



The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005,
Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jürgen Habermas:

“Religion in the Public Sphere”

Award Announcement

The Board of the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund awarded the Holberg International Memorial Prize 2005 to

Professor Jürgen Habermas

Citation of the Holberg Prize Academic Committee

"Jürgen Habermas has developed path-breaking theories of discourse and communicative action and thereby provided new perspectives on law and democracy.

His research is thematically wide ranging and has had exceptional interdisciplinary impact. Habermas has significantly contributed to the understanding of rationality, ethics, legitimation, critical public discussion, modernity, the post-national society and European integration. His intellectual breakthrough was *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962; Eng. ed. 1989), which, by combining empirical and theoretical research from a number of disciplines, constituted an original contribution to democratic theory. In his opus magnum *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981; Eng. ed. 1984/89) he provides a new foundation for critical social theory and discusses the possibility of public discourse among free and equal citizens. The discourse theory of law and deliberative democracy is outlined in *Between Facts and Norms* (1992; Eng. ed. 1996). His conception of democracy is further elaborated in articles addressing contemporary issues such as the multicultural society, nationalism and globalization (collected in *The Inclusion of the Other* (1996; Eng. ed. 1998) and *The Postnational Constellation* (1998; Eng. ed. 2001)). Lately, Habermas has among other things worked on foundational problems in ethics and philosophy.

Habermas has had extraordinary international influence in a great number of disciplines."

About the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

The Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund was established by the Norwegian Parliament for the purpose of annually awarding the Holberg International Memorial Prize for outstanding scholarly work in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law or theology. The prize is worth NOK 4.5 million (about 585,000 Euro) and was awarded for the first time on 3 December 2004 to Professor Julia Kristeva.

The Holberg International Memorial Prize aims to increase society's awareness of the value of research in these fields. The prize is also intended to stimulate young people to become more interested in these academic fields. Scholars holding senior positions at universities and other research institutions in the above-mentioned academic fields are entitled to nominate candidates for the Holberg International Memorial Prize.

The Holberg International Prize is administered by the University of Bergen, which has appointed a Holberg Board for this purpose. The Board has appointed an academic committee consisting of four scholars from the relevant fields of study, which reviews the nominees for the prize, and recommends a Holberg Prize laureate.

The Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund also awards the Nils Klim Prize to young Nordic researchers in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law or theology. To be eligible to receive the Prize, which is worth NOK 250,000 (about 32,000 Euro), candidates must be younger than 35. Holberg Prize School Project is organised annually in order to stimulate interest among children and young people in these academic fields.

The Holberg International Memorial Prize is named after the Norwegian/Danish scholar and playwright Ludvig Holberg. Holberg was born in Bergen in 1684 and held the Chair of Metaphysics and Logic, Latin Rhetoric and History at the University of Copenhagen. He was an important modernising influence in Norwegian and Danish society and academic life. Through his interdisciplinary and internationally oriented efforts, Ludvig Holberg endeavoured to modernise subjects and teaching methods at the university of his day. His work has been widely published and has also had a broad appeal outside academia.

Laureates

Holberg International Memorial Prize:

2005: Jürgen Habermas

2004: Julia Kristeva

Nils Klim Prize:

2005: Dag Trygve Truslew Haug

2004: Claes de Vreese



Greetings from the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

The Holberg International Memorial Prize is an award for outstanding and internationally recognised scientific achievement in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law and theology, either within one of these fields or as interdisciplinary research.

To a considerable degree, law, theology, social sciences, and the arts and humanities all involve studying human interaction as part of the formation of opinions and development of understanding. Attempts to divide various aspects of this interaction and human consciousness into phenomena that can be observed, measured and counted will in many contexts give us only incomplete and inadequate knowledge of the issues we are – or should be – interested in. Knowledge of actual human behaviour is not very useful if it is not based on an *interpretation* of the world we live in.

One of the main purposes of the Holberg International Memorial Prize is to draw attention to research within the above-mentioned scientific fields, and to increase awareness of the alternative, or complementary, approach to knowledge that is embedded in the paradigms of these scientific disciplines, based upon a concept of science which is distinct from that of the natural sciences and mathematics.

Thus, the prize is not merely a celebration of an outstanding scholar of great importance to the scientific community, it is also an occasion to draw attention to the fundamental importance of insights into our individual and collective self-understanding and how we organize our common world and communicate with each other.

The Holberg International Memorial Prize is awarded by the Board of the Holberg Memorial Fund on the basis of the recommendation of an academic committee composed of outstanding scholars from the relevant academic fields. During the selection process, the Committee and the Board not only look for academic excellence, they also assess the contribution the nominee has made to the international scientific community. Through his or her scholarly work, the prize-winner must have had a decisive influence

on international research in the field, for instance through the development of new theory, knowledge or insight, through making new use of existing theories, or through the methods used.

Scientific and scholarly enterprises are by their very nature communicative acts. The proof of the pudding is in its eating. Only by communicating our findings and the basis for them can we test the quality of our method and reasoning, and prove the relevance of our activities. Scholars have both a professional and a moral obligation to share their insights, and to subject themselves to testing and criticism.

The Holberg Laureate for 2005 fulfils these demands to the extreme. We have a prize-winner who has become an icon, a personification of his own academic ideals. Jürgen Habermas has not only developed ground-breaking theories of discourse and communicative action and thereby provided new perspectives on law and democracy, his research is also thematically wide-ranging and has had an exceptional interdisciplinary impact. Habermas has contributed significantly to the understanding of rationality, ethics, legitimation, critical public discussion, modernity, the post-national society and European integration. He has had an extraordinary international influence in a great number of disciplines, and at the same time been an important participant in and influence on the general public debate, both internationally and in Germany.

In this light, it was very appropriate that a major part of the celebration of the Holberg Laureate for 2005 consisted of a seminar comprising a discourse between Habermas and friends and colleagues. We are very happy to present the texts from this seminar as a report from an ongoing and never-ending discourse on topics of great importance through which Jürgen Habermas has made invaluable contributions to our knowledge and understanding.

Professor Jan Fridthjof Bernt

Chair Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

Jürgen Habermas's speech at the award ceremony 30 November 2005

Minister Djupedal, Your Excellences, Representatives from the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund, ladies and gentlemen

Not that I would not have any experience with the rare situation of being awarded with a prominent academic prize. But the rank, the ambition and the excellence of this award is truly embarrassing for anybody who is very well of the fact that he is only one among many candidates of at least equal standing. I gratefully accept this distinction also as an expression of recognition of a whole generation of German philosophers who, after the end of World War II, entered the university and faced the challenge to renew the reputation and strength of a tradition the moral backbone of which had been broken during the recent past. Of great support was the unbiased reception we enjoyed from colleagues in countries like Norway – including those who would have had good reasons for stronger reservations. I have still vivid memories of my first encounters with Knut Erik Tranøy and his younger colleagues, when Hans Skjervheim invited me, in the early 70s, to come to Bergen.

There are further reasons, why I am happy to enjoy the privilege of this occasion. It is a pleasure to serve the purpose of the Holberg Prize by helping to pull the paled face of the humanities out of the shadow of those more fortunate disciplines that are used to attract more public attention and more financial support for their more visible and robust achievements. I appreciate the decision of the Norwegian government to give, with this foundation, for the right purpose the right sign at the right moment. Moreover, it could have hardly chosen a more convenient patron for this institution than the unconventional founding father of modern Norwegian scholarship, Ludvig Holberg – an outstanding figure of the European enlightenment.

Far from the awkward role of a dignified and somewhat pompous professor, Holberg was a witty person and polemical writer, gifted with a broad range of talents, widely traveled, well versed in many languages and the ways of the world, a public figure, involved in quite a few controversies and, as the author of so many theater plays, well known to larger audiences in various countries. You imagine my increasing pleasure while reading the autobiographical letters – the *epistolae ad virum perillustrem*, which were, by the way, immediately translated from Latin into German, only two years after its original publication. I cannot but mentioning one episode that aroused my enthusiasm about Holberg in his role as a philosopher and let me discovered a brother in the spirit of post-metaphysical thought.

Describing the course of his life until the age of 33 years, Holberg in those letters continues to sing the melody of graceful laments about his desperate financial situation and his delicate physical constitution. But finally, the Danish King liberates him from

this deplorable state by an appointment to the position of a veritable professor of metaphysics. Holberg comments the happy turn in his life with self-irony: "I received the office to teach metaphysics although that was against my inclination. This is why those people, who knew me better, predicted the decline of this splendid discipline. And they were not mistaken. I honestly confess that metaphysics was never in greater danger as under my tutelage." Referring to his inaugural lecture, Holberg adds that all true admirers of metaphysics could not listen to him without anger since they must have had the impression of attending not an eulogy but "a funeral address on the occasion of the death of metaphysics". This very phrase was unheard of in those days. That happened in 1717, seven years before Kant – the "Zermalmer" or great destroyer of metaphysics, as he was called – was even born. The intrepid Holberg, I guess, was an early forerunner of this first post-metaphysical thinker when he pronounced the death of the kind of rationalist metaphysics that remained the academic philosophy for almost the whole of that century.

The sympathy I have with the creativity and spontaneity of this independent and fearless mind is the same feeling which is aroused again and again by the civil mentality I encounter when I come to this country and meet my distinguished Norwegian colleagues. In this respect the lasting influence of Holberg has obviously shaped the spirit of the academic community in his homeland until to-day. I am grateful for what I benefited from rich intellectual contacts with a whole generation of students and academic grandchildren of Arne Næss, and from the vivid debates between those parties who leaned more to Wittgensteinian arguments on one side, or more to those of my friend Karl-Otto Apel on the other. My thanks for the jury's decision is equally an expression of my gratitude for what I learned from these exchanges.

Professor Jürgen Habermas



Religion in the public sphere

Holberg Prize Laureate 2005 Professor Jürgen Habermas



Facing the present situation, let me first express my ambivalent feelings – a mixture of embarrassment and pleasure. On the one hand, it is impossible to present a lecture that could match the extraordinary rank and distinction of the Holberg Prize and to meet corresponding expectations. On the other hand, I am just glad to be once again back to Norway and find myself in a rather familiar academic environment, in the midst of distinguished colleagues and close friends, and vis á vis an attentive and sophisticated audience. The unpretentious and inviting cultural environment I always meet in your country encourages me to cope with this unique occasion in an inconspicuous way by continuing business as usual. I will talk about a provocative issue that bothers many of us.

I

We can hardly fail to notice the fact that religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance.¹ The fact is at least unexpected for those of us who followed the conventional wisdom of mainstream social science and assumed that modernization inevitably goes hand in hand with secularization in the sense of a diminishing influence of religious beliefs and practices on politics and society at large. At least European countries, with the notorious exemptions of Poland and Ireland, did provide sufficient evidence for a continuous recession in the numbers of faithful citizens, whether we look at more institutionalized or more spiritual forms of religiosity. Some indicators though support the qualifying proposition that religious communities did better in cases of orthodox strategies of rejecting modernity than in cases of liberal strategies of adaptation. At the international stage orthodox and fundamentalist movements are anyway on the rise.² Apart from Hindu nationalism, Islam and Christianity are at present the two most vital religious sources.

The Islamic revival has an impressive geographical extension from North-Africa via the Middle East to Southeast Asia, where Indonesia is the most populous of all Muslim countries. The influence of Islam is also spreading in sub-Saharan Africa, where it competes with Christian movements. In the wake of immigration, it is also increasing in Europe and somewhat less so in North America. If we look at countries like Turkey and Egypt we moreover realize that this revival reaches far into the educated milieus of elite cultures and middle classes. In most of these countries the rise of religion cannot but having an impact on domestic politics. In many cases it is not easy to distinguish between the authentic core and the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes. Fundamentalist movements often lock into national and ethnical conflicts, and today also form the seedbed for the decentralized networks of a form of terrorism that operates globally and is directed against the *perceived* insults inflicted by a superior Western civilization.

1 Peter L. Berger (ed.): *The Desecularization of the World*, (Washington, 1999)

2 Zum folgenden P.L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, Washington 2005, 1-18

However, the attack on the twin towers and the rash reaction to 9/11 should not distract our attention from the fact that the Evangelical upsurge is no less important in scope and intensity than its counterpart in the Muslim world. Peter Berger characterizes the hard core as “Pentecostalism, which combines biblical orthodoxy and a rigorous morality with an ecstatic form of worship and an emphasis on spiritual healing”.³ Such born-gain Christians share the opposition to cultural modernity and political liberalism, but they comply more easily with motivational requirements for economic modernization. Evangelical movements often result from missionary achievements in countries for which this type of religion is new. There are now about fifty million Protestant converts in Latin America. Evangelical movements keep spreading also in China, South Korea, the Philippines and even in parts of Eastern Europe.

Both of these religious revivals find an echo in domestic politics. They are squeezing their way also into the international arena in various ways. World religions that to this very day shape the physiognomy of all major civilizations fuel the agenda of *multiple modernities* with requisite cultural self-esteem. But the zeal of religious movements more often poisons intercultural encounters. On the Western side of the fence, the perception of international relations has changed in light of a feared “clash of civilizations”. Even Western intellectuals, to date self-critical in this regard, are starting to go on the offence in their response to the image of Occidentalism that the others have of the West.⁴

What is most surprising in this context is the political revitalization of religion at the heart of Western society. Though there is statistical evidence for a wave of secularization in almost all European countries since the end of World War II, in the United States all data show that the comparatively large proportion of the population made up of devout and religiously active citizens has remained the same over the last six decades.⁵ Here, a carefully planned coalition between the Evangelical and born-again Christians on one side, the American Catholics on the other side siphons off a *political* surplus value from the *religious* renewal at the heart of Western civilization.⁶ And it tends to intensify, at the *cultural* level, the *political* division of the West that was prompted by the Iraq War.⁷ With the abolition of the death penalty, with liberal regulations on abortion, with setting homosexual partnerships on a par with heterosexual marriages, with an unconditional rejection of torture, and generally with the privileging of individual rights versus collective goods, e.g., national security, the European states seem now to be moving forward alone down the path they had trodden side by side with the United States.

Against the background of the rise of religion across the globe, the division of the West is now perceived as if Europe were isolating itself from the rest of the world. Seen in terms of world history, Max Weber’s Occidental Rationalism appears to be the

3 Berger (2005),8

4 I. Buruma & A. Margalit: *Occidentalism. The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2004)

5 P. Norris & R. Inglehart: *Sacred and Secular, Religion and Politics Worldwide*, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2004), Ch.4

6 G. Wills, *Fringe Government*, *The New York Review of Books*, October 6, 2005, 46-50

7 J. Habermas, *Der gespaltene Westen*, (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 2004)

actual deviation. The Occident's own image of modernity seems, as in a psychological experiment, to undergo a switchover: what has been the supposedly "normal" model for the future of all other cultures suddenly changes into a special-case scenario. Even if this suggestive Gestalt-switch does not quite bear up to sociological scrutiny, and if the contrasting evidence of what appears as a sweeping desecularization can be brought into line with more conventional explanations,⁸ there is no doubting the evidence itself and above all the symptomatic fact of divisive political moods crystallizing around it. Irrespective of how one evaluates the facts, there is now a *Kulturkampf* raging in the United States which forms the background for an academic debate on the role of religion in the political public sphere.

In what follows I will continue this debate. Let me first remind you of the liberal premises of the constitutional state and of the consequences John Rawls draws for what is called an "ethics of citizenship". The battle over what a secular state must expect from its citizens and politicians is a controversy carried out on the ground of normative Political Theory. Through a discussion of revisionist proposals that touch on the foundations of the liberal self-understanding of Western democracies I will then introduce my conception of what religious and secular citizens should mutually expect from one another. These demanding civic duties presuppose, on the other hand, epistemic attitudes and mentalities that secular and religious citizens must acquire in the first place. Since 'Ought' implies 'Can', we must shift our attention from normative to epistemological arguments and highlight those learning processes without which a liberal political order cannot expect the required kind of mutual respect and cooperation from citizens of different faith and background. I will characterize the change in the form of religious consciousness that can be understood as a response to the challenges of modernity, whereas the secular awareness of living in a post-secular society gains a sophisticated articulation in a post-metaphysical mindset. However, the liberal state cannot influence, by its own means of law and politics, those learning processes by which alone religious and secular citizens can achieve those self-reflective attitudes on which the democratic ethos hinges. Even worse, it is not clear whether we may speak at all of 'learning processes' in this context.

II

Let me begin by explaining the liberal conception of democratic citizenship. The self-understanding of the constitutional state has developed from a contractualist tradition that relies solely on public arguments to which all persons are supposed to have equal access. The assumption of a common human reason is the epistemic base for the justification of a secular state which no longer depends on religious legitimation. And this allows in turn for a separation of state and church at the institutional level. The historical backdrop against which this liberal conception emerged were, of course, the religious wars and confessional disputes in early Modern times.

The introduction of the freedom of religion was the appropriate political answer to the challenges of religious pluralism. However, the secular character of the state is a

8 Norris and Inglehart (2004) Ch. 10: Conclusions

necessary, not yet a sufficient condition for guaranteeing equal religious freedom for everybody. It is not enough to rely on the mere benevolence of a secularized authority. The conflicting parties themselves must reach agreement on the precarious delimitations between a positive freedom to practice one's own religion and the negative freedom to remain spared of the religious practices of the others. If the principle of tolerance is to be above any suspicion of repression, then compelling reasons must be found for the definition of what can just about be tolerated and what cannot, reasons that all sides can equally accept. Fair arrangements can only be found if the parties involved learn to take also the perspective of the other. And the very procedure that fits this purpose best is the deliberative mode of democratic will formation. In the secular state, government has to be placed on a non-religious footing anyway. And the democratic procedure is able to generate such a secular legitimation by virtue of two components – first the equal political participation of all citizens, which guarantees that the addresses of the laws can also understand themselves as the authors of these laws; - and second the epistemic dimension of a deliberation that grounds the presumption of rationally acceptable outcomes.⁹

It is precisely the conditions for the successful participation in this democratic practice that define the ethics of citizenship: for all their ongoing dissent on questions of world views and religious doctrines, citizens are meant to respect one another as free and equal members of their political community. And on the basis of such civic solidarity, when it comes to contentious political issues citizens owe one another good reasons for their political statements. Rawls speaks in this context of the 'duty of civility' and 'the public use of reason'. In a secular state only those political decisions are taken to be legitimate as can be justified, in light of generally accessible reasons, vis-à-vis religious and non-religious citizens, and citizens of different religious confessions *alike*. This constraint explains the controversial reservation, the so called "proviso" for the public use of non-public, that is religious reasons.

The principle of separation of state and church obliges politicians and officials within political institutions to formulate *and justify* laws, court rulings, decrees and measures only in a language which is equally accessible to all citizens. But what about the duties of citizens in the political public sphere? Rawls's position is this: "The first is that reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, *provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support.*"¹⁰ In the recent debate about citizens' public use of reason, this very proviso of secular justification is countered by a lot of objections.

9 see John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in: *The University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 64, Summer 1997, no. 3, pp. 765-807, here p. 769: "Ideally citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the principle of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact"

10 Rawls (1997), p. 783f. (my italics). This amounts to a revision of the more narrowly formulated principle in John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia UP), New York 1994, p. 224f

The most serious one is that many religious citizens do not have good reasons to undertake an artificial division between secular and religious within their own minds, since they couldn't do so without destabilizing their mode of existence as pious persons. The objection appeals to the integral role that religion plays in the life of a person of faith, in other words to religion's "seat" in everyday life. A devout person pursues her daily rounds *by drawing* on her belief. True belief is not only a doctrine, believed content, but a source of energy that the faithful person taps performatively. Faith nurtures an *entire* life.¹¹ This totalizing trait of a mode of believing that infuses the very pores of daily life runs counter to any flimsy switchover of religiously rooted political convictions onto a *different* cognitive basis. Thus Nicolas Wolterstorff maintains: "It belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our society that *they ought to base* their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice *on* their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do it"¹². They are not only unwilling but incapable of discerning "any 'pull' from any secular reasons."¹³

If we accept this rather compelling objection, then the liberal state, which expressly protects such forms of living cannot at the same time expect of all citizens that they justify their political statements also independent of their religious convictions or world views. We cannot derive from the secular character of the state an obligation for all citizens to supplement their public religious contributions by equivalents in a generally accessible language. The liberal state must not transform the requisite *institutional* separation of religion and politics into an undue *mental and psychological* burden for *all* those citizens who follow a faith. It must well expect of them to recognize the principle that any binding legislative, juridical or administrative decision must remain impartial with regard to competing world views, but it must not expect them to split their identity in public and private components as long as they participate in public debates and contribute to the formation of public opinions.

In consideration of Wolterstorff's objection we should loosen the rigid liberal position somewhat. Certainly, every citizen must know that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, and administrations. But this recognition need not deter religious citizens from publicly expressing and justifying their convictions by resorting to religious language. Under certain circumstances secular citizens or citizens of a different faith may be able to learn something from these contributions and discern in the normative truth content of a religious expression intuitions of their own that have possibly been repressed or obscured. The force of religious traditions to articulate moral intuitions with regard to social forms of a dignified human life makes religious presentations on relevant political issues a serious candidate for possible truth contents that can then be translated from the vocabulary of a specific religious community into a generally accessible language. The

11 On the Augustine distinction of *fides quae creditur* and *fides qua creditur* see R. Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, (Tübingen, 1984), Annex 3: *Wahrheit und Gewissheit*, p. 183ff

12 Wolterstorff in: Audi & Wolterstorff, (1997), p. 105

13 P. Weithmann, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge UK, 2002, p. 157

liberal state has an interest of its own in unleashing religious voices in the political public sphere, for it cannot know whether secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity.

And in view of the fact that civic self-legislation is a *shared* practice, the requirement of translation is even a cooperative task in which non-religious citizens must likewise participate, if their religious fellow citizens are not to be encumbered with an asymmetrical burden. Whereas citizens of faith may make public contributions in their own religious language only subject to the proviso that these get translated, the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and even enter into dialogues from which religious reasons then might emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments.¹⁴

This relaxation of too strict a definition of neutrality towards competing world views must not level, however, the institutional threshold between the “wild life” of the political public sphere and the formal proceedings *within* political bodies. We better use the image of a filter that allows only secular contributions from the Babel of voices to pass through. In parliament, for example, the standing rules of procedure must empower the president of the house to have religious statements or justifications expunged from the minutes. The truth content of religious contributions can enter into the *institutionalized* practice of deliberation and decision-making only if the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere itself.

Revisionist critics like Wolterstorff drop even this important limitation. He pleads for allowing political legislatures to make use of religious arguments.¹⁵ If one thus opens the parliaments to religious strife, governmental authority can evidently become the agent of a religious majority that asserts its will while violating the democratic procedure. Remember, the content of political decisions that can be enforced by the state *must be formulated in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens and it must be possible to justify them* in this language. Therefore, majority rule turns into repression if the majority, in the course of democratic opinion and will formation, refuses to offer those publicly accessible justifications which the losing minority, be it secular or of a different faith, must be able to follow and to value by its own standards.

III

There remains still another objection, that deserves closer inspection. The liberal ethics of citizenship, even in a loosened version, appears to impose an *asymmetrical burden* on the religious part of the population. The translation requirement for religious reasons and the subsequent institutional precedence of secular reasons demand of the religious citizens an effort to learn and adapt that secular citizens are spared having to make. The deeper reason for the ongoing flickering resentment of the state’s neutrality toward

14 Jürgen Habermas, “Glauben und Wissen,” in: my *Zeitdiagnosen*, (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 2003), pp. 249-263, here pp. 256ff

15 Audi and Wolterstorff, (1997), p. 117f

competing world views stems from the fact that the civic duties of civility and a public use of reason can only be discharged under certain *cognitive* presuppositions. The asymmetry-objection directs our attention to the tacit assumption of learning processes that are independent of good or bad will. We must therefore shift the perspective from the conception of a liberal ethics of citizenship to those large scale mental changes on the achievements of which Political Liberalism always already counts.

Let me first focus on the change in religious consciousness that we observe in Western culture since the periods of Reformation and Enlightenment. Traditional communities of faith must process cognitive dissonances that do not equally arise for secular citizens. Sociologists have described this "modernization of religious consciousness" as a response to three challenges - first the fact of pluralism, then the emergence of modern science, and last not least the spread of positive law and a profane morality:

- Religious citizens must develop an epistemic attitude toward other religions and world views that they encounter within a universe of discourse hitherto occupied only by their own religion. They succeed to the degree that they self-reflectively relate their religious beliefs to competing doctrines in such a way that their own exclusive claim to truth can be maintained.

- Secondly, religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the independence of secular from sacred knowledge and the institutionalized monopoly of modern science on what we know about states and events in the world. They succeed to the extent that they conceive the relationship of dogmatic and scientific beliefs in such a way that the autonomous progress in secular knowledge cannot come to contradict their faith.

- Religious citizens must finally develop an epistemic stance toward the priority that secular reasons enjoy in political and social arenas. They succeed to the extent that they make a transparent connection between the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality and the premises of their own comprehensive doctrines. For this operation Rawls has offered the image of a 'module' fitting into different world views.

This work of hermeneutic self-reflection must be undertaken from within religious traditions. In our culture, it has essentially been performed by theology. The new epistemic attitudes are "acquired by learning" if they arise from a reconstruction of sacred truths that is compelling for people of faith in the light of modern living conditions for which no alternatives any longer exist. In the final instance it remains up to the practicing community to decide whether a dogmatic processing of the cognitive challenges of modernity has been "successful" or not; only then will the true believer accept the modernizing interpretation as the result of a "learning process".

So far everything speaks for the thesis of an asymmetric distribution of cognitive burdens. Religious citizens, in order to come to terms with the ethical expectations of democratic citizenship, have to learn how to adopt new epistemic attitudes toward their secular environment, whereas secular citizens are not exposed to similar cognitive dissonances in the first place. However, secular citizens are likewise not spared all cognitive burdens, since a *secularist* consciousness does not suffice for the required respect for, and cooperation with their religious fellow citizens.

As long as the secular citizens perceive religious traditions and religious communities as archaic relics of pre-modern societies that continue to exist in the present, they fall prey to what I will call a "secularist" view, secularist in the sense that they can understand freedom of religion only as the natural preservation of an endangered species. From their viewpoint, religion lacks any *intrinsic* justification to exist. The principle of the separation of state and church can for them only have the laicist meaning of sparing indifference. Citizens who adopt such an epistemic stance toward religion can obviously not be expected to take religious contributions to contentious political issues seriously - or even to help to assess them for a substance that can possibly be expressed in a secular language and justified by secular arguments. We thus discover on the secular side again certain cognitive presuppositions that are required for meeting the duties of civility and a public use of reason.

In the light of a liberal ethics of citizenship, the admission of religious statements to the political public sphere cannot mean anything but sheer window-dressing unless all citizens can be expected not to deny a priori a possible cognitive substance to these contributions. The secular citizens behave in a paternalistic, that means by Rawlsian standards in an 'uncivil' way if they refuse to understand their political conflict with religious opinions as a *reasonably expected disagreement* and to give public religious comments the benefit of a check whether they contain something translatable. In the absence of this epistemic attitude, a public use of reason cannot be imputed to citizens, at least not in the sense that secular citizens should be willing not to exclude religious from serious consideration.

Since such an attitude only results from a self-critical assessment of the limits of secular reason, we can now meet the initial suspicion of an unequal distribution of cognitive burdens with the argument that the liberal ethics of citizenship requires from both, religious and secular citizens, *complementary* learning processes. Secular citizens have to learn what it means to live in a post-secular society. Let me briefly outline a postmetaphysical mentality as a mindset that represents the secular counterpart to a religious consciousness that has become self-reflective. Post-metaphysical thought draws, with no polemical intention, a strict line between faith and knowledge. But it rejects a narrow scientific conception of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the genealogy of reason.

Post-metaphysical thought certainly refrains from passing ontological statements on the constitution of the whole of beings. Yet at the same time it rejects a kind of scientism that reduces our knowledge to what is, at each time, represented by the "state of the art" in natural science. The borderline often becomes blurred between proper scientific

information and a naturalist world-view that is only synthesized from various scientific sources.¹⁶ This is the wrong way of naturalizing the human mind. It casts into question our practical self-understanding as persons who can take responsibility for our actions.

Post-metaphysical thought reflects on its own history. In so doing it refers, however, not only to the metaphysical heritage of Western philosophy. It discovers an internal relationship also to those world religions whose origins, like the origins of Classical Greek philosophy, date back to the middle of the first millennium before Christ – in other words to what Jaspers termed the “Axial Age”. Those religions which have their roots in the Axial Age accomplished the cognitive leap from mythical narratives to a logos that differentiates between essence and appearance in a very similar way to Greek philosophy. Ever since the Council of Nicaea, and throughout the course of a “Hellenization of Christianity”, philosophy itself took on board and assimilated many religious motifs and concepts, specifically those from the history of salvation. Concepts of Greek origin such as “autonomy” and “individuality” or Roman concepts such as “emancipation” and “solidarity” have long since been shot through with meanings of a Judaeo-Christian origin.¹⁷

Philosophy has recurrently found in its confrontation with religious traditions (and particularly with religious writers such as Kierkegaard, who think in a post-metaphysical, but not a post-Christian vein) that it receives innovative or world-disclosing stimuli. It would not be rational to reject out of hand the conjecture that religions – as the only surviving element among the constitutive building-blocks of the Ancient cultures – manage to continue and maintain a recognized place within the differentiated edifice of Modernity because their cognitive substance has not yet been totally exhausted. There are at any rate no good reasons for denying the possibility that religions still bear a valuable semantic potential for inspiring other people beyond the limits of particular communities of faith, once that potential is only delivered in terms of its profane truth content.

In short, post-metaphysical thought is prepared to learn from religion while remaining strictly agnostic. It insists on the difference between certainties of faith and validity claims that can be publicly redeemed or criticized; but it refrains from the rationalist temptation that it can itself decide which part of a religious doctrine is rational and which part is not. This ambivalent attitude to religion expresses an epistemic attitude which secular citizens must adopt, if they are to be able and willing to learn something from religious contributions to public debates – provided it turns out to be something that can also be spelled out in a generally accessible language.

16 Wolterstorff draws our attention in general to the distinction that often gets neglected in practice between secular reasons, that are meant to count, and secular world views, that like all comprehensive doctrines are not meant to count. See Audi & Wolterstorff (1997), p. 105: “Much if not most of the time we will be able to spot religious reasons from a mile away... Typically, however, comprehensive secular perspectives will go undetected”

17 See for example Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarität*, (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), pp. 40-78

IV

In the beginning I have mentioned the sweeping religious upsurge across the world and the rather uneasy place our more or less secularized European countries occupy in view of an ever more intensive impact of politically instrumentalised religious movements. A philosophical reflection on what the liberal state must ask from its citizens leads to an account of those reflexive mentalities which are required for maintaining political integration through a normative background consensus on constitutional essentials, however thin it may be. As we have seen, a liberal ethics of citizenship depends on the improbable mind-sets that religious and secular citizens acquire in the course of complementary learning processes. Compared with the introduction of self-reflection into religious consciousness, there is a similar step towards the self-reflective overcoming of a secularist stubbornness. In the end I would like to draw two disquieting conclusions with regard to a kind of cultural polarization which we to-day observe even in the oldest and hitherto most reliable democracy on earth.

Let us assume that we face a lack of learning on one or the other side of the religious/secular divide. In such a case the means of law and politics, the only ones at the disposal of a state, are insufficient to foster those mentalities that are necessary for meeting the duties of civility and a public use of reason. Whether we may speak at all of a lack of "learning processes" is moreover a question that political theory must leave undecided. From an outside perspective philosophers cannot decide whether any "modernized" faith is still the "real" faith. And today it is impossible to decide even from inside the philosophical debate whether at the end of the day it will be secularism, embedded in a naturalist world-view, that trumps the more generous post-metaphysical thought. If, however, only participants themselves can decide whether the polarization results from a lack of "learning" or from the fact of pluralism per se, the issue of which obligations a liberal ethics of citizenship may impose can be taken to remain an essentially contested issue anyway. Such are the limits of normative Political theory.

Faith in religion. Habermas's post-secular search for Meaning and Solidarity

Comments on Jürgen Habermas's lecture 'Religion in the Public Sphere'

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Habermas argues that, in a liberal state, believers and non-believers are obliged to show each other mutual respect. Every citizen must observe that in the institutions of parliament, law and bureaucracy only secular reasons count. Believers therefore need to view their religious convictions from the outside: to treat them reflexively and to accommodate them to secular points of view. However, when no secular 'translations' can be found, believers should be free to articulate their convictions in religious language. In doing so, they must recognise that convictions based on faith carry no privileged epistemic (or moral) status in our kind of secular liberal state.

A characteristic feature of Habermas's approach to the dialogue between believers and non-believers is that he is wary of laying too much of a burden on the believers: to exhibit mutual tolerance and respect, the dialogue needs to be conceived – and carried out – in strictly symmetric fashion. Whereas believers need to give up attributing a privileged status to their faith-based convictions, non-believers need to abandon the notion that secularly-based convictions are *a priori* epistemically superior to – because more rational than – faith-based ones. Non-believers need to open up to the possible truth ('Wahrheitsgehalt') of religious contributions; faith-based reasons must be approached openly and with curiosity as *bona fide* contenders for truth, leading to arguments that could prove equally accessible to all and hence, in the end, acceptable to all.

Yet, as Habermas repeatedly points out, the postulated model of symmetry is challenged by various forms of asymmetry. In particular, since secular reasons in our society enjoy institutional primacy over religious ones, religious citizens are burdened with an obligation to learn and adjust that non-believers are spared. This form of asymmetry should not be exaggerated, however, since religious consciousness – at least in the Western tradition – has been subject (and, indeed, has subjected itself) to the demands of modernisation in general: the established and seemingly irreversible facts (achievements) of religious pluralism, the ascendance of modern science, and the triumph of positive law and profane morality.

While these historical achievements of modernization still stand, Habermas admits that, at least in one widespread version, the Weber-inspired thesis of full-blown secularisation has been proved wrong. Exactly how, why, when and where this has happened, Habermas is less explicit about (2003: 31-43). Now, in the essay on which his lecture is based, Habermas describes our present-day society not (or no longer?) as secular but as *post-secular* (2005: 146). The implication, he tells us, is that secular citizens now

need to adjust to the fact that religious communities persist in the midst of 'modernised' society. In other words, whereas we have been used to thinking that in our society and epoch, believers need to accommodate their views to the hegemony of (secular) reason in a secular state, what Habermas now points to as no less important, even urgent, is for non-believers to adjust to the persistence of faith-based convictions, as encountered among believers both outside and within the public sphere; an adjustment on the part of the non-believers that according to Habermas is no less cognitively demanding than the epistemic adjustment that, largely one-sidedly, has for so long been the burden of believers. One variant of asymmetry appears to be, perhaps increasingly, supplemented by another. If my understanding is correct, this would not have been the case today if the early twentieth-century thesis of secularisation (roughly the flip-side of 'modernisation' and 'rationalisation' as famously coined by Max Weber) had been historically borne out.

Habermas's plea is that, 'from the standpoint of secular knowledge ("Wissen"), religious convictions be admitted an epistemic status as not *schlechthin* irrational; accordingly, a liberal culture must expect its secular citizens to take part in efforts to translate "relevant contributions" from the religious and into a publicly accessible language' (2005: 322). That said, Habermas has also recently advocated in various places that, regardless of personal faith or lack or denial of such, as citizens we should all show respect, even awe, for the stubbornly 'non-translatable' pertaining to deeply held religious convictions. Here, Habermas has in mind the profound – and profoundly personal (first-person) – sense in which such convictions, such belief in a God, are of the utmost *existential* significance in the life of the empathic believer, the *devout* Christian, say, or Muslim. That religion, under the circumstances of historical modernity, must abandon its claim to morally authorise and epistemically order (explain, make sense of, instil trust in) a life form in its totality, is one thing. Quite another is the incomparable role such belief may still play in the personal lives of individual believers. Habermas is eager to emphasise both of these dimensions, not merely the former, as sociologists of secular leaning have been wont to do.

On my reading, Habermas's recent positive interest in religion, while in a way somewhat of a surprise and certainly not to be anticipated from, say, the position he took in his monumental *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), where the sociological importance of religion was held to be waning, steadily and following a main trend, is grounded in concerns not directly touched upon in his largely formal model for dialogue. In the Introduction to his book *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Habermas states: 'Der liberale Staat ist langfristig auf Mentalitäten angewiesen, die er nicht aus eigenen Ressourcen erzeugen kann' (2005: 9). Since when does Habermas hold this view? What makes him hold it now? Is this about globalised capitalism wreaking havoc globally as far as indispensable sources of meaning, identity, and solidarity are concerned; sources that, according to Marx and Weber's analyses, capitalism cannot avoid destroying along its way and yet cannot sustain itself – socially, culturally, morally – without? But if the semantic resources of religion prove themselves indispensable as a result of secular rationalisation as dictated by the globalised capitalist economy, with religion coming in handy when secular traditions are exposed as normatively empty or impotent, why

doesn't Habermas identify the renewed actuality of religion as being a consequence of the development of capitalism in its present version? (Recall that the historian Eric Hobsbawm points to 'destruction of the past' as a defining feature of capitalism, making the quest for meaning a most precarious – and increasingly individualised – matter.) Or is the relevance of religion in the West today rather an aspect of the crisis the world was thrown into on that most symbol-laden of dates: nine-eleven? Is it that we perceive the faith of the 'free world's' declared enemies – Bush's 'axis of evil' – as providing them with a kind of backing, of commitment, of determination that is felt to be acutely lacking in the secular West? If so, how can we compensate for that comparative lack other than by tuning in, more attentively than for decades, if not centuries, to what remains of the West's own religious traditions?

To employ what is only a modest exaggeration, the irony is that in his latest book Habermas pays religious convictions greater respect than wholly and restrictedly secular ones. More to the point, he demonstrates greater trust in religious, faith-based convictions' *semantic potential for identity-formation and meaning-formation* than in (contemporary and prevailing) non-religious, that is to say wholly and unashamedly secular, ones. He creates the impression that an officially secular – secularised – liberal state is dependent upon its epistemic Other, i.e. its religious rivals in order to establish truth, rightness, identity and meaning that the liberal state has sought to render publicly, politically and legally null and void since its birth and – since then – as part and parcel of its specific identity and self-understanding. In the aftermath of the religious civil wars from 1618 till 1648, Hobbes inaugurated what was to evolve into the modern liberal state by distinguishing strictly between what belongs to – and must remain strictly within – the private and the public spheres, respectively. Habermas's contention that 'in the long run, the liberal state is directed to mentalities of a kind it cannot produce out of its own [secular] resources' flies in the face of the argument of centuries of liberal political thought: Habermas, that is to say, advocates a public – or *the public's* – engagement with the non-translatable semantic resources of faith-based convictions that would be entirely foreign to the major thinkers in the liberal tradition he claims to belong to. True, one could argue that his overall model of symmetric dialogue and of the necessity of one-way translation (i.e. from religious to secular language, and so to universally accessible validity claims) goes to show that such convictions can only be allowed to make the move, as it were, from the private sphere (individual lives) to the public sphere, meaning to public *relevance*, understood as relevance for all, regardless of value-orientation, on condition that they leave behind their distinctly religious origins and features; that they are rendered – precisely – secular in the sense of being robbed of what most distinguishes them as religious as opposed to secular.

But this is precisely the asymmetry Habermas warns against – if not in all his statements, then in the most telling ones as far as my purposes here are concerned. At stake is no less than the following: There are growing signs that the contemporary secular liberal state proves incapable of producing and reproducing the amount and quality of resources necessary to secure a positive experience of identity and meaning among its members, or at least among large numbers of them. What cannot be secularly, and in

that sense purely rationally, produced, sustained and transmitted, must be so by recourse to other – non-secular – sources, sources of identity and meaning in particular (and why not add *solidarity*, which arguably cannot evolve without the former?). The spectre of nihilism – the suspicion that life as understood and lived with the (secular, rational) sources at hand will prove meaningless, devoid of direction and moral values – raises its head once again. Formally stated: the secular is exposed as dependent upon the religious, upon its philosophical and historical Other, what went before it and stubbornly refused to wither, let alone die.

Now read the following passage from Habermas's Introduction in the light of what I have just said:

'Religiöse Überlieferungen leisten bis heute die Artikulation eines Bewusstseins von dem, was fehlt. Sie halten eine Sensibilität für Versagtes wach. Sie bewahren die Dimensionen unseres gesellschaftlichen und persönlichen Zusammenlebens, in denen noch die Fortschritte der kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Rationalisierung abgründige Zerstörungen angerichtet haben, vor dem Vergessen. Warum sollten sie nicht immer noch verschüsselte semantische Potentiale enthalten, die, wenn sie nur in begündete Rede verwandelt und ihres profanen Wahrheitsgehaltes entbunden würden, eine inspirierende Kraft entfalten können?' (2005: 13)

To be sure, the demand of translation is referred to even here; Habermas cannot present his position on the recurrent relevance of religion without including it, as we saw above. But the claim that religion(s) still, to this very day, or more to the point: today, more urgently than for a long time (Habermas offers no accurate clues), possess invaluable and irreplaceable significance as *sources* of dimensions even a near-fully secularised society cannot do without, and indeed cannot produce on its own, is a strong and provocative one, regardless of Habermas's emphasis on a translation he readily admits has its limits.

I have two final critical remarks. First, the notion of learning Habermas employs in his model of learning ('*Lernprozesse*') is, here as always, much too one-sidedly cognitivist. The category of the 'epistemic' he invokes fails to incorporate the role of emotions, of our affectivity-based receptivity to goings-on in the world (Vetlesen 1994). As a theorist, Habermas in this respect unwittingly exhibits the thinness and lack of substantive first-person experience ('*Erfahrung*') that the available secular-cum-rational sources of identity and meaning in our society *qua* practice uphold – and which, precisely for lack of these thick dimensions, give rise to the need to engage with the religious that Habermas now articulates – happily ignorant, it seems, that his own formalist discourse ethics and cognitivist theory of learning contribute to the deficit he now points to religion to help compensate.

My second critical remark is that Habermas's recent keen interest in the role of religion in a liberal society such as our present-day one in Western Europe has an unwelcome functionalist ring. To talk in terms of resources needed and resources lacking, even when the issues involved are of the utmost existential-cum-moral importance to the concrete

persons affected, suggests that Habermas assesses the ups and downs of the societal relevance of religion in an overly instrumentalist manner: religion as a provider of (re)sources otherwise scarce. However, and to end on a less critical note on a day like this, on the occasion of Habermas's deservedly receiving the Holberg Prize, I also sense – yes, sense is the word – a quite strong existential dimension to his present interest in the role of religion. It remains to be seen whether future work will theorise this existential dimension more fully.

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The Critically Ambiguous Idea of a “Modernization of (Religious) Consciousness”

Comments on Jürgen Habermas’s lecture ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’

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Zuerst einmal möchte ich Ihnen ganz herzlich zum Holbergpreis gratulieren!

Danach danke ich Ihnen für eine sehr anregende Vorlesung über äusserst wichtige Themen!

Es tut mir im übrigen leid, dass diese Veranstaltung, hier in der Hansestadt Bergen, nicht auf deutsch gehalten wird.

(Doch vielleicht ist es demokratischer so, denn auf diese Weise müssen wir alle eine Fremdsprache sprechen.)

Due to prescribed time limits, I shall restrict myself to a few questions, aiming at an explication of two basic terms, namely ‘religion’ and ‘learning’.

At the outset, a preliminary reminder concerning
the ambiguity of the term ‘religion’.

There are various versions of Christianity, and likewise for Judaism and Islam, and there are Buddhism and Hinduism, and Bahai, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientologists, and New Age religions of many kinds, not to forget Confucianism, and various versions of animism.

Hence there are different conceptions of *religious truth claims*, of *faith* and of the *faith-knowledge relationship* – also within Western Christianity, cf. the role of *lumen naturale* in Thomas Aquinas versus faith from divine grace and a voluntaristic notion of God in branches of Protestantism. Consequently, views differ between believers and non-believers with respect to *what* can be learnt, and *how*. And there are different visions of *human beings* – some pessimistic, related to sin (perhaps deserving eternal punishment), while some underline the equal godlikeness of all human beings. And there are different visions of *God* – often as creator and judge at the same time – or of gods (if any).

¹ Cf. Gunnar Skirbekk, “Religion und Moderne. Die Modernisierung des Bewusstseins und die Notwendigkeit von Religionskritik”, in Michele Borrelli and Matthias Kettner (eds.), *Filosofia trascendentalpragmatica – Transzendentalpragmatische Philosophie, Festschrift in honor of Karl-Otto Apel on his 85th anniversary*. Cosenza, Pellegrini Editore, 2007 (ISBN 978-88-8101-441-5), pp. 433-453.

So, what are we talking about?

Primarily, *the three main monotheistic religions* [without further differentiation]?
[If so, what about China, and Japan?]

And about whom?

About devout persons, for whom true belief is a source of energy that nurtures their entire life – a totalizing trait that infuses the very pores of daily life? Or also less devout believers?

And what is the major focus?

Belief systems

[religious truth contents]

or

forms of life

or

religious language?

Anyhow, we should consider the claim that a

‘modernization of religious consciousness’

has taken place, and has to take place, a modernization characterised by

- the fact of pluralism
- modern science
- positive law based on secular reason

It is said that

religious citizens must develop an epistemic attitude:

‘must’ – hence an inbuilt imperative:

- one has to relate self-reflectively to other religious beliefs and competing doctrines
- one has to realise the institutionalised monopoly of modern science concerning secular knowledge
- one has to recognise the priority of secular reasons in legal matters

These are extensive challenges:

One has to refrain from the idea of religious laws and accept reasonable disagreement in religious matters, and learn to see one's own faith and conviction from the perspective of the others.

Furthermore, modern science (*Wissenschaft*) includes not only the natural sciences, but also social sciences and psychology, as well as humanities such as history, philosophy and philology – including the critical interpretation of texts, also religious ones, and of their implementation in concrete situations – and the history of Western thought, including knowledge about the various discussions between philosophy and theology.

So, what are the implications for a devout person who adapts to these requirements?

Can his or her faith still be 'totalizing'? – not innocently and non-reflectively, since this person has to be aware of the pluralism of other religions and world views.

What about his or her conviction concerning religious 'truth contents'? – the believer can no longer see them as publicly redeemable truth claims or truth contents; such claims and contents are taken care of by the sciences.

Hence the question:

What remains as a religious substance (to be learnt by non-religious persons)?

Learning processes, yes – but learning what and how?

We could refrain from the question of religious truth contents and focus on what non-religious persons can learn from performative contributions in terms of faith and devout forms of life, or from the potential for articulation in religious language.

But, in this lecture, religious truth contents are included, at the same time as these truth contents are not conceived in terms of validity claims that can be publicly criticised.

So what then?

How should these truth contents be conceived?

- Could 'truth' here be conceived in analogy with the 'truth of a piece of art'?
- Or along the lines of the discussions around 'redescription' or 'world disclosure'?
- Or as the highest 'existential stage', as in Kierkegaard?

In the latter case: how should this be articulated and learnt?

By existential experiences?

Such authentic experiences require, for articulation: a special genre and a special style, for learning/appropriation: a special receptivity and special efforts.

- If so, a term like '*personal knowledge*' would be more to the point than the term 'truth content'. And a notion of formation (Bildung) by first-person experience would be more adequate than a notion of learning related to the acquisition of propositional knowledge.
- Perhaps the decisive point is the following: secular persons, in dialogue with religious persons (and by the force of religious language, and by a reminder of their own underlying intuitions), could realise that '*something is sacred*'?

For instance, recognise that there is something like a '*cosmic shame*'

(as in Dworkin, with reference to cases such as: destroying a piece of art, destroying a natural habitat, exterminating an endangered species etc.).

We should learn to understand the sacredness and inviolability of fragile lives!

Against cynicism!

If so, this has implications for public debates concerning our vision of human beings. Religious intuitions could thus contribute to a defence of human dignity, for instance against scientific reductionism.

By the performative force of religious language and by our half-forgotten religious heritage, we could learn to recognise the *sacredness* of a person in his or her vulnerability and the *equal worth* of all human beings – in short, *Menschenwürde*, as stated in the German *Grundgesetz*.

Finally, is this the underlying motivation at this point?

And if so, are all religions equally relevant?



The Burdens of the Public Use of Reason

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In his essay 'Religion in the Public Sphere'¹ Habermas points out that the liberal conception of democratic citizenship is based on the assumption that 'natural reason' (i.e., a reason common to all human beings) is sufficient to discover our moral and political obligations. Thus, it provides the epistemic base for the justification of a secular state which no longer depends on religious legitimation.

In addition to their assumption concerning natural reason, liberals expect overlapping consensus² (or 'obligational overdetermination'³) on fundamental political issues, despite differences in the reasonable comprehensive doctrines of citizens. That is, multiple sources – whether religious or secular – are expected to support the same political obligations. An overlap between religiously and secularly grounded obligations is possible to the extent that we are able to come to the *same* results by *different* epistemic paths. Let's call this the 'overdetermination thesis'.

This thesis, combined with the asymmetry between secular⁴ and religious reasons (i.e. the fact that secular reasons are accessible to everyone, whereas religious reasons are not accessible to secular citizens or to citizens of different faiths), makes it possible to justify a neutrality principle regarding the public use of reason, as Rawls and Audi do. Furthermore, the lucky coincidence suggested by the 'overdetermination thesis' makes it seem reasonable to ask those adhering to particular comprehensive views to limit themselves to the public use of generally accessible reasons, instead of making exclusive⁵ use of the idiosyncratic reasons provided by their particular religious or

1 J. Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14/1 (2006), pp. 1-25. For a longer version see Habermas (2005), pp. 119-54

2 J. Rawls (1993), pp. 133-73

3 R. Audi, 'Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics', in Audi and Wolterstorff (1997), p. 12

4 Audi and Habermas use the term 'secular' in slightly different ways. Audi's use of the term is ambiguous. It includes both what Rawls calls 'purely political' and what he calls 'nonreligious but comprehensive' (see Rawls 1997, p. 587), whereas Habermas's distinction between 'secular' and 'secularist' views and reasons points to a distinction similar to Rawls's own. Here I will use the term 'secular' as Habermas does, that is in the narrow sense that refers to what Rawls calls 'purely political' and does not include secularist comprehensive doctrines.

5 Rawls's latest account of the 'duty of civility' does not exclude religious reasons from public political debate, but asks only for the provision 'in due course' of proper political reasons that are sufficient to ground the obligations at issue. (See Rawls 1997, p. 584). Even so, the issue of 'exclusion' of religious reasons does not thereby disappear, for in cases of conflict between political and religious reasons the proviso implies that the former trump the latter. Consequently, according to Rawls's account, religious (and otherwise comprehensive) reasons remain *excluded from those that 'count'*.

otherwise comprehensive doctrines.⁶ This request seems particularly appropriate in view of the political purpose of the public use of reason in liberal democracies. If, as democratic citizens, we owe one another justifications based on reasons that everyone can reasonably accept for the legislative decisions with which we all must comply, it makes sense to ask, as Rawls does, that 'in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support' (Rawls 1997, p. 783).

In this context, it is important to note that as long as the liberal criterion of democratic legitimacy is not questioned, there seems to be no alternative to the Rawlsian proviso. That is, if democratic legitimacy requires that legislative decisions be supported by reasons that all citizens can reasonably accept, there seems to be no room for debate about whether 'proper political reasons' need to be provided at all, but only about when the most appropriate time to provide them may be. Clearly, the latest possible time would be when the legislative decisions are made, but Rawls's interpretation of the 'public use of reason' as imposing a 'duty of civility' on citizens suggests that proper political reasons ought to be provided earlier. According to this interpretation, citizens, and not only officials, should provide publicly accessible reasons in support of the policies they favour in public political discussions.

With regard to this question, if one takes into account that democratic legitimacy does not concern political opinions but only legislatively *binding decisions*, Habermas's proposal to interpret Rawls's proviso in the narrower sense of an 'institutional translation proviso' seems quite plausible. Accordingly, the duty of providing 'secular translations' does not apply to all citizens but only to officials 'beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations' (p. 9). Among its many virtues, the most obvious is that this proposal does not demand self-restraint from religious citizens or advocate the censorship of religious topics, reasons and arguments that may be incorporated in the deliberative agenda of the *informal* public sphere. Although Habermas does not explicitly emphasize this aspect of his proposal, in my view, as I will try to show later, this is a crucial feature of any plausible account of deliberative democracy. Other virtues that Habermas does emphasize are related to the positive consequences of leaving the public sphere open to mutual learning processes, cultural changes etc. Finally, due to its elimination of additional constraints, his proposal highlights the central constraint of Rawls's proviso, namely, that 'only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold' (p. 9).

For all its virtues, however, I am not sure whether Habermas's proposal actually provides a solution to the objection that it is meant to address. According to Habermas, the most serious objection that authors such as Wolterstorff and Weithman have against the liberal proposal is that the obligation of providing publicly accessible reasons for

6 For Audi's own account of the distinction between publicly accessible arguments and religious arguments see Audi (1993) and (2000)

political decisions imposes undue cognitive burdens on religious citizens, which threaten the integrity of their existence as pious persons. My impression is that what fuels this objection runs deeper and cannot be solved by simply moving Rawls's proviso up one step, so to speak, from the public sphere to the institutional framework.

We can best identify the motivation for Wolterstorff's and Weithman's objections to the liberal conception of public reason if we consider them in connection with the overdetermination thesis that I mentioned before. In his essay, Habermas summarizes their objections by quoting the following passages:

'It belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our society that they ought to base their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do it.'⁷ Their religiously grounded concept of justice tells them what is politically correct or incorrect, meaning that they are incapable of discerning 'any "pull" from any secular reasons.'⁸

As already mentioned, the proposal this objection targets requires citizens to restrict themselves to publicly accessible reasons (i.e. secular reasons) in advocating any law or public policy.⁹ However, if the objection is compelling, as Habermas thinks it is, the problem with the liberal proposal seems to be that religious citizens cannot take on such a 'schizophrenic' task *precisely because the reasons they have to support or oppose many policies are religious reasons*. As I see it, the main problem here is not so much that those who rely on religious reasons may lack sufficient imagination to come up with secular reasons, but rather that *there is no guarantee that such reasons are available*. In view of the possibility of a real conflict between religious and secular reasons, the claim that religious citizens may be 'incapable of discerning any "pull" from any secular reasons' becomes a compelling objection to the exclusion of religious reasons from public political discussion.

If we consider that there may be no obligatory overdetermination of secular and religious reasons, the urgency of Wolterstorff's and Weithman's objections becomes clear. It is relatively easy to imagine a scenario in which overdetermination fails, where certain policies are accepted for secular reasons that are morally objectionable to religious citizens. In such case, the only reasonable way they can fulfil their personal ethical obligation to express their opposition to such policies is through the use of the

7 N. Wolterstorff, 'The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues' in Audi & Wolterstorff (1997), p. 105

8 P. Weithman (2002), p. 157

9 The particulars of the proposals vary, but nothing hinges on their specific differences regarding the objection at issue. For the most discussed proposals see Rawls (1993) and (1997) and Audi (1997).

only reasons available to them, which may be religious.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, the 'duty of civility' understood in Rawlsian terms may seem to them clearly unacceptable *to the extent that it rules out this possibility*.¹¹

However, once we contemplate the possibility of a situation in which overdetermination fails, Habermas's proposal, though certainly less demanding than Rawls's, appears vulnerable to the same objection. If overdetermination fails, the requirements of Habermas's 'institutional translation proviso' would be equally impossible to meet. Translation *presupposes* overdetermination; it presupposes that *it is possible to arrive at the same results by different epistemic means*. Whenever this is not possible, Habermas's proviso encounters the same challenges as Rawls's proviso.

From this perspective, it seems that if there is indeed something to the objection at the level of informal discussion in the public sphere, it will remain in place at the institutional level as well. Habermas accepts the soundness of the objection when he argues that citizens 'should therefore be allowed to express and justify their convictions in a religious language if they cannot find secular "translations" for them' (p. 10). But, if the fact that secular translations cannot be found is a good reason to allow citizens to appeal to exclusively religious reasons, why exactly is that not the case when those citizens happen to be politicians? What happens when no secular 'translations' can be found for the religious reasons that underwrite the policies they (and their constituencies) think are right? If there is a real discrepancy between secular and religious reasons guiding legislative decisions, officials would not be able to fulfil their translation obligation simply by virtue of the proviso. Here too 'ought' implies 'can'. So, how can officials generate the required translations in cases of real discrepancy? Where could such translations come from? In cases of real conflict between secular and religious reasons the 'institutional translation proviso' leads to the same exclusion of religious reasons as does Rawls's proviso. Adding that the exclusion only operates 'beyond the institutional threshold' can hardly silence the objection, given that this is precisely *when it matters most*. In cases of conflict, religious citizens, officials included, would remain 'incapable

10 Although Weithman does not specifically discuss the potential conflict between secular and religious reasons, his argument against Rawls's 'duty of civility' focuses on the need to allow citizens 'to adduce religious arguments for their political positions *even when they have no other reasons to which they can appeal*.' (p. 142)

11 Rawls (1999) contemplates a possibility like this one, when he discusses different types of discourses that do not belong to public reasoning, one of which he calls 'witnessing'. According to Rawls, citizens can make use of this type of discourse when 'they must not only let other citizens know the deep basis of their strong opposition, but must also bear witness to their faith by doing so' (p. 595). Nevertheless, he makes clear that this type of discourse does not belong to public reasoning and thus it cannot be used as a basis for actively opposing the policies at issue. He adds: 'At the same time, those bearing witness accept the idea of public reason. While they may think the outcome of a vote on which all reasonable citizens have conscientiously followed public reason to be incorrect or not true, they nevertheless recognize it as legitimate law and accept the obligation not to violate it.' (ibid.)

of discerning any “pull” from any secular reasons.’ If this is a compelling objection against Rawls’s proviso, it will remain equally compelling against Habermas’s proviso.

But is the objection actually compelling? And what are the specific consequences of Habermas’s acceptance of the objection regarding his own approach? We can begin to address these questions by looking at Wolterstorff’s and Weithman’s objection in greater detail.

As I see it, their objection to the liberal understanding of the ethics of citizenship has an ethical, political and cognitive dimension. Accordingly, an account of the ethics of citizenship should not impose *morally* objectionable, *politically* illegitimate or undue *cognitive* burdens on any citizen. This multi-dimensionality allows us to break down the general objection into three more specific ones:

According to the objection, Rawls’s interpretation of the ‘duty of civility’ may occasionally force religious citizens to do something *morally objectionable*. As mentioned before, in cases of real conflict between secular and religious reasons supporting morally contentious policies, Rawls’s approach would make it impossible for religious citizens to fulfil their personal ethical obligation of opposing what in their view are immoral policies by providing the reasons for their opposition, whenever those reasons are exclusively religious.

From a political point of view, so the objection goes, Rawls’s interpretation of the ‘duty of civility’ *illegitimately* imposes a one-sided exclusion of the views, reasons and convictions of many citizens.¹² This imposition runs counter to the liberal principle of democratic legitimacy, according to which we owe our fellow citizens justifications that are based on reasons that they can rationally accept for political decisions with which they must comply. Given that democratic requirement, it seems that no particular group of citizens has the right to determine *a priori* or once and for all what should and what should not belong to public discussion, what requires justification and what does not. Only the citizens themselves should make such determinations. As Wolterstorff puts it, ‘the ethic of the citizen is itself up for debate in constitutional democracies of a by and large liberal character.’¹³

According to Habermas, however, the most serious objection to the liberal proposal is related to the *undue* cognitive burdens *asymmetrically* imposed on religious citizens.¹⁴ As I

12 Wolterstorff (1997) includes in the charge of political illegitimacy that, from a normative point of view, Rawls’s proviso ‘infringes, inequitably, on the free exercise of religion’ (p. 105) and, from a practical point of view, will most of the time single out for exclusion religious reasons, while secular comprehensive doctrines are more likely to ‘go undetected.’ (ibid.)

13 Wolterstorff (1997), p. 113.

14 Habermas’s view of the cognitive objection includes two separate questions. One question is whether the liberal proposal imposes *undue* cognitive burdens by forcing religious citizens to do something *wrong*. A different question is whether it imposes undue cognitive burdens, even if there is nothing wrong with the cognitive tasks involved, to the extent that they are *asymmetrically* distributed among citizens. In my opinion, only the first question poses a valid objection, but I will address the second question at the end of the essay as well. See also footnote 33.

understand the objection, what is wrong with Rawls's interpretation of the 'duty of civility' from a cognitive point of view is that it may force religious citizens to be *disingenuous*. That is, they may be required to publicly defend the policies they favour with reasons that do not correspond to their own convictions. This would threaten the integrity of their religious stance and thus, as Habermas points out, 'destabilize their existence as pious persons' (p. 8). Given that we cannot take an instrumental attitude towards our own beliefs or cognitive stances – in other words, given that it is not up to us to *choose* what reasons we find convincing and what reasons we do not – the requirement that we exclude our real reasons is objectionable, since it forces us to argue for something we do not actually believe. As Habermas observes, the objection does not amount to an empirical claim that religious citizens may in fact be unable to find alternate, secular reasons. The normative core of the objection is that it would be wrong to require something from them that involves cognitive dishonesty.¹⁵ Rather than expressing a virtue, the duty of civility so understood seems to involve a clear vice from a purely cognitive point of view.¹⁶

Since Habermas's proposal aims to offer a solution to the cognitive objection to Rawls's account of the ethics of citizenship, we need to find out whether his proposal fares better than Rawls's with respect to the cognitive burdens that it imposes on citizens.

To its credit, Habermas's revised account of the ethics of citizenship does not impose a *direct* burden of cognitive dishonesty on religious citizens below the institutional threshold. In the public sphere they are *allowed* to make exclusive use of those reasons that they sincerely believe in, even if they are religious reasons. In that sense, they are not obliged to come up with secular reasons that do not correspond to their authentic beliefs. They are only obliged to do so *if they want their reasons to count in the legislative process*. I wonder whether the conditional character of the latter obligation makes the burden of cognitive dishonesty any more bearable (or the dishonesty more acceptable, for that matter), but I will leave this issue for later.

What I want to consider first is the complementary question concerning the acceptability of the cognitive burdens imposed on secular citizens. According to Habermas's proposal, secular citizens must exercise restraint concerning their 'secularist attitudes.' Surprising

15 Although Weithman does not discuss the cognitive objection in those very terms, it is important to notice that the principle he proposes concerning the role of religion in the public sphere contains a proviso of *sincerity*, that is it allows citizens to make use of their religious reasons without having to make them good by additional secular reasons 'provided they *sincerely believe* that their government would be justified in adopting the measures they favor and are prepared to indicate what they think would justify the adoption of the measures.' (Weithman 2002, p. 121).

16 An additional aspect of the cognitive objection concerns the cognitive dissonance that may confront religious citizens in trying to fulfil both the duty of civility and the religious duty of letting religion shape their most important convictions in their search for a religiously integrated existence. See Wolterstorff (1997), p. 105, 116 and Weithman (2002), p. 141. I will discuss this issue in more detail later.

as it may be, it turns out that they are not allowed to publicly adopt an epistemic stance towards religion, according to which religion has 'no cognitive substance.' Thus, in contradistinction to religious citizens, they cannot make public use of their sincere beliefs, if they happen to be of a secularist type that contradicts the possible truth of religious claims. It follows that in such cases they must be cognitively dishonest and will have to come up with alternate reasons that 'are independent of their authentic beliefs.'

However, if cognitive dishonesty is unacceptable from a normative point of view when it comes to allowing citizens to publicly adopt their own cognitive stance, it seems that this would be so regardless of whether those citizens have a religious or secularist stance. As we saw before, the cognitive reason why religious citizens should be able to adopt their own religious stance was simply because one cannot *choose* a cognitive stance or adopt an instrumental attitude towards it without being cognitively dishonest.¹⁷ But if this is the case, it would remain so for any cognitive stance and thus *a fortiori* for a secularist stance. It seems to me that in imposing such additional burdens Habermas's proposal opens itself to similar objections to those facing Rawls's proposal.¹⁸

As I mentioned at the outset, an important advantage of Habermas's proposal is that it does not demand self-restraint from religious citizens or any censorship of religious topics, reasons and arguments that can be incorporated in the deliberative agenda of the informal public sphere. A key consequence of doing this is that the public sphere remains open to mutual learning processes, cultural changes and so forth. Having this ideal of openness, it is extremely counterintuitive that Habermas's proposal should demand self-restraint from secular citizens or the censorship of secularist views. It seems to me rather unmotivated that all kinds of religious or otherwise comprehensive views should be allowed in the informal public sphere for the sake of possible mutual learning processes, but that secularist views in particular (whatever those may be) should be singled out for exclusion from the deliberative agenda of the informal public sphere.

17 It would surely be very controversial to argue that the reason, instead, is that religions may indeed contain truths. For that can be equally true of secularist beliefs. Once we get into the issue of truth, who is to say that religions are not 'archaic relics of pre-modern societies that continue to exist in the present?' But be that as it may, it seems to me that if religious citizens are allowed to express their beliefs in creationism or the Virgin Birth, regardless of the likelihood of them being true, other citizens should equally be allowed to express their belief that religion is the opium of the people or whatever other beliefs they may have.

18 It seems clear that, beyond the charge of cognitive dishonesty, the charges of being morally objectionable and politically illegitimate could also apply to this version of the ethics of citizenship. Given that there are in fact citizens who hold secularist views, it could always happen that in forcing them to exclude secularist views from the public sphere they may be unable to fulfil their personal ethical obligation of opposing what in their view are immoral policies by providing the only reasons they have available to do so, whenever they happen to directly depend on secularist views. From a democratic point of view, it also seems clear that, if imposing a one-sided exclusion of the views, reasons and convictions of religious citizens is politically illegitimate, by parity of argument, it is illegitimate to exclude any other views of democratic citizens.

This theoretical move is especially surprising in the context of a discursive approach for which it is crucial that only the affected citizens themselves can legitimately make such determinations.¹⁹

Habermas does offer a reason to justify this peculiar feature of his approach. According to him, it is an unavoidable consequence of allowing citizens the use of religious reasons in the informal public sphere. After all, what would be the point of doing so if secular citizens do not take those religious reasons seriously? In Habermas's view, 'taking seriously religious contributions to contentious political issues' (p. 15) requires secular citizens, first of all, 'not to deny from the outset any possible cognitive substance to these contributions' (ibid.) and, secondly, 'to help to assess them for a substance that can possibly be expressed in a secular language' (ibid.).

I find the question that motivates these considerations compelling. It would be rather meaningless to recognize the right of religious citizens to include their religious views in the informal public sphere if there were no complementary duty obliging other citizens to take those views seriously. What I do not find convincing, however, is Habermas's narrow interpretation of what it means to 'take seriously' religious views (or any other views, for that matter). In the following, I would like to briefly outline a different interpretation that in my view is at least as plausible as Habermas's own. In contrast to his proposal, however, my proposal supports an 'ethics of democratic citizenship' that requires no cognitive self-restraint from democratic citizens, and no censorship regarding the type of religious, secular, or otherwise comprehensive views that they can include in the deliberative agenda of the informal public sphere.²⁰

The heated debate in the USA between evolution and creationism can serve to illustrate my alternate understanding of what 'taking religious reasons seriously' can mean. This debate has many legal, political and social implications and I do not intend to get into the details here. For my purpose, it is enough to mention that the great variety of policies under discussion include such things as barring evolution from public school science

19 In fact, Habermas explicitly recognizes that 'the ostensibly critical overcoming of what to my mind is a narrow secularist consciousness *is itself an essentially contested issue*.' (p.33) From this recognition he derives only the obvious empirical conclusion that his expectation vis-à-vis secular citizens of 'a self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of Modernity' depends on learning processes that no one can influence from the outside. But he does not seem to notice the normative implications of his move. In imposing a cognitive precondition on secular citizens that takes sides on what is admittedly a contested issue among the affected citizens themselves, his version of the ethics of citizenship constitutes an attempt to influence the outcome from the outside and in so doing it seems clearly to overstep the normative limits imposed by the discourse principle. See Habermas (1998).

20 Needless to say, comprehensive views that infringe upon the basic moral and political principles (of freedom, equality, etc.) of a liberal democracy would need a separate treatment in a general discussion on the proper structure of the public sphere in democratic societies, but given that this is not at issue in the discussion of the ethics of *democratic* citizenship in particular, I will not make any further reference to it here.

curricula, permitting creationism to be taught as a scientific theory, passing 'balanced treatment' laws and so on. The important implications of such policies surely explain the tremendous resonance this debate has found in the informal public sphere.²¹ In this context, however, we only need to determine what is involved in taking the religious views of creationists seriously.

According to Habermas's interpretation, taking religious contributions to contentious political issues seriously is only possible 'if *all citizens* can be expected not to deny from the outset any possible cognitive substance to these contributions' (p. 15; my italics).²² However, I do not see why this should be so. In my view, taking religious (or any other) contributions to political issues seriously only obliges us to *engage* them seriously. That is, it obliges us to *evaluate them strictly on their merits* and thus to be prepared to offer the counter arguments and counter evidence needed to show why they may be wrong, in the event that one thinks they are. Indeed, this is clearly what is actually going on in the debate over evolution and creationism. Those defending evolution are certainly fulfilling their political obligations towards their fellow citizens by investing an incredible amount of work, energy and human resources in order to provide the counter-evidence for every claim that defenders of creationism bring to the informal public sphere.²³ More importantly, they are fulfilling their obligations of citizenship *regardless of what their personal cognitive stance towards the cognitive substance of religion may be*. It may well be that many defenders of evolution operate from a perspective that entirely rules out any possible cognitive substance for religion. But, even if that were not the case, we can imagine a recalcitrant secularist who not only refuses to believe a word of creationism, but who, in addition, is firmly convinced that religions are 'opium for the people' (so they are not merely 'archaic relics of pre-modern societies', but particularly dangerous holdovers that should be openly combated).²⁴ Beyond the fact that it is not clear why that person would have less right than the religious person to bring to the public sphere whichever views she has, it is also unclear why holding those views would make any significant difference to her ability to fulfil the political obligations of citizenship. After all, she provides her best arguments and reasons for public deliberation in the informal public sphere like everyone else who participates in this debate.²⁵

21 From thousands of discussion groups on the internet and elsewhere to daily articles in newspapers, endless publications of scientific and religious books on the topic etc.

22 As I will argue later, in my opinion cognitive attitudes are not the type of thing that can meaningfully be subject to a fair distribution of rights and duties. But given that Habermas is concerned with assuring a symmetric distribution of cognitive burdens, it is striking that, according to his account of the ethics of citizenship, all religious citizens have the right to remain monoglots of their 'religious language' in the informal public sphere, whereas no secular citizen has the right to remain a monoglot of her 'secularist language.'

23 Their cognitive efforts are targeted at claims in support of creationism, such as the alleged evidence for Noah's ark, and against evolution, such as the claim that evolution violates the second law of thermodynamics or that there is insufficient evidence to prove that the earth is over 4 billion years old. For an overview of some of these efforts, see www.talkorigins.org

Precisely because the discussion of the ethics of citizenship concerns political obligations, it seems clear to me that the obligation of 'taking seriously religious views on contentious political issues' does not have a cognitive but a *political* meaning. It is the obligation of democratic citizens to provide one another with justifications based on reasons that everyone can reasonably accept for the legislative decisions with which everyone must comply. Therefore, the obligation to engage the views of other fellow citizens and to provide arguments, evidence, justifications etc. for or against them does not derive from the cognitive possibility that they may contain some truth. Secular citizens may very well be cognitively closed to the possible truth of creationism or any other religious views. Nonetheless, they owe their fellow citizens the cognitive effort of providing arguments to show why they think these views are wrong. What their fellow citizens happen to believe tells them what they have to 'take seriously,' that is to say it tells them *what belongs to the deliberative agenda of the informal public sphere*. Thus, it is because no particular group has the right to determine *a priori* or once and for all what belongs and what does not belong in the public sphere, what is in need of justification and what is not, that citizens have to take views seriously that they might otherwise have disregarded. As we saw before, this is the political 'pull' of Wolterstorff's and Weithman's objection to the exclusion of religious views from political discussion in the public sphere.

Once we look at deliberation in the public sphere from this perspective, it is possible to give a more complete answer to our original question about what is and what is not compelling about Wolterstorff's and Weithman's objections. From the arguments provided so far, it should be clear that I find their objection to the exclusion of religious views from the public sphere compelling for the kind of ethical and political reasons mentioned earlier.²⁶

24 It could perhaps be argued that the kind of open-mindedness towards the possible truth of religious views to which Habermas appeals does not directly refer to the particular contents of those views, but concerns only a meta-attitude towards religions in general. According to this line of argument, secular citizens should meet the cognitive precondition of being open-minded towards the possible cognitive substance of religions in general, although, when it comes to particular beliefs or claims (like those concerning creationism or the Virgin Birth), they may not need to be equally open to their possible truth. The point of the example I am using here is to show that, even under this interpretation, it is not at all clear why citizens with a secularist meta-attitude that entirely denies any cognitive substance to religions would necessarily fail in their obligation to take religious contributions to contentious political issues seriously.

25 It should be clear that, for the general argument, nothing hinges on the particulars of this example. The same case could be made regarding the debate about gay marriage, for instance. Taking religious arguments against gay marriage seriously does not require secular citizens to open their minds to the possible truth of religious claims against homosexuality. A perfectly appropriate way of taking their contributions to the debate seriously is to offer the counter arguments and counter evidence needed to show why their arguments are wrong if one thinks they are.

However, the arguments regarding the cognitive dimension of the objection are not as compelling. The importance of this issue does not primarily concern whether religious views should be excluded *from the informal public sphere*. As I've argued, we already have sufficient arguments to yield a negative answer to that question. The importance of identifying the weakness of these arguments is to see why they cannot be used to challenge the exclusion of religious views *beyond the institutional threshold*.²⁷

As we have seen, the charge of cognitive dishonesty was directed against Rawls's contention that citizens must provide publicly accessible reasons in support of the policies they favour. To the extent that this contention can be understood as an *exclusion* of religious views and reasons from the public sphere, it imposes an undue cognitive burden on citizens because it makes it impossible for religious citizens to adopt their own religious cognitive stance in public deliberation. This forces them to be cognitively dishonest. But even if religious views and reasons are permitted in public deliberation, the liberal contention involves an *additional obligation* to provide arguments and reasons that other citizens can reasonably accept. This obligation requires religious citizens to engage secular views and reasons in the public sphere in order to check whether the policies they favour can be reasonably justified to others. The objection suggests that this obligation *also* imposes an undue cognitive burden on religious citizens. To the extent that it forces them to follow an argumentative path that does not correspond to their own religious cognitive stance, it involves cognitive dishonesty and thus threatens the integrity of their existence as pious persons. If this charge is sound, if, as Weithman contends, the religious cognitive stance of citizens makes them 'incapable of discerning any "pull" from any secular reasons' (p. 157),²⁸ it could provide some support for his contrary proposal, namely that 'citizens of a liberal democracy may offer arguments in public political debate which depend upon reasons drawn from their... religious views, *without making them good by appeal to other arguments*' (p. 3).²⁹

26 The rationale for allowing religious citizens to include exclusively religious reasons for the policies they favour in their deliberations in the public sphere is not merely political fairness. It has a cognitive sense as well. For such inclusion opens up the possibility that 'secular translations' of those reasons can be found which show that the policies at issue can actually be reasonably accepted by everyone. This possibility of cognitive learning is rightly underlined in Habermas's proposal (see pp. 21-22).

27 I do not rule out that other arguments could be used to challenge the neutrality principle. All I am claiming here is that the charge of cognitive dishonesty is not compelling and thus cannot be used to this end.

28 Here I am only using this claim that Habermas quotes from Weithman's book as a label for the objection to the liberal view that the obligation to take a cognitive stance from which one cannot discern any 'pull' involves cognitive dishonesty. However, using this quote in this particular context could be misleading because the original argument from which it is taken is actually very different. There Weithman is objecting to Audi's principle of secular motivation and the example he discusses is not directed against the obligation to provide secular reasons, but against the alleged obligation to be motivated by them as well. I find his argument against Audi's principle compelling. However, the general line of argument that Weithman defends in the book is also directed against the obligation of religious citizens to provide secular reasons, as the democratic principle that he proposes indicates (See Weithman 2002, p. 3). Given that, I do not think that it is misleading to ascribe this view to him, although using this particular quote here without further explanation might be.

Once citizens are no longer required to provide reasons that can be accessible to others, the door is open to 'allowing exclusive reliance on religious arguments and religious reasons in politics' (p. 140).³⁰ Following this line of argument, one could conclude that the kinds of reasons that count beyond the institutional threshold should be decided instead by democratic majority rule.

Here it is important to note that what is at issue in the cognitive objection is not so much whether citizens have the right to *include* their sincere beliefs and reasons in the public sphere, but whether they have the right to *do nothing more*. The main issue here is whether they can be released from the obligation to check whether their arguments *can be made good in view of all other arguments available*. If fulfilling this obligation necessarily involves some cognitive dishonesty, Weithman's objection to the liberal proposal may be compelling and his claim that religious citizens have the right 'to offer religious political arguments in public, *without having or being prepared to offer accessible reasons*' (p. 121; my italics) could be justified.

If this were the case, it seems that Habermas's proposal would face a hard choice. To the extent that his proposal requires that both religious and non-religious citizens cooperate in the deliberative process of finding generally accessible arguments, it can perhaps release *some* citizens from the obligation to offer accessible reasons, but surely not *all* of them. However, if something is really wrong with an obligation, it would seem that all citizens and not just some would have to be released from it. In that case, the practice of public deliberation in the informal public sphere would just collapse. Each citizen would simply declare her own religious or non-religious comprehensive views and then place their vote. Fortunately for Habermas's proposal, nothing is actually wrong with the obligation in question. But precisely for that reason, as I will try to show in what follows, the objection that it imposes undue cognitive burdens is not as compelling as Habermas believes.

As became clear in the discussion of what it means to take seriously the views of other citizens, the obligation to provide arguments and reasons accessible to others by no means requires giving up one's cognitive stance. Our democratic obligations only extend to seriously *engaging the reasons accessible to other citizens*, not so much so that they can become our own reasons,³¹ but in order to find out through deliberation whether the policies we favour can be justified to others, that is, in order to justify to those who have a different world view *why they should comply*.

29 Weithman's principle also contains a proviso regarding the sincerity of the views, but this is not relevant here. See the quote in footnote 15.

30 Weithman himself points out the costs involved in this proposal: 'There may, of course, be costs involved in allowing exclusive reliance on religious arguments and religious reasons in politics. Doing so may result in the advocacy of policies which strike us as unjust and which cannot be defended on nonreligious grounds.' (p. 140)

Consequently, the 'pull' of the views and reasons that one is required to address in public deliberation need not come from one's personal cognitive stance. This is precisely why no dishonesty is required of any citizen. Whether religious citizens are capable of discerning any 'pull' from secular reasons is therefore irrelevant. It is *the other citizens* who must be able to discern such a 'pull' in order to accept the policies that religious citizens favour. If anything, the 'pull' should come from their democratic convictions. Religious citizens cannot make exclusive use of religious claims and reasons in the public sphere simply because they live in societies with secular citizens and citizens of conflicting faiths. If they want to fulfil their democratic obligations, they cannot remain monoglots. What their fellow citizens happen to believe tells religious citizens, too, what reasons and arguments they have to 'take seriously.' This is why the fact that some citizens may have a religious cognitive stance by no means releases them from the obligation to *seriously engage secular views and arguments*, whether to prove them wrong or to provide secular citizens and citizens of conflicting faiths with the necessary justifications for the policies they favour.³²

Insofar as seriously engaging the views and arguments of other citizens does not require us to give up our own cognitive stance, the objection of cognitive dishonesty does not seem compelling. There is no cognitive dishonesty involved in being exposed to the arguments of our fellow citizens or in being obliged to make our own arguments good by appeal to arguments that other citizens can reasonably accept. Consequently, there is no argumentative path from a right to include in public political debate whatever views and reasons one honestly believes to *a right to be released from the obligation to engage the views and reasons* needed to justify to others the policies one favours.

Looking at the cognitive objection from this perspective, it seems clear that a proper account of the ethics of citizenship must recognize *the right of all democratic citizens to take their own cognitive stance in their deliberative contributions to the public sphere*. However, this right by no means includes an additional right to the *protection of the integrity* of such cognitive stances. It seems to me that public deliberation, as a collective

31 Here I disagree with Audi's general line of argument regarding the cognitive and motivational expectations of religious citizens in a liberal democracy. I see Audi's appeal to religious citizens to search for theo-ethical reflective equilibrium more as the engaged political appeal of a citizen to her fellow citizens (by using the type of discourse that Rawls calls 'conjecture') than as a piece of philosophical reflection on the general obligations or conditions for democratic citizenship. It seems to me that it is up to religious citizens to decide whether or not to search for theo-ethical reflective equilibrium. In any event, no obligation to that effect follows from the interpretation that I offer here of the requirements for participation in democratic deliberation in the public sphere.

32 As Rawls (1997) makes clear, 'public reasoning aims for public justification... *Public justification is not simply valid reasoning, but argument addressed to others*: it proceeds correctly from premises we accept and think others could reasonably accept to conclusions we think they could also reasonably accept.' (p. 593-94; my italics).

enterprise, would have no point if citizens had a right to include their own views and reasons in public deliberation, but no consequent obligation to check whether they can be made good in view of all other arguments available. If doing so threatens the integrity of the religious stance of some citizens, this is not because public deliberation requires any kind of *cognitive dishonesty*. At most, it is because engaging and confronting alternative cognitive stances, such as secular ones, may expose them to *cognitive dissonances*, as Weithman and Wolterstorff contend.³³

The argument I have outlined so far aims to show that participating in public deliberation does not require democratic citizens to be cognitively dishonest, whatever their comprehensive views may be. In that sense, it does not impose *undue* cognitive burdens on any citizen. A very different question, though, is whether the cognitive burdens that it does impose are *asymmetrically* distributed among citizens.³⁴ Here I must say that it is not clear to me why a positive answer to this question should be objectionable if there is nothing wrong with the cognitive tasks themselves. But be that as it may, I do not dispute that the confrontation between religious and secular views may expose some citizens to cognitive dissonances. All I can say is that cognitive dissonances cannot be legitimately avoided by releasing some citizens from their obligation to provide generally accessible justifications to their fellow citizens for political decisions to which they all must comply. There is no guarantee that the integrity of the cognitive stances of all citizens can be made compatible with this democratic obligation, regardless of what those cognitive stances happen to be. Thus it may well be that the cognitive burdens that democracy imposes on different citizens actually are not symmetrical. However, *to the same extent that cognitive stances cannot be chosen or prescribed from the outside, it makes no sense to think that the consequences of adopting them can be controlled through a fair distribution of cognitive burdens*. The rationale of privileging secular reasons beyond the institutional threshold is not a concession of special privileges to citizens whose respective cognitive stances include such reasons, and thus something for which other citizens may need to be compensated. Its rationale is simply the legitimate protection

33 See references in footnote 16

34 As I mentioned earlier, Habermas's general line of argument suggests that he accepts this second aspect of Weithman's and Wolterstorff's cognitive objection when he claims that religious citizens 'are not to be encumbered with an asymmetrical burden' (p. 23). My impression is that the discourse approach to deliberative democracy cannot take this criterion as decisive for a proper account of the ethics of citizenship and thus it cannot guarantee a solution to this aspect of Weithman's and Wolterstorff's objection. For there is no *a priori* guarantee that the request for symmetrical distribution of cognitive burdens among citizens will be compatible with the discursive conditions necessary for a meaningful process of political opinion and will formation through collective deliberation in the public sphere. Given that such conditions, whatever they turn out to be, must have priority in a discourse account of the ethics of democratic citizenship, if a deliberative democracy is to be possible at all, the discourse approach must leave open the question of whether or not the cognitive burdens that derive from such conditions turn out to be symmetrically distributed among citizens.

against coercion that the state owes not only to secular citizens, but also to religious citizens with conflicting religious views, and that means to *all* citizens.³⁵ Having said that, it is also not clear to me that trying to avoid cognitive dissonances is wiser than trying to resolve them, and whereas democratic deliberation may not contribute to the former, it can surely contribute to the latter.

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- Weithman, P. (2002), *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

35 Even if the overdetermination thesis turned out to be false, so that real conflicts between religious and secular reasons are unavoidable, the rationale for privileging secular reasons beyond the institutional threshold could still be justified not only to secular but to religious citizens as well. Audi (1997) provides this type of justification in the following terms: 'if the only reasons that move me are religious, and if I would not want to be coerced on the basis of religious reasons playing a like role in someone with a conflicting religious perspective, I would want to abstain from coercion.' (p. 141) Audi is considering here only a hypothetical case where motivational overdetermination fails, but it seems clear that the same could be said about a hypothetical case where epistemic overdetermination fails: 'if the only reasons that I can allege in support of a policy are religious, and if I would not want to be coerced on the basis of religious reasons playing a like role for someone with a conflicting religious perspective, I would want to abstain from coercion.'



Secular Worries.

Comments on Cristina Lafont's lecture 'The Burdens of the Public Use of Reason'

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In his essay 'The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere', Jürgen Habermas concludes that John Rawls's translation proviso imposes undue cognitive burdens on religious citizens. Habermas's conclusion is based on the observation that Rawls's proviso obliges religious citizens to translate their religious reasons into secular political reasons 'in due course', whereas non-religious citizens are necessarily freed from this burden of translation in the sense that their reasons are already secular. In this way, Habermas says, asymmetrical cognitive burdens such as the burden of translation are imposed on religious citizens. To impose cognitive burdens asymmetricaly is, however, undue or unfair. To achieve a more symmetrical distribution of such burdens, additional cognitive burdens ought thus to be imposed on non-religious citizens. The burden he has in mind is, as we know, that 'the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content' of religious reasons that cannot be translated into secular political reasons, whereas religious citizens are not required to make any extra effort to 'open their minds to the possible truth content' of non-religious reasons that cannot be translated into political reasons even if they are secular (because, obviously, not all secular reasons are political).

Like Lafont, I am not convinced by this argument. Firstly, it rests on the assumption that an asymmetrical distribution of burdens is also undue or unfair. This is, however, not necessarily the case. When a proviso or a principle is applied, the distributive implications of its application are often asymmetrical. This does not mean that the proviso or principle cannot be symmetrically or impartially justified. Consequently, the translation proviso could, in principle, very well be symmetrically justifiable even if the implications of its application were asymmetrical. These asymmetrical distributive implications could be fair – or unfair. Lafont argues convincingly that it is unfair to impose additional cognitive burdens on non-religious citizens of the kind Habermas suggests. At the same time, she claims that this unfairness cannot in fact be conceptualised in terms of an unfair distribution at all, because 'cognitive tasks and attitudes' are simply not that 'type of thing that can meaningfully be subject to a fair distribution of rights and duties'. On this point, I believe it would be apt to distinguish between cognitive tasks that can be meaningfully subject to a fair distribution and what Lafont refers to as 'cognitive stances' that, as she correctly points out, cannot.¹ For example, a requirement to translate one's reasons into a different vocabulary could be a burden that might fall heavier on some

1 '[...] to the same extent that cognitive stances cannot be chosen or prescribed from the outside it makes no sense to think that the consequences of adopting them can be controlled through a fair distribution of cognitive burdens.'

citizens than on others, depending on the degree of initial overlap between one's original vocabulary and the vocabulary into which one were required to translate one's reasons. The distribution of this burden would then be asymmetrical, and this asymmetry could meaningfully be referred to as fair or unfair, depending on the legitimacy of the requirement, i.e. whether the requirement could be justified to all citizens or not. Hence, cognitive tasks may be a 'type of thing' that it makes sense to talk about as more or less fairly distributed, even if the cognitive burdens Habermas has in mind in his essay cannot be talked about in such terms.

According to Lafont, it is 'controversial' to argue that 'the cognitive reason why religious citizens should be able to adopt their own religious stance' is that 'religions may contain truths' which non-religious comprehensive doctrines do not, and, for that reason apparently, she does not investigate this argument more closely. But might not a version of this argument be Habermas's argument? His argument on this point seems to be either instrumental or substantial. Even if non-religious citizens are not convinced that religions may contain truths, they should in any case allow society to be regulated by principles that presuppose that religions may contain truths, because this would, in the end, be in their best interest. This would be the instrumental argument. The substantial argument would be that religions contain certain exclusive truths, for example certain vocabularies, that make it possible for us to express certain ethical truths that it would not otherwise be possible for us to express, and that society should be regulated by principles that respect these truths. This argument seems to be a variant of the 'controversial' argument Lafont is referring to.

Lafont spells out the really hard case, i.e. the case that seems hardest to handle in a fair way on the basis of the institutional translation proviso. The hard case is not when 'those who rely on religious reasons may lack sufficient imagination to come up with secular reasons' for a policy, but when no secular reasons in favour of a policy are available, i.e. when there is in fact a real conflict between religious and secular reasons. Initially however, there is no reason not to consider situations where there is a real conflict between secular political reasons and secular reasons that cannot be translated into secular political reasons as equally hard cases. Habermas argues that the conflict between religious and secular reasons may threaten the integrity of religious citizens' existence. I think it remains to be argued that being religious in a society regulated by the institutional translation proviso is generally less compatible with preserving personal existential integrity than, for example, being a radical scientific naturalist, if the prerequisite for preserving personal existential integrity is cognitive consistency. Indeed, a radical scientific naturalist cannot accept such a proviso without experiencing significant cognitive dissonance, because, according to him, all questions are in the end questions of empirical validity that can be answered most properly by science. The institutional translation proviso implies, however, an acceptance of the existence of irreducible 'questions of fundamental political justice' that ought to be answered, not by science, but by reasoning, 'free and equal citizens', i.e. by 'the reason of the public'.²

2 John Rawls (1999): 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', p. 575, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

If cognitive consistency is the prerequisite for preserving personal existential integrity, it is hard to see why a citizen holding radical scientific-naturalist views would not run into similar existential problems as a religious citizen.

Lafont correctly points out that Habermas seems to exclude certain secular comprehensive doctrines from the deliberations of the informal public sphere, namely secular doctrines that disregard the extra cognitive burdens of non-religious citizens. It seems to me, however, that he also excludes several religious comprehensive doctrines from this sphere. The religious doctrines secular citizens should 'open their minds to the possible truth content' of are not any religious doctrines, but 'modernised' religious doctrines that acknowledge the fact of pluralism, the authority of modern science, positive law and a profane morality. With this in mind, I am not sure whether Habermas would consider the creationists of Lafont's example as spokespersons of 'modernised' religion at all, i.e. as people we should 'open our minds to'.

My final comment concerns the relationship between Rawls's and Habermas's ideas of public reason. On the one hand, Lafont observes that the institutional translation proviso as outlined by Habermas 'distills the real content of Rawls's proviso'. What is suggested is that Rawls's proviso is not *really* different from Habermas's proviso. In a different passage however, Lafont says that Habermas's proposal is after all 'more convincing' than Rawls's. Does this mean that she considers Habermas's proposal to be more convincing because Habermas makes explicit what remains (more) implicit in Rawls's proposal, or does she think, after all, as Habermas himself would claim, that Rawls's proviso is more restrictive than his own? The latter is, I think, not the case. As Lafont herself calls attention to, Rawls's elaboration of the idea of public reason in 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited'³ suggests that there is not, at least not initially, any real disagreement between Rawls and Habermas on this point. However, it may very well turn out, if Habermas defends the position he seems to defend in 'The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere', that it is Habermas who is more restrictive, not Rawls.

3 John Rawls (1999): *Collected Papers*, p. 573-615, ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

Post-metaphysical thought, religion and secular society

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Post-metaphysical philosophy, according to Habermas, is agnostic.

It is prepared to learn from religion, but remains agnostic in the process. It insists on the difference between the certainties of faith, on the one hand, and validity claims that can be publicly criticized, on the other; but it refrains from the rationalist presumption that it can itself decide what part of the religious doctrines is rational and what part irrational. ... However, an apology of faith with philosophical means is not the task of philosophy proper. At best, philosophy circles the opaque core of religious experience when reflecting on the intrinsic meaning of faith. This core must remain so abysmally alien to discursive thought as does the core of aesthetic experience, which can likewise only be circled but not penetrated by philosophical reflection.¹

As a consequence of this view, among other things, Habermas now speaks of 'post-secular society.' In this lecture, I shall pursue this by taking a somewhat different route through the history of thought than Habermas does.² I shall present two rival accounts of how modern thought developed from medieval to modern times. One of these accounts is that of Hans Blumenberg, in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.³ Blumenberg wants to find the legitimacy of modern secular thought by showing how it arose as a kind of assertive self-defence against the frightening thought potential of medieval theological absolutism. Habermas seems to question the contemporary relevance of this kind of argument when he claims that "the offensive self-assertion" of an anthropocentric understanding of the self and the world against a theocentric one, is a battle from yesterday in the European West.⁴ Let us first take a look at this Blumenberg-interpretation.

In the year 1277, the bishop of Paris, in close cooperation with the Pope, condemned some 130 sentences taken from diverse contemporaneous authors. Their conceptual

1 Jürgen Habermas *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt 2005: Suhrkamp Verlag, cited from *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Cambridge 2007: Polity Press (to appear), ch. 5, section 6; German edition. p. 150

2 See *op.cit.*, ch. 5 and 8

3 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, orig. Frankfurt 1966: Suhrkamp Verlag, whose second edition was translated as *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Cambridge, Mass., 1985: MIT Press, especially Part II. I shall also make use of an early article of his: "Kant und die Frage nach dem "gnädigen Gott" " (*Studium Generale*, Heft 10, December 1954), where the role of Kant in Blumenberg's account is made much clearer than in the later book. The article focuses on moral philosophy and moral theology, and does not cover the whole of Blumenberg's later perspective. This is also true of the following.

4 See Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 8. German ed. p. 218

core was that in an important sense, the world was eternal and that God had not, therefore, created the world out of nothing. What was at issue was a difference between Christianity on the one hand and ancient Greek philosophy on the other – a difference that had not been so starkly thematized before. Neither Plato nor Aristotle allows for a *creatio ex nihilo* in his thinking, although emanatist versions of Platonism may give one a sense of radical creation of sorts. In addition, of course, it is not philosophically crystal clear what the bible actually says about creation, though the story told in the bible is not that of Greek philosophy. The essential point is that neither Plato nor Aristotle allows for creation on the level of the possible. What is possible is, for Plato, expressed in the order of eternal forms, and for Aristotle in an order of eternal essences, or species. A so-called demiurge creates the world in Plato's *Timaeus*, but he does it by looking at the eternal forms, he only sculpts the individual things on the basis of an eternal uncreated recipe, as it were. And in Aristotle, who calls his God only an Unmoved Mover, not a Creator, the point becomes quite clear: what God – as the final goal of the whole system of teleology – is indirectly doing, without actually being concerned with it, is to bring specimens of a species of possible specimens into being, but he does not invent the species, the essences, the possibilities of individual things. The cosmos, for the major tradition of Greek thought from Parmenides to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, was a cosmos of plenitude, a cosmos full of predefined possibilities uncreated by God.

In 1277, three years after the death of St. Thomas Aquinas, the great compromiser between Aristotle and Christian thought, this lack of clarity was no longer tolerated. The rhetorical opportunities of Neoplatonism were probably, as I indicated, one reason why it had been tolerated for such a long time, but it could also be argued (and Blumenberg does so) that Christian philosophy had in any case no choice if it were to survive in a culture long dominated by conceptually advanced Greek thought. Lacking a theoretical tradition of its own, it had no choice but to take over the forms and figures of Greek thought, including the figures used about the deity – and this despite the fact that the Christian God, though of course not human, is nevertheless a being with feelings of anger and love. God, moreover, condescends to a covenant between himself and the humans, which in due time is followed by the incarnation, in which God in fact also becomes a human.

In classical Greek philosophy, no such personal and social nature is ascribable to the deity. Part of the motivation behind the impersonal monotheism of this philosophy was the polytheistic Greek folk religion, whose gods were immortal but often careless and cruel to human beings, engaged as they were in fights with each other. "*Wissenschaft entsteht, wenn die Götter nicht gut gedacht werden*", wrote the young Nietzsche, and Blumenberg uses this as a kind of motto for his model of Greek philosophy: the philosophical science of the Greeks responds to the challenge of a polytheistic religion of deities that are indeed persons, but who by and large do not show solidarity with human beings. In stead, Greek philosophers invented their *theoria*, a life of contemplation of the cosmos that saw it by and large as a good cosmos, governed teleologically by divine reason that seemed to the philosophers to be intelligibility itself. This was the birth of what Pascal called the God of the Philosophers, in order to distinguish it from the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. That this god had not created the world from nothing and would not, therefore, destroy it again, was for them a great advantage, making a science of the cosmos possible. That the god should not be a person, was for them no counterargument, but indeed a pro-argument: against the backdrop of mythic Gods both personal and wicked, they preferred a monotheism of impersonality, intelligibility and goodness. Christian philosophy, in order to establish itself philosophically and theologically, took this Greek bait, and had in consequence to labor with a successor problem – the problem of how God in his omnipotence can be seen as a radical creator of the world, i.e. not just on the level of individual realization according to eternal patterns somehow independent of God, but also on the level of the possible.

With the condemnation of 1277, it was clear that God should now no longer be thought of as co-original with a world that was eternal. God was no longer to be thought of as the ultimate source of the world's intelligibility and goodness alone, but also as a radical omnipotent will, who created the world out of nothing. What was the consequence of this theological and philosophical marching order from the Roman Church? One thing, at least, seems clear: it led, as it were, to an experimental extension of the omnipotence of God, and it led in the end to a radical questioning of Western metaphysical thought, as that thought derived from the Greeks. In the Middle Ages, it led to a doctrine called nominalism, which questions Platonic or Aristotelian universal forms or essences, claiming that everything which is created is created immediately by God, through his omnipotent will. There are, in the final analysis, only God and individuals; the individuals are directly unto God – and thus we already seem close to Luther.

The Reformation, however, is not the main avenue towards modern thought in the Blumenbergian perspective. A part of Luther's thought, although not the decisive one, may be seen as moving in this direction. Luther claimed that if you really wanted to think God and not just believe in him, then you would end up as his enemy because, in fact, God demands things which you cannot possibly achieve, due to original sin. For how can you be on his side if he blames you for a sin he must have allowed to be possible, and which moreover was committed not by you as an individual, but by an individual he created long ago called Adam? This argument seems to gain dramatically in importance in a time obsessed by extending the implications of God's omnipotence, which surely must seem to allow for the possibility of his committing evil acts.

Now Luther, of course, chose nevertheless to believe – in a merciful God. Descartes, another believer, also wanted to build secure foundations of scientific knowledge. He starts his *Meditations* with a famous thought experiment: he introduces the notion of an evil spirit, supposedly omnipotent, in order to help himself doubt all his convictions and expose all sham foundations. He then shows that this spirit could not actually undermine his knowledge that he himself, as a thinking or conscious being, does exist – for if he doubted that, he could not doubt the existence of the doubt, but here was the proof that as a thinking, conscious, doubting being, he did exist. Alas, Descartes' triumph over omnipotence lasts only for a moment, for what he has proven is not, for instance, that he has a body, nor that the outer world exists, only that he exists as someone who thinks,

who is conscious. In order to prove that his body and the world exists, he has to prove that a good God exists, who does not want to deceive us – and thus Descartes reverts in part to earlier metaphysics.

Nevertheless, the story Blumenberg tells is the story of how modernity gradually arose as a human self-assertion against the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages – as a response to a challenge that indeed threw human beings into doubt, into crisis and despair. For did not the idea of an omnipotent God in fact threaten to unhinge the world, did it not threaten both moral and physical order? It was, according to him, against this threat that Descartes, starting from his thought experiment, built his inner castle called “consciousness”, a theater of representations that cannot be broken into by evil spirits – because some of these representations are evidently true, providing us with, he thought, the foundations for a methodical control of the world, even the outer world.

And yet Descartes remained committed to the idea of a radically omnipotent God. In fact, he believed in the doctrine of *creatio continua*, i.e. the doctrine that were it not for the fact that God in every moment confirmed the creation of the world – including the laws of mathematics and logic! – the world would literally fall into nothing. Since this means that God is at liberty to let the world – and even the laws of our thought! – fall at any time, God himself, for humans, seems to disappear into an inscrutable will. But how then could proofs of God’s existence, if possible, show that he is to be trusted and will allow the world to last? How could we even be able to think continually and correctly, in the inner castle?

As a Christian, of course, Descartes was committed to the view that God would destroy the world at some point. But how, in this view of God, can we trust him with good reason even for a second? One of Descartes’ ways of putting his argument for the existence of God is that he is so powerful that it is impossible to think that he does not exist. But does this not amount to a self-abdication of thinking, rather than a proof of God’s existence? Descartes calls God *souverainement bon*. But if his sovereignty is so radical, how are we to make sense of his goodness and trustworthiness? It was, by this Blumenbergian account, hard to philosophize at the beginning of modernity!

An important further step in the process of self-assertion was taken in Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy. Kant claimed to have shown that theoretical proofs of God’s existence are impossible. Despite thus having undermined the bridge Cartesian science relied on to advance from the inner to the outer world, he also claimed to have shown how science can make progress in the investigation of natural laws without recourse to such a proof.

Now to show that theoretical proofs of God’s existence are impossible was not, for Kant, to show that God’s existence itself was impossible. Indeed, he too thought God existed and was good. But he could not theoretically exclude the possibility that God existed and was capable of evil. As was the case with Descartes, then, Kant did not quite do away with the idea of an omnipotent, potentially evil God. Blumenberg⁵, however, is concerned with moral order, not physical order alone: he argues, one could perhaps say,

5 I refer especially to his early article, see footnote 3.

that for Kant, the fact that we cannot prove God's existence theoretically is not bad news at all; indeed it is decisively good news, morally decisive good news. We shall come back to this, after a brief survey of Kant's moral philosophy.

To Kant, humans are members of two realms: firstly, the realm of sense experience and natural science, which obeys the laws of Newtonian physics and displays a thorough-going determinism, and secondly, the intelligible realm, for which there is a moral law which, in relation to humans, takes the form of a Categorical Imperative. We have an unconditional duty to always act according to rules of action that are universalizable, rules that can be turned into universal laws for all creatures endowed with reason. If you want to lie in order to gain an advantage, you must generalize your rule into a command for all; but if you do that, the result will be that people will no longer trust each other and thus will not believe your lie, which shows that if you want to lie successfully, then you have to think of your lie as an exception, from the moral order. This, then, finally shows that your wish to lie is immoral, since you cannot allow all others to share the advantages a lie might give you, but act as a free rider on the moral order, immorally.

Now, for Kant, the two realms interact, for of course the moral law is supposed to make a difference in the world of sense experience. But how is this possible if that world is deterministic through and through? For Kant, an Ought famously implies a Can, or in other words: in order for us to be able to follow the Categorical Imperative and act from universalizable rules of action, there has to be a will that freely chooses to do so, but which could have chosen and effectively acted otherwise. Kant tries to show, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, how a thorough-going determinism of the sensible realm is compatible, nevertheless, with an account of our actions as also being based on a free will, not just on laws of nature. It is his opinion that such a free will can be either good or bad – a bad will being that will which wills precisely such rules of action that cannot be universalized, and which thus wants to pervert the order of the moral law.

According to Kant, theoretical reason shows us a nature that is deterministic; practical reason shows us a moral law which we ought to obey, but obey freely. Practical reason rejects the perversity of a free will turned against the moral law – the perversity of an evil heart of reason, as it were, a heart using reason against its practical purpose: the conservation of the moral law. But for practical reason to be possible, such an evil perversion of its purpose must also be possible, the moral law is not deterministic in a theoretical sense, but allows for the possibility of the choice of evil.

Kant insists upon the notion of autonomy which is found in the moral law – a kind of freedom that is above ideals of *Übermensch* sovereignty. It is the freedom to give oneself the law which one realizes one ought to obey, conscious that one may of course sometimes succumb to the temptation to deviate from it, and that even the perversity of willingly chosen evil is somehow available. Kant uses his distinction between the intelligible and moral realm and the sensible, sensuous realm to explain our moral weakness. But the perversity of humans with an evil heart goes beyond such weakness: it is itself a product of reason – of a practical reason radically rejected. It is freedom turned

against moral autonomy, against the moral order of freedom that in fact makes human freedom possible.

What we see here, is in a way the return of the problem of the omnipotent God who may be evil, this time not in the realm of theoretical but of moral philosophy, and moreover in the shape of a human being. Now, human beings are after all finite beings, not omnipotent gods, however much some humans have striven towards omnipotence in limited earthly conditions. But how would it be if we could prove theoretically that there existed a God who was omnipotent and perhaps had an evil heart?

According to Kant, the consequence would be that practical reason and morality would be impossible. If God's terrible majesty were to be continually present before our eyes, most actions would be based on fear and none on moral duty, although, of course, we would obey God's will – we would be like marionettes, mechanical puppets, without the dignity of persons.⁶ We would lose sight of the intelligible realm of the moral law and its freedom, acting like Pavlovian dogs. For Kant, the dignity of man is linked directly to our ability to reason practically, to understand and to follow the Categorical Imperative out of good will. But if an omnipotent God were to present himself to us, having passed the theoretical proof of necessary existence, this moral law would disappear and be supplanted by a regime of fear and conditioning. Nor would evil hearts acting against the moral order be possible, of course. God's obedient slaves would be the only ones left. But we cannot prove the existence of such a God theoretically, says Kant, and thank God for that!

Now what kind of progress in the process of human self-assertion against theological absolutism does this represent? Should we talk of a god well lost? In a way that is what Kant is saying, for he chooses to regard the reason to which human beings have access, as the condition that makes liberty possible, even for God. God exists and is also good, thinks Kant, but his goodness is not the sovereign goodness of an inscrutable will, it is the goodness of the will motivated by the moral law of practical reason.

The existence of God is a matter of belief for Kant, not theoretical proof: this much, and more, he shares with Luther. But in addition, the existence of God, including his omnipotence, is a postulate of practical reason. In the world of finite human beings, morality may often seem a meaningless game: immoral people may live happily, whereas moral people may be unhappy, their good conscience notwithstanding. For Kant, the belief in an omnipotent God, together with the belief in an immortal soul, provides the comfort that, in the long run, this twisted moral world can be turned around and morality be rewarded.

Not that we can know how he will reward us, of course; and, if we could, this would just tempt us to wag our tails while we act to please him in order to make us happy, whereas the famous criterion of morality in Kant is to follow the moral law out of good will, even when this is in conflict with our pursuit of happiness. Kant is no enemy of happiness, he

6 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, A 265

even thinks it a duty to further the happiness of others, albeit without paternalism. But we should be moral in order to be *worthy* of happiness, he thinks; happiness cannot be the direct goal of humanity, and its pursuit is in any case, an empirical fact about ourselves.

The omnipotence of God, then, is the guarantee for the justice behind morality – he is morality itself, including the power to make morality meaningful, though we cannot know how he will reward us, but only rationally believe in it. The worship of God is, for Kant, really the worship of morality as a goal in itself, and any worship that goes beyond living according to the moral law, such as going to church, taking part in sacraments, belief in wonders, he mistrusts as superstitious ways of trying to please and manipulate a god one basically fears. In other words: the religion that wants to go beyond “the limits of reason alone” is, according to Kant, a religion and a god well lost, lost through human self-assertion, as Blumenberg would say.

We are here, to be sure, not simply witnessing the return of the impersonal god of the ancient philosophers, at the expense of the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The religion Kant wants to reconstruct within the limits of reason alone, is indeed the Christian religion. The religion of Jesus becomes the precursor of the Kantian religion of practical reason. Carl Schmitt commented scornfully on this – from a strong theocentric perspective, with perhaps unacknowledged Nietzschean overtones – when he said: God is here the parasite of ethics.⁷ But one should give Kant his due. Thus Habermas interprets God’s creation of man in his image as saying that all humans are equally endowed with a dignity that must be unconditionally respected.⁸ “Unconditional respect” recalls Kant’s idea that all humans should be treated as ends in themselves and as autonomous, not as mere means. We have here a reception of genuine Christian content through philosophy according to Habermas, and Kantian moral philosophy is central in this connection, emphasizing as it does both human autonomy and the solidarity between humans that moral reason requires.⁹ Kant, then, clearly gives us an example of how religion has contributed to what Habermas calls “The Genealogy of Reason”¹⁰ – a large topic I cannot go into here.

Nevertheless, if – as quoted above – the post-metaphysical thought of Habermas “refrains from the rationalist presumption that it can itself decide what part of the religious doctrines is rational and what part irrational”, then Kant’s programme of a religion within the limits of reason alone is also a clear case of what Habermas wants to part with. Perhaps we can say that Kant, though in part he does indeed “circle the opaque core” of religious experience, in the end closes himself off from this core. Habermas, on the other hand, though he does not consider it a task of philosophy to

7 Carl Schmitt, “Das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitisierungen,” in his *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin 1963: Duncker & Humblot, p. 63

8 See Habermas 2005 and 2006, *op. cit.*, ch. 4, German ed. p. 115f

9 Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 4, German ed. p.115f. See also Habermas’s subtle reconstruction of Kant’s philosophy of religion and its relation to Christianity in Ch. 8 of that book, especially section 5, German ed. p. 234.

10 See Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 5, section 6, German edition p. 147 and p.150

penetrate the core, still wants epistemic openness. What does this mean? I approach this question by presenting an alternative interpretation of the genesis of modern thought to that of Blumenberg, the covenantal interpretation, represented by authors such as Francis Oakley, William Courtenay and Heiko Oberman¹¹

This account interprets medieval nominalism as taking the reflection on the omnipotence of God one step further, with a paradoxical, yet benign effect. Recall Descartes' idea that God recreates the world, including the laws of thought, anew, at every moment, through his inscrutable will – or else the world falls into nothing. Can the idea of omnipotence be taken further than this? The nominalists might have responded that Descartes portrays God as someone within time, as subject to time's atomistic division into ever new moments. Since, however, God is not enslaved by time, but through his omnipotence reaches beyond space and time, the Cartesian picture is one-sided. Not that God for the nominalists is not able to change everything, if he so pleases. But they saw God both as absolutely powerful in this sense (*potentia absoluta*), and also as a loving God who had, beyond time, laid down an eternal law which humans could hold on to (*potentia absoluta*.) And they saw him as one being in these two different respects – his almighty freedom was an expression of order, they thought.¹²

But how could this be possible? The nominalist answer was: possible it is, for God, but not, in all respects, thinkable, for humans. They were in agreement with Descartes that God's omnipotence was something beyond the power of human thinking, but for this reason they did not try to use the notion of omnipotence in a proof of his existence. The nominalists took seriously the finite status of natural human reason: William of Ockham, for instance, did not mean to touch God with his famous principle that thinking should operate as economically as possible (Ockham's "Razor.") God's freedom is infinite and bountiful, he thought, and no science should try to legislate on topics only God can speak of. God, as the absolute necessary being, has, nevertheless, in his absolute freedom chosen to love us, who are not necessary, but contingent beings, and no human science should go beyond its limits. The result of this would only be to limit God's freedom, or to break with faith and declare his freedom to be arbitrary and perhaps evil.

In this way the nominalists got around the notion that God might be like those tyrants who change their mind every other second (in T.S. Eliot's striking words: "In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse"), whether it be out of cruelty or nervousness or both – tyrants who may seem almighty, but in fact display not just power, but also loss of power, even possible self-destruction.

11 Francis Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order*, Ithaca and London 1984: Cornell University Press, provides an excellent, well-balanced introduction and overview

12 Oakley explains Descartes' picture of God as a result of his tendency to collapse the nominalist distinction between God's absolute and his ordained power – an important analytical distinction for a more technical presentation of the argument, which I just barely indicate in the text. See Oakley, *op. cit.*, p. 89, also 87 and 147f.

The nominalist God is no a tyrant: he creates human beings directly unto himself as individuals, and though he can change everything, he has in fact condescended to a covenant of solidarity with us, every single one of us, directly unto him, he has not just subjected us to a mediating clergy. This, at any rate, is the long-term consequence the interpretation aims to cover: ¹³ we can speak of a covenantal account of how the modern individualist moral order arose from medieval divine omnipotence – not in a self-assertive opposition to it, as in Blumenberg. The experimental extension of God’s omnipotence ended, as it were, in God’s giving birth to the modern world, with its individualism, its freedom and its dream of a universal brother– and sisterhood.

What is the relevance of this interpretation of nominalism for understanding Habermas’ post-metaphysical philosophy of religion in “post-secular society”? Habermas seems, as mentioned, to question the contemporary relevance of the Blumenbergian argument when he claims that “the offensive self-assertion” of an anthropocentric understanding of the self and the world against a theocentric one, is a battle from yesterday in the European West. We have taken him as thinking that Kant in the end closes himself off from the opaque core of religious experience. We have now seen a theocentric account of the genesis of modernity which does no such thing. Is this account compatible with Kant’s religion of practical reason, with its emphasis on individual freedom on the one hand, and solidarity on the other?

I think so. The interpretation demands no theoretical proof of God’s existence – on the contrary, it emphasizes the theoretical inaccessibility of God to finite human beings. Kant chose himself to regard divine mercy and moral autonomy as compatible,¹⁴ and if Carl Schmitt regarded Kant’s God as a parasite of ethics, then this reveals more about the enmity towards individual freedom in his theocentrism than it reveals about a possible atheism in Kant. As Habermas emphasizes, Kant wanted to strengthen modernity against the possible moral defeatism of enlightened disbelief, and to this end he tried to save a rational core of religion – the religion of practical reason.

Now Habermas, though his view of philosophy is agnostic, has certainly worked in this Kantian tradition. His work in that tradition is a central part of his theory of modernity – a theory which, though critical, certainly also defends what he calls the project of modernity. When he speaks of “post-secular society”, then this is an attempt at defending the modern project against the danger of its own secularist derailment.¹⁵

Secularism in the sense criticized by Habermas, is the belief that religion is dying out in our societies, precisely under conditions of religious freedom. It is often based on a counter-religion derived from science, a view which may also be directed against the idea of moral autonomy. Against this, one may defend the Kantian religion of

13 See Francis Oakley: “Legitimation by Consent: The Question of the Medieval Roots”, *Viator*, Vol. 14, 1983, esp. p. 327

14 See, on this problematic point, Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, German ed. p. 221ff, and Blumenberg’s early article, referred to in footnote 3

15 See Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 4, German ed. p. 106

practical reason. Secularism may, however, also be based on the kind of rigorist rejection of traditional religious belief that I described above in Kant. To the extent that religious beliefs are seen only as “relics of an archaic world that continue to exist in the present”, the meaning of the freedom of religion changes: it turns into “the cultural version of the conservation of a species in danger of becoming extinct.”¹⁶

Against such beliefs – for beliefs or convictions they are, however much one may try to base them on rational arguments – Habermas argues for a post-metaphysical philosophy which “circles the opaque core of religious experience when reflecting on the intrinsic meaning of faith.” How is this possible?

My presentation above of the covenantal interpretation of the genesis of modernity, was not meant as a direct contribution to answering this question. But perhaps it may help explain why Habermas, the agnostic, seems to have chosen Søren Kierkegaard as the most important thinker in this post-metaphysical turn, at least with respect to the topic of religion in its relation to morality. The transformation of a possibly evil omnipotent God into a God that from eternity has chosen an order human beings can hold on to, the transformation of God from a possible tyrant to a reliably loving being, who then also becomes an individual human being like the rest of us, and yet remains God: this paradoxical perspective, which eludes our finite understanding, was also Kierkegaard’s topic. He protested against the Hegelian attempt to unfold and penetrate the paradox in a metaphysical logic of absolute knowledge. Habermas, though sympathetic towards much in Hegel, agrees with Kierkegaard here, when he says that Hegel ends in the fatalism of a spirit that circles in itself – a notion that recalls the impersonal Aristotelian God.¹⁷

Kierkegaard’s concern was with the individual, *Hiin enkelte*. He wants the paradox to remain a paradox, but thinks that whereas all finite power makes dependent, the omnipotent God is able to create a being that is independent of himself, despite being the most fragile being of all.¹⁸ If the omnipotent God can suffer, fragile humans can become autonomous, on condition that they learn – through suffering, despair, *fortvivelse*, through “sickness unto death” – to understand such autonomy not as narrow-minded self-empowerment, but as dependent on the personal power that founds this autonomy.¹⁹

Of course, to speak this way is, from Habermas’s agnostic perspective, to delve into the opaque core of religious experience. But though he thinks that philosophy cannot do that, he thinks that circling this opaque core is important in preventing the offensive self-assertion of reason from turning into a narrow-minded self-empowerment. He thinks that Kantian type moral theories have been successful in explaining how moral norms are to be justified and applied, but that they have failed with respect to the underlying question: why be moral

16 Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 5, section 5, German ed. p. 145

17 See Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op.cit.*, ch. 7, section 7, German ed. p. 239

18 See Klaus M. Kodalle, *Die Eroberung des Nutzlosen. Kritik des Wunschenkens und der Zweckrationalität im Anschluss an Kierkegaard*, Paderborn 1988: Schöningh, p. 98f. This book tries, among other things, to use Kierkegaard against Blumenberg.

19 See Habermas, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur*, Frankfurt 2002, erw. Auflage, pp. 9-33, for the expression “bornierte Selbstermächtigung” see p. 25

at all? And here is where Kierkegaard's *Hiin Enkelte* takes us a step further, according to Habermas – *Hiin Enkelte* who, through the process of despair, learns not to pursue omnipotence, but to take responsibility for a finite life lived under conditions one cannot be in control of.²⁰

As an agnostic Habermas does not, of course, think that such a development needs to end in Kierkegaard's religious manner. But though he thinks the danger of omnipotence can also be transcended in a purely secular way, he warns against closing one's epistemic sensibility to the rich stories that have often gone beyond such purely secular limits. He cites other concepts (among them Marx' "alienation" and Benjamin's "anamnetic solidarity") which do not deny a religious origin, though they were used by non-believers.²¹ The insensibility towards the opaque core of religion, he thinks, may threaten the sources of solidarity so vital to our complex modern world.²² And I agree.

But I end this lecture with a critical question: why have you adopted the tendency to speak of a post-secular age, Mr. Habermas, just because you want to combat this tendency to close oneself to the opaque core of religions experience? You wish to battle the secularist counter-religion of scientist naturalism and anti-religious moral rigorism. That is certainly better suited to a hopefully more mature secular society such as ours, but why change its name to post-secular? Why distinguish between "modern" and "secular," despite the danger of narrow secularist self-empowerment?

You remained firm during the postmodern fashion, though of course you saw that much of what was presented as postmodern was integral to the project of modernity – which includes, among other things, an opaque core of aesthetic experience. The opaque core of aesthetic experience, as Karl Heinz Bohrer never tires of clarifying, also belongs to modernity, to a sphere of its own, with its own idiosyncratic *Eigensinn*.

So it is with religious experience, too. Its place within the genealogy of reason is more central than that of aesthetics, for it has to do with the most important sources of solidarity. But it is nevertheless the genealogy of the reason of *secular* society we are talking about – a more mature secular society, to be sure, with more openness towards the spheres of experience that may not so easily communicate themselves, and yet are so important, as art and religion indeed are.²³

20 See Habermas, *op.cit.*, esp. p. 15 and p. 25

21 See Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op. cit.*, ch. 8, section 11, German ed. p. 250

22 See, for instance, Habermas 2005 and 2007, *op.cit.*, ch. 5, section 4, German ed. p. 137

23 For an earlier article of mine on "Secular Society: An Attempt at Initiation", see Kari Vogt/Tore Lindholm: *Islamic Law Reform and Human Rights*, Nordic Human Rights Publications, Oslo-København-Lund-Åbo/Turku, 1993



Religion, Secularism, and Public Reason

Comments on Helge Høibraaten's lecture. Craig Calhoun, Professor of Sociology, University of New York

Note the problem of religion taken not in the confessional sense but in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct. But why call this unity of faith "religion" and not "ideology," or even frankly "politics"?

- Antonio Gramsci¹

Religion appears in liberal theory first and foremost as an occasion for tolerance and neutrality. This orientation is reinforced by both (a) the classification of religion as essentially a private matter, and (b) the view that religion is in some sense a "survival" from an earlier era - not a field of vital growth within modernity. In response to the failure of religion to disappear from the politics of even "advanced" democratic capitalist societies, liberal theorists have sometimes been moved to address religious identities and practices as matters deserving recognition. In his recent writings, Jürgen Habermas helpfully goes further, advancing discussion of religion as source and resource of democratic politics, from within a revised conception of liberalism.

Habermas proceeds, as always, carefully and methodically, but it seems on this occasion with some additional caution and uncertainty about just how far he wants to go. Religion, after all, appears prominently in contemporary politics in the form of strikingly illiberal views and positions, and in a package with practices Habermas can hardly condone. It also appears in more positive and even heroic forms, of course, not least as part of movements for peace, civil and human rights, and equitable development. But Habermas recognizes that the theoretical challenge requires not just accepting "nice" versions of religion, but precisely determining in what way religious positions with which secular liberals may disagree vehemently should carry weight.

In the present paper, I discuss two dimensions of these issues: First, in more detail, the question of what it means to speak of a "post-secular" society or era and what this has to do with the relationship of faith and culture to public reason. Second, but only briefly, the question of what brings order and unity to the world – what makes it the cosmos of a potential cosmopolitanism – and more locally what establishes sufficient solidarity for support of practices of public reason.

At the conference on the occasion of Jürgen Habermas's Holberg Prize, as in a number of other contexts, the question of what it means to refer to a "post-secular" era was the

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International and London: Lawrence & Wishart, Ltd., 1971), p. 326.

subject of debate. Helge Høibraaten reflected the concerns of many when he asked whether the prefix “post” wasn’t misleading. Just as the ostensibly “postmodern” reflected cross-currents intrinsic to modernity, wasn’t this true also of the “post-secular”?²

We could come at this historically as well as philosophically, noting the dramatic role played by religion – and periodic movements of religious revitalization – throughout the modern era. It is significant not just that Americans remain more religious than Europeans in recent decades, thus, but also that the United States has seen successive waves of Great Awakenings, each transforming not only religious but also apparently secular life. And while the contrast with Europe is not new, having informed both Tocqueville and Weber after their travels in the US, it is also not complete. For the Protestant Reformation was not the last time religion mattered in Europe. We should remember the anti-slavery movement and the influence of especially low-church Protestant religions on a range of other late 18th century and early 19th century social movements, including those also shaped by democratic and class politics.³ We should not neglect the mid-19th century renewal of spiritualism, even if much of it was outside religious orthodoxy, and we should not lose sight of its fluid relationships with Romanticism, utopian socialism, and humanitarianism.⁴ We should see religious internationalism both under the problematic structure of colonial and postcolonial missionary work and in the engagements shaped by Vatican II, the peace movement, and liberation theology. We should recognize, as Habermas does, the importance of religious motivations and understandings (and indeed organizational networks and practices) in a range of social movements during the 20th century, in Europe as well as America, and around the world.⁵ And of course we should recognize the growing importance of religion in Europe – largely occasioned by but not limited to Muslim immigration.

What has passed, I think Habermas means to suggest, is not a simple condition of secularity nor even a secularizing trend but (a) the plausibility of the assumption that progress (and freedom, emancipation, and liberation) could be conceptualized

2 See Høibraaten, “Post-metaphysical thought, religion, and secular society,” in this volume

3 See for example E.P. Thompson’s classic account of Methodist influence on early workers’ mobilizations in *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968; rev. ed.). And see Michael Young’s more recent account of the centrality of religion in the era of the Second Great Awakening to the development not just of specific movements – notably against slavery – but to the very form of a national social movement (*Bearing Witness against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

4 The shaping of humanitarianism by Christian religious engagements is emblematic of the extent to which a new concern for certain aspects of the “secular” – life in this world – grew within religious contexts at least as much as outside of them in some “secular humanism”. Both Florence Nightingale and Henri Dunant, the principal advocates for the founding of the Red Cross, were moved by Christian commitments.

5 And in this regard, we should recognize the extent to which the story of secularization is not simply the story of a decline in religion, but rather of growing religious engagements with projects of transforming “this-worldly” life. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

adequately in purely secular terms and (b) the plausibility of the notion that a clear differentiation could be maintained between discourses of faith and those of public reason. Note that the assumption and the notion have never seemed plausible to everyone; they shaped secular perspectives more than those of religious people though they did shape the discourse and views of both. In any case, loss of certain on these dimensions is challenging, most especially for liberalism.

As Habermas rightly notes, the very ideas of freedom, emancipation, and liberation developed in largely religious discourses in Europe and this continues to inform their meaning. This genealogy is not simply a matter of dead ancestry; the living meaning of words and concepts draws both semantic content and inspiration from religious sources.⁶ The word "inspiration" is a good example, and reminds us that what is at stake is broader than the narrowest meanings of politics and ethics and necessarily includes conceptions of the person that make meaningful different discourses of freedom, action, and possibility – and that shape motivation as well as meaning.⁷ What is at stake is also broader than measures of participation in formally organized religion, since a variety of 'spiritual' engagements inform self-understanding and both ethical and moral reasoning.

Religion, moreover, is part of the genealogy of public reason itself. To attempt to disengage the idea of public reason (or the reality of the public sphere) from religion is to disconnect it from a tradition that continues to give it life and content. Habermas stresses the importance of not depriving public reason of the resources of a tradition that has not exhausted the semantic contributions it can make. Equally, though, the attempt to make an overly sharp division between religion and public reason provides important impetus to the development of alternative or counterpublic spheres as well as less public and less reasoned forms of resistance to a political order that seeks to hold religion at arm's length.

This issue is significant for Habermas's reconsideration of the extent to which prevailing secularist assumptions are adequate for the current era. Not only is there value for public reason to gain if it integrates religious contributions, it is a requirement of political justice that public discourse recognize and tolerate but also fully integrate religious citizens. It is with this in mind that he rejects Rawls's formulations in which public reason requires arguments conducted entirely in secular terms. Rawls's reasoning is that this is necessary in order to ensure that all arguments are accessible to everyone. Religious people, in this view, must give reasons for their arguments that are not specifically religious and fully available for acceptance by those who are not religious. But this, Habermas rightly suggests, places an unfair and asymmetrical burden on religious citizens.

6 As Mendieta has suggested in his introduction to *Reason and Rationality*, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and others in the Frankfurt School tradition were deeply engaged in recovering both content and inspiration from religion, including both Jewish traditions and the intertwining of Christian theology and German idealism

7 This is an important theme of Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989)

Official tolerance for diverse forms of religious practice and a constitutional separation of church and state are good, Habermas suggests, but not by themselves sufficient guarantees for religious freedom. "It is not enough to rely on the condescending benevolence of a secularized authority that comes to tolerate minorities hitherto discriminated against. The parties themselves must reach agreement on the always contested delimitations between a positive liberty to practice a religion of one's own. And the negative liberty to remain spared of the religious practices of others" (5).⁸ This agreement cannot be achieved in private. Religion, thus, must enter the public sphere. There deliberative, ideally democratic processes of collective will formation can help parties both to understand each other and to reach mutual accommodation if not always agreement.

Rawls's account of the public use of reason allows for religiously motivated arguments, but not for the appeal to "comprehensive" religious doctrines for justification. Justification must rely solely on "proper political reasons" (which means mainly reasons that are available to everyone regardless of the specific commitments they may have to religion or substantive conceptions of the good or their embeddedness in cultural traditions). This is, as Habermas indicates, an importantly restrictive account of the legitimate public use of reason – one which will strike many as not truly admitting religion into public discourse (6). Crucially, Habermas follows Wolterstorff in arguing that it is in the nature of religion that serious belief is understood as informing – and rightly informing – all of a believer's life. This makes sorting out the "properly political" from other reasons both practically impossible in many cases and an illegitimate demand for secularists to impose. Attempting to enforce it would amount to discriminating against those for whom religion is not "something other than their social and political existence" (9). On more ambiguous grounds, Habermas does hold it acceptable to demand "properly political" justifications, independent of religion, from politicians even if not from those who vote for or endorse them.⁹

8 Page numbers refer to the circulated draft of "Religion in the public sphere"

9 Habermas seeks here to defend a distinction between the greater impartiality required of the liberal state, and the lesser requirements (more "reflexivity" than impartiality) required of citizens in the public sphere of civil society. The ambiguity has partly to do with whether "politicians" are part of the state or of civil society. Here national traditions vary, and so do occasions – as one may hold politicians sitting as legislators to different standards from those appropriate to elections. But Habermas seems clear that state institutions from courts through administrative bodies to the legislature must filter out directly religious contributions from the political public sphere, admitting only those that can be translated into "properly political" secular language open to everyone regardless of religious belief or disbelief. Standing rules of parliamentary procedure, for example, "must empower the house leader to have religious statements or justifications expunged from the minutes" (12). Whether this is a necessary requirement or an attempted universalization of a more contingent European *laïcité* could be debated. In any case, Habermas disagrees with Weithman, Wolterstorff and others who would admit "untranslated" religious reasons into state discourse and decision-making (13).

Habermas seeks to defend a less narrow liberalism, one that admits religion more fully into public discourse (including both democratic will formation and the rule of law) but seeks to maintain a secular conception of the state. He understands this as requiring impartiality in state relations to those of any religious orientation or none and to all religious communities, but not as requiring the stronger *laïc* prohibition on state action affecting religion even if impartially. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that the liberal state and its advocates are not merely enjoined to religious tolerance but – at least potentially – cognizant of a functional interest in public expressions of religion. These may be key resources for the creation of meaning and identity; secular citizens can learn from religious contributions to public discourse (not least when these help clarify intuitions the secular have not made explicit).

In this “polyphonic complexity of public voices” the giving of reasons is still crucial. Public reason cannot proceed simply by expressive communication or demands for recognition, though the public sphere cannot be adequately inclusive if it tries to exclude these. The public sphere will necessarily include processes of culture-making that are not reducible to advances in reason, and which nonetheless may be crucial to capacities for mutual understanding.¹⁰ But if collective will formation is to be based on reason, not merely participation in common culture, then public processes of clarifying arguments and giving reasons for positions must be central. Religious people like all others are reasonably to be called on to give a full account of their reasons for public claims. But articulating reasons clearly is not the same as offering only reasons that can be stated in terms fully “accessible” to the nonreligious.¹¹ Conversely, though the secular (or differently religious) may be called on to participate in the effort to understand the reasons given by adherents to any one religion, such understanding may include recognition and clarification of points where orientations to knowledge are such that understanding cannot be fully mutual. And the same goes in reverse. Since secular reasons are also embedded in culture and belief and not simply matters of fact or reason alone, those who speak from non-religious orientations are reasonably called on to clarify to what extent their arguments demand such non-religious orientations or may be reasonably accessible to those who do not share them.

10 As Habermas recognizes, there is a question about whether these should be called processes of “learning”. On the one hand, they involve historically produced new capacities. On the other hand, it is not clear that there exists an abstract standard by which these can be assessed as the acquisition of “truths”. This issue is intertwined with the question of whether modern science is “a practice that is completely understandable in its own terms, establishing the measure of all truths and falsehoods? Or should modern science rather be construed as resulting from a history of reason that includes the world religions?” (22). See also Thomas Schmidt, “The Discourse of Religion in Post-Secular Society,” in this volume.

11 See Schmidt’s discussion of the role of philosophy of religion (in “Reasonable Pluralism – Justified Beliefs: Religious Faith in a Pluralist Society,” unpublished ms) – though note that expectations for philosophy of religion must be different from expectations for the everyday discourse of civil society, even the public sphere of civil society at its most articulate.

Indeed, one could argue that a sharp division between secular and religious beliefs is available only to the secular. While the religious person may accept many beliefs that others regard as adequately grounded in secular reasons alone – about the physical or biological world, for example – she may see these as inherently bound up with a belief in divine creation. She may also regard certain beliefs as inherently outside religion, but even if she uses the word “secular” to describe these, the meaning is at least in part “irreligious” (a reference to a different, non-religious way of seeing things and not simply to things ostensibly “self-sufficient” outside religion or divine influence). It is necessary to demand that the religious person consider her own faith reflexively, see it from the point of view of others, and relate it to secular views. Though this amounts to demanding a cognitive capacity that not all religious people have, it is not one intrinsically contrary to religion and equivalent demands are placed on all citizens by the ethics of public discourse. What the liberal state must not do is “transform the requisite *institutional* separation of religion and politics into an undue *mental* and *psychological* burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith” (10). And with this in mind, Habermas also suggests that the non-religious bear a symmetrical burden to participate in the translation of religious contributions to the political public sphere into “properly political” secular terms – that is, they must seek to understand what is being said on in religious terms and determine to what extent they can understand it (and potentially agree with it) on their own non-religious terms. In this way, they will help to make ideas, norms, and insights deriving from religious sources accessible to all, and to the more rigorously secular internal discursive processes of the state itself.

This line of argument pushes against a distinction Habermas has long wanted to maintain between morality and ethics, between procedural commitments to justice and engagements with more particular conceptions of the good life.

*We make a moral use of practical reason when we ask what is equally good for everyone; we make an ethical use when we ask what is respectively good for me or for us. Questions of justice permit under the moral viewpoint what all could will: answers that in principle are universally valid. Ethical questions, on the other hand, can be rationally clarified only in the context of a specific life-history or a particular form of life. For these questions are perspectively focused on the individual or on a specific collective who want to know who they are and, at the same time, who they want to be.*¹²

Habermas does not abandon the pursuit of a context-independent approach to the norms of justice. But he does now recognize that demanding decontextualization away from substantive conceptions of the good life as a condition for participation in the processes of public reason may itself be unjust.

12 “Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World,” in *Rationality and Religion: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). The distinction is developed in many works and examined in detail in *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

In fact, the notion of religion as somehow private has informed the modern era in a host of ways, mostly misleading but also constitutive of social practices and understandings. It is not that religion simply was in every sense private. On the contrary, from the Social Gospel to Vatican II and Liberation Theology, as well as in more conservative forms it was recurrently part of both national and international public life. The distinction is not that of personal piety from more outward forms of religious practice, though this has been a significant distinction. Indeed, established churches have suffered some of the greatest declines in religious adherence. Religion has flourished most where it has felt like a personal commitment, but this has not meant that it had no public implications. Rather, the 'privacy' of religion has been bound up with (a) the notion that religious convictions were to be treated as matters of implicitly personal faith rather than publicly authoritative reason, and (b) the idea of a separation from the state (which was as much a demand for states not to interfere as for particular religious views not to dominate states). In the former sense religious freedom could be recognized as a right, but it was implicitly always a right to be wrong or to have a peculiar taste, and thus not to have matters of faith arbitrated by the court of public opinion. In the latter sense, religion was private in something of the same sense that property was private: it could be socially organized on a large scale, but was still seen as a matter of individual right and in principle separate from affairs of state.

The Peace of Westphalia, for example, established a framework for seeing sovereignty as secular and religion as private (or essentially domestic) with regard to the relations among sovereigns. Bringing a series of partially religious wars to an end, it helped in 1648 to usher in an era of mostly secular nationalism and building of modern states, as well as the very idea of international relations. The academic discipline of international relations, not least as it recast itself after World War II, incorporated this secularist assumption about states and their interests into its dominant intellectual paradigms. It requires a considerable effort today for international relations specialists to think of secularism as a substantive position on states rather than virtually a defining feature of states, as a "something" rather than an "absence". This issue is more widespread, for in general religion is seen as a presence, and secularism is casually understood as its absence. But of course secularisms are themselves intellectual and ideological constructs and traditions. They differ with different political histories – and also with different juxtapositions to religious claims on and in the public sphere. China is secular in a different sense from India and each from France. Attempts to suppress or at least manage religion, to treat different religions equitably, and to ignore religion are different secularist projects – they are not merely secular. And of course there are more variations on this theme – states that fund multiple religions, states that grant all religions special privileges, states with established official religions that nonetheless demarcate substantial secular spheres within which religious claims or institutions are expected not to intrude.

Throughout the so-called Westphalian era, religious actors and religious fields of discourse have played important public roles.¹³ Religion has never been essentially private.

13 See, perhaps most notably on this, José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Rather, the Westphalian frame of discourse constructed a particular misrecognition of the way religion figured (or didn't) in public life. And if the Westphalian frame did this for international affairs, others did it domestically. Habermas's own account of the public sphere and its transformations, for example, pays almost no attention to religion.¹⁴ The error here is not simply Habermas's own, but rather his participation in reproducing and extending an Enlightenment tradition of imagining religion outside the frame of the public sphere. This was tendentious, since empirically religion figured prominently in public life (though it was widely understood as fading). The Enlightenment theorists and many successors were not reporting on social reality so much as seeking to construct a reality in which religion would be outside the frame of the public sphere. Kant's effort to reconstruct religion "within the limits of reason alone" was of course a challenge to the lived orientations of many religious people. If it respected a certain core of faith – "the *Eigensinn* of religion" – it did so only by excluding it from the realm of reason (and thus by implication of the public sphere). Faith became available only on the basis of leaps beyond reason – as Kierkegaard recognized.

Kierkegaard figures importantly in Habermas's thinking about religion and postsecularism. Indeed, it is perhaps precisely in this sense that we should understand the idea of the post-secular: it refers (a) to the reclaiming of religion as faith without rejecting the claims of reason (as by Kierkegaard) and (b) to the recognition of the misrecognition secularism of the Westphalian sort must have of itself, both (i) in terms of historical accuracy since it presumes a containment of religion in the private that has not been achieved and (ii) in terms of justice since it assumes the restriction of religion to the private realm to be accomplishable on universalistic criteria.

But though Kierkegaard is important, we should not presume that Habermas intends an existentialist resolution to dilemmas about the relationship of faith to reason.¹⁵ In particular, I think we must assume that Habermas could not accept existentialism's presentism. Rather than an anti-historical appropriation of faith and action as such, Habermas wants to find a way to incorporate insights historically bound up with faith (and religious traditions) into the genealogy of religion. He clearly sees faith as a source

14 This leads to misleading history as well as theory, as for example the vibrant public sphere of 17th century England doesn't figure in Habermas's account of the genesis of the late 18th century golden age of the public sphere. See David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) and "Religion, Science, and Printing" pp. 259-288 in C. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). It is worth noting that these examples reveal the extent to which it is not just religious ideas, matters of content, that figure in the genealogy of public reason but also religious practices and experiences. Reformation-era debates were part of the genesis of a rational-critical form of public reason, and throughout the time since, it was often in religious contexts that people learned to speak in public, and even to participate in reciprocal reason-giving (even if the reasons in question – like Bible quotations – are not ones that secular rationalists find persuasive).

15 See also the discussion in Høibraaten's contribution to this volume, "Post-metaphysical thought, religion, and secular society"

of hope, both in the sense of Kant's practical postulate that God must exist and in the sense that it can help to overcome the narrowness of a scientific rationalism always at risk of bias in favor of instrumental over communicative reason. He is prepared also to recognize that reason is not entirely self-founding, especially in the sense that it does not supply the contents of conceptions of the good on its own, but also in the sense that the historical shaping of its capacity includes religious influences that cannot be accounted for "within the bounds of reason alone". How far this should extend to intuitions and inspirations in a more contemporary sense is unclear, but the question is at least opened.

But a further couplet of questions is also opened which may prove challenging for efforts to preserve a strong understanding of (and wide scope for) context-independence and universality in moral reasoning. First, is a genealogical or language-theoretical reconstruction of reason adequate without an existential connection between social and cultural history on the one hand and individual biography on the other? Second, is "translation" an adequate conceptualization of what is involved in making religious insights accessible to nonreligious participants in public discourse (and vice-versa)?

The two questions are closely related, for the issue is how communication is achieved across lines of deep difference. Helpful as translation may be, it is not the whole story. Transformation is also necessary. Translation implies that differences between languages can be overcome without interference from deeper differences between cultures, or indeed from incommensurabilities of languages themselves. It implies a highly cognitive model of understanding, independent of inarticulate connections among meanings or the production of meaning in action rather than passive contemplation. But the idea of translating religious arguments into terms accessible to secular fellow-citizens is more complicated. To be sure, restricting attention to argumentative speech reduces the extent of problems because arguments are already understood to be a restricted set of speech acts and are more likely to be commensurable than some others. But the meaning of arguments may be more or less embedded in broader cultural understandings, personal experiences and practices of argumentation that themselves have somewhat different standing in different domains. (To "translate" a classic religious argument for the existence of God—e.g., one of Aquinas's attempts to transform faith into knowledge—into secular terms as a demonstration of God's existence for unbelievers might be informative, but it could not reproduce the meaning of the original argumentative project.)

Bridging the kinds of hermeneutic distance suggested by the notion of having deeply religious and nonreligious arguments commingle in the public sphere cannot be accomplished by translation alone. Perhaps translation is not meant literally, but only as a metaphor for the activity of becoming able to understand the arguments of another – but that is already an important distinction. We are indeed more able to understand the arguments of others when we understand more of their intellectual and personal commitments and cultural frames ("where they are coming from" in popular parlance). But where really basic issues are at stake, it is often the case that mutual understanding cannot be achieved without change in one or both of the parties. By participating in

relationships with each other, including by pursuing rational mutual understanding, we open ourselves to becoming somewhat different people. The same goes at collective levels: mutual engagement across national or cultural or religious frontiers changes the pre-existing nations, cultures, and religions, and future improvements in mutual understanding stem from this change as well as from “translation”. Sectarian differences among Protestants or between Protestants and Catholics are thus not merely resolved in rational argumentation. Sometimes they fade without resolution because they simply don’t seem as important to either side. A shifting context and changed projects of active engagement in understanding and forming intellectual and normative commitments changes the significance of such arguments (as for example when committed Christians feel themselves more engaged in arguments with nonChristians and the irreligious—including arguments with those who believe secular understandings are altogether sufficient—than they are in arguments with each other). But a process of transformation in culture, belief, and self is also often involved. We become people able to understand each other.¹⁶

So Habermas is right, following Weithman and Wolterstorff, to insist that cooperative acts of translation are necessary to the full incorporation of religious citizens and arguments into the public sphere. But we also need to recognize that histories of mutual engagement that produce both common understandings and citizens able to understand each other are not simply matters of translation or advances of reason. They are also particular histories that forge particular cultural commonalities. National traditions are examples. The Peace of Westphalia did not issue in a world of nation-states and of course the hyphen in ‘nation-state’ masked a variety of failures to achieve effective fit between felt peoplehood and political power, legitimacy and sovereignty. Rather the Westphalian settlement informed a process of continuing history in which national projects wove together particular cultural commonalities and collective processes of mutual understanding. This was not entirely a matter of reason and it is by no means entirely a happy history (for the era marked by the Peace of Westphalia led by way of both empire and nationalism to world wars). But at least many of the national projects that flourished after 1648, especially in Western Europe, produced histories and cultures that both integrated citizens across lines of religious difference and provided for “secular” discourse about the common good (where secular means not merely the absence of religion but the capacity for effective discourse across lines of religious difference). It is thus an interesting juxtaposition that Habermas’s writings on a post-secular era should come on the heels of his considerations of a “postnational constellation”. One issue may be the contemporary inadequacy of older national

16 See discussion in Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), ch. 2. Such processes of historical transformation are not necessarily advances in reason; they are not necessarily symmetrical; and they are specific histories among multiple possible histories. While any of them may be judged positively, thus, they do not amount simply to progress or evolution. They may involve elements of unreason or arbitrariness in the genealogy of reason.

identities, traditions, and discursive frameworks to incorporating new religious discourses—and the need to forge new cultures of integration.¹⁷

Such cultures of integration are historically produced bases for the solidarity of citizens. Whether they can be construed in evolutionary terms as “advances” in truth or along some other dimension is uncertain. As Mendieta suggests, questions of religion crystallize the tension “between reason as a universal standard and the inescapable fact that reason is embodied only historically and in contingent social practices.”¹⁸ This bears on the nature of collective commitments to processes of public reason and the decisions they produce. The Rawlsian liberal model depends on a “reasonable background consensus” that can establish the terms and conditions of the properly political discourse. Wolterstorff doubts whether this exists.¹⁹ Habermas is more hopeful – and reason for hope seems strongest if what is required is only what Rawls called an “overlapping consensus” not a more universal agreement. This suggests, however, that what is required is a practical orientation rather than an agreement as to the truth. This is precisely Wolterstorff’s (and Habermas’s) concern: “that majority resolutions in an ideologically divided society can at best yield reluctant adaptations to a kind of *modus vivendi*”.²⁰ A utilitarian compromise – based on the expectation of doing better in the next majority vote – is an inadequate basis for continuing solidarity where there is not merely a disagreement over shares of commonly recognized goods, but over the very idea of the good. “Conflict on existential values between communities of faith cannot be solved by compromise”.²¹

This is of course a crucial reason why Habermas has held that we must separate substantive questions about the good life from procedural questions about just ways of ordering common life. I believe he retains the conviction that this separation is important and possible.²² It is intrinsic to his support for a “constitutional patriotism”.²³ But it is challenged by recognition that for religious citizens to give reasons in terms “accessible” to secular citizens may be unjustly difficult or even impossible. And it is challenged further if one agrees that religious faith but also specificities of cultural traditions may

17 See Calhoun, *Nations Matter* (London: Routledge, 2007) on the issue of cultures of integration, the reasons why older national solidarities continue to matter even while the production of new, potentially transcending patterns of integration is underway, and the reasons why transcending the older national solidarities is a matter of new but still historically specific solidarities not simply cosmopolitan universalism

18 P. 1 of the “Introduction” to Habermas, *Religion and Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002)

19 P. 160 in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997)

20 “Religion and the Public Sphere,” pp. 13-14

21 Ibid

22 For a relatively recent, nuanced, statement see “Norms and Values: On Hilary Putnam’s Kantian Pragmatism,” in: Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, Cambridge (MA) 2003 [1999]: MIT Press, pp. 213-235

23 See various essays in *The Inclusion of the Other*, ed. C. Cronin and P. De Greiff (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998)

make it difficult for citizens to render all that is publicly important to them in the form of criticizable validity claims.

Conflicts between world views and religious doctrines that lay claim to explaining man's position in the world as a whole cannot be laid to rest at the cognitive level. As soon as these cognitive dissonances penetrate as far as the foundations for a normative integration of citizens, the political community disintegrates into irreconcilable segments so that it can only survive on the basis of an unsteady modus vivendi. In the absence of the uniting bond of a civic solidarity, which cannot be legally enforced, citizens do not perceive themselves as free and equal participants in the shared practices of democratic opinion and will formation wherein they owe one another reasons for their political statements and attitudes. This reciprocity of expectations among citizens is what distinguishes a community integrated by constitutional values from a community segmented along the dividing lines of competing world views.²⁴

The basic question is whether or how much commonalities of belief are crucial to the integration of political communities. How important is it for citizens to believe in the truth of similar propositions "explaining man's position in the world"?

As Durkheim suggested by distinguishing mechanical from organic solidarity, communities are integrated in ways other than by shared values (constitutional or otherwise) and worldviews. But the Durkheimian binary is too simple. Habermas takes it over, to some extent, in the distinction of lifeworld from system.²⁵ In general (and rightly), he sees a mismatch between the scale of integration accomplished on the basis of systems of money and power without the communicative understanding of participants, and the capacities of the lifeworld to generate such integrative understandings. Insofar as communicative action in lifeworlds yields diverse substantive understandings (and projects) of the good life, it cannot yield the necessary integration on a large scale. But to the extent that communicative action may underwrite agreement on procedures it may generate a "mechanical" solidarity based on a common view of at least one aspect of the world. This is embodied in the project of constitutionalism, where constitutions are limited to procedural rather than substantive norms. As the phrase "constitutional patriotism" suggests, Habermas also hopes this will help to solve problems of motivation and commitment which are otherwise secured only in commitments to diverse ways of life and solidarities that are incommensurable (such as ethnicities). This invests a great deal of hope in the relatively thin commonality of similarities of propositional belief and acceptance of procedures (however valuable).²⁶ Communities are also products of a variety of social relationships, recognized in varying degree by their members. Bonds of civic solidarity are produced in networks of practice and functional interdependence that

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ *Theory of Communication Action* (Boston: Beacon, 2 vols. 1984, 1988)

²⁶ See Calhoun, "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism and the Public Sphere," *Public Culture*, vol. 14 #1, pp. 147-72

is linguistically recognized as well as on the basis of values and propositions “explaining man’s position in the world as a whole”. Indeed, participation in the public sphere may contribute to this solidarity. Solidarity is not just a condition for reciprocal exchange of reasons in public discourse; it can be a product.

This is not the place to try to defend a different view of the production of social solidarity in which culture is not reduced to common propositional beliefs and the binary oppositions of mechanical and organic or lifeworld and system are complemented by attention to webs of social relations and processes of historical creativity and transformation in culture. My point here is the more limited suggestion that religion figures in these processes in ways that transcend ‘beliefs’.

II

Modernity has hardly been an era of simple secularism, then, though of course few would interpret the secularism thesis so simplistically. The “post-secular” cannot be a reference to moving beyond a historical past so simplistically conceived. It can be a matter of moving beyond particular projects of achieving mutual understanding and conceiving of progress in entirely secular (and especially universalistic and nonsubstantive) terms. In this sense, thinking about post-secular public reason can potentially be helpful for improving the way we think about new projects of mutual understanding and social solidarity based on choice rather than mere imposition or inheritance. In particular, post-secular thinking may help us see some limits in many existing approaches to cosmopolitanism and some ways of enriching the pursuit of cosmopolitan ideals.

The ideal of cosmopolitanism is today rendered overwhelmingly in political terms. Citizenship of the world is a theme of political philosophers concerned with human rights, peace, and the responsibilities all humans owe each other. Even while these philosophers seek to transcend the nation-state, they somewhat ironically understand citizenship largely in the jural terms states have given the concept and in the logic of equivalence the rhetoric of nationalism has encouraged in domestic discussions. Most of these cosmopolitans are heirs of Enlightenment and French Revolutionary humanism, as well as more distantly of Diogenes Laertius, so this is not surprising. But it means that a central question about cosmopolitanism remains too seldom asked: what makes the world a knowable whole and not chaos?

There are three main sorts of answer to this question: God, nature, and human social institutions.²⁷ God is arguably “cosmicizing” in a way neither scientific reason nor humanism can be. Faith in God renders the whole intelligible in principle (even if aspects

27 Obviously each sort of answer is almost infinitely internally variegated. “God” may be understood in Judeo-Christian terms of radical *ex nihilo* creativity, or as the perfect wholeness towards which all things tend. And of course there are others, as for example the proposition that the world (or the universe) is unified aesthetically, or a Platonic notion that if this world is incompletely intelligible it is because it is only an imperfect reflection of eternal ideals.

of the whole remain opaque even to believers). Faith in science presumes an ultimate intelligibility of nature, and at least in many versions the idea of a deterministic whole. Faith in science is not faith in the already known so much as in the continual improvement of human knowledge and mastery of this whole. Least cosmicizing, perhaps, are human social institutions. Here the knitting together of the whole is a historical project, rather than a reality to be discerned. Human beings form both hermeneutically meaningful relationships and systems of indirect relationships like markets, each intelligible though in different ways. Yet while these human creations structure reality they do so incompletely, and sometimes in internally contradictory ways.

Of course the different types of answer may be combined. An appeal to nature, for example, may be not only an appeal to the external operation of deterministic laws, but at the same time also an evocation of internal meaning as in the quasi-religious ecological notion of *Gaia*. Humanism combines (unstably) reference to the natural commonalities of all people and to the human capacity for creativity which issues in diverse histories and institutions. I don't propose any exhaustive tracing of the various ways in which the wholeness of life, or the world, or the universe – the cosmos – may be constituted or represented. Rather, I want simply to call attention to the reliance of all cosmopolitan notions on some theory, usually implicit, of what constitutes the whole. And I want to suggest that differences in claims about what makes the cosmos a meaningful whole are basic to the challenges of contemporary public discourse.

This is a question that has historically arisen in religious contexts, although modern science and humanism also offer potential answers. A key question, as Høibraaten has suggested, is whether God (or belief in God) has the capacity to center and unify the world in a way humanism cannot.²⁸ And closely related, it is worth asking how much most expressions of humanist values are informed by their Judeo-Christian as well as Hellenic heritage. There is, for example, the imagery of creation in God's image which at least on some readings ascribes to human beings an untouchable dignity, a basic freedom and equality, and the capacity for universal solidarity.

Creativity is a basic issue. Arguably there is no more basic tenet to the Judeo-Christian tradition than the radical creativity of God. This doctrine of radical creation, however, yielded internal arguments and tensions within both Jewish and Christian traditions. Not least, in these traditions human beings are also creative.²⁹ Yet, paradoxically, human self-assertion is itself linked to positing a radically powerful God fundamentally prior to the world. As the story of temptation before the Tree of Knowledge suggests, human creativity is based problematically – even contradictorily – on knowledge. In Christianity especially, these tensions helped to give impetus to a questioning of metaphysics, yielding nominalism and in turn modern realism. The same tensions inform Protestant efforts to think an unknowable God, from Luther to Kierkegaard.

28 Høibraaten, op cit

29 Habermas, and Høibraaten following him draw from the Genesis story of God's creation of man in his image that all humans are free and equal, have an untouchable dignity, and are capable of universal solidarity. But the human capacity to join in creation is an implication of at least equal importance.

If God makes the world knowable and the world at least to some extent reveals God, neither sort of knowledge is simple and unproblematic. Though the central role of faith has not always seemed in tension with knowledge – on the contrary, has often seemed its condition – one of the core dimensions of secularization has been the continual re-examination of the boundary. The Kantian idea of religion within the limits of reason keeps the boundary, but circumscribes religion as the other to a newly dominant scientific enterprise. The core of faith remains opaque to Kantian moral philosophy, in which an ‘ought’ implies a ‘can’, but it is not denied by it.

Kant is significant not simply as an intellectual source but as the most powerful symbol of an 18th century moment when potential of enlightenment and modernity was radically open, and political economic and institutional history had not yet begun sharply to condemn some of its emancipatory potentials to unfulfillment. Kant claims the compatibility of free will (central to morality) and determinism, distinguishing spheres in which each with differentially reign. But in a sense God (and the current renewal of public professions of religious faith) invites new struggle echoing the old Manichean dualism. If God is radically powerful, whence evil? If God (and morality) are to be reserved for the good, then this source of good is not all-powerful. A line of thought initially focused on how God’s radical power circumscribes human freedom and morality is transposed. Is the deterministic scientific-technological rationality equally contrary to human moral action? And if so, how does this affect the intelligibility of the world – especially if the world disclosed by science and technology is only available to human understanding as something exterior?

The shift from secular to post-secular is arguably as much about critical recognition of the limits of scientific naturalism as it is about the incorporation of religious perspectives. It is a shift from the project of asserting human sovereignty as independence from God in a natural world to a project of recovering the capacity to articulate the limits of the human and of naturalistic understanding without surrendering strong conceptions of human value and freedom. The notion of complete sovereignty and adequacy of human reason is challenged not only by substantively specific reference to God, but by recognition of the extent to which human reason works only when informed by historical and cultural capacities not understandably simply in naturalistic terms (e.g., of individual brains or individual speakers). Religion opens such recognitions but it is not the only source for them.

Absent such recognitions, however, the merely secular is apt to be an affirmative tradition with weak resources for opening up a critical purchase on actually existing social conditions and trends. Religion offers resources for hope along with the critical resource of a negative relationship to the actual.³⁰ But of course religions are not only traditions with “unexhausted semantic potentials” established sometime in the past. Many religious traditions are

30 This is a crucial theme for many of the earlier Frankfurt School thinkers from whom Habermas learned a great deal. See Eduardo Mendieta’s helpful introduction to Habermas, *Reason and Rationality* as well as several of the essays collected there. Compare the effort to identify cultural but not specifically religious resources for hope by Raymond Williams. The book entitled *Resources of Hope* is a posthumous collection of essays (London: Verso, 1989). But the idea that community, class, and cultural traditions and creativity offer such resources runs through his work.

alive and innovative today.³¹ If in the context of Europe it is Islamic believers who most influentially put religion on the contemporary public agenda, Christian resurgence is at least as significant for global cosmopolitan projects (and it is not as insignificant for Europe as some survey data from Western Europe would indicate).³² Christianity is about as rapidly growing as Islam. This growth – not least in Africa, Latin America, and Asia – is largely evangelical, often very conservative on both theological and social issues, and while not always political often at odds with moderate versions of Christianity that understand themselves as mainstream.

Religion is likely to figure in the global future to an extent that most cosmopolitan theories have not considered. It is not just one among the various sources of diversity to be recognized and accommodated. There are also a number of religious projects that are direct competitors to secular cosmopolitanism, not because they are backwardly or defensively parochial but because they aspire to occupy the same space, providing moral and cultural and sometimes even political frameworks for global integration. Several religious traditions have produced transnational discursive fields of great scope and complexity. They mediate migrations as much as any secular accounts of cosmopolitan universalism. They inform relations among nations and among activists across national borders. The great world religions are internally diverse and polyvalent and not automatically forces for good or evil – any more than, say, nations and nationalisms are. But at least as much as nations and nationalisms it would be unwise to build social theories that in effect wish religion away, imagine it a fading inheritance from the past, or a private ‘taste’ that can be kept beyond the frame of the public sphere.

Cosmopolitanism is not realistically imaginable as the transcendence of all forms of belonging. To propose a leap into traditionless secular reason is to propose the tyranny of the pure ought, and indeed, an ought without a can. It is also to privilege a class and a cultural group able to identify its traditions – including secularism – with neutral reason. Global solidarity will be achieved – if it is ever achieved – by transformation of religion and other forms of cultural belonging rather than by escape from them. And it will be achieved on the basis of hope and critical perspectives and solidarity that inform public reason but are not produced simply from within it.

31 It is potentially misleading to speak of religion in the singular for it implies more unity to the category of religions than is warranted. An ecumenical pursuit of better relations and greater unity among religions is best founded on recognition of their plurality. Religion as such and in the singular may appear most strongly (ironically) from the point of view of the secularist thinking all religions the same and the religious person who unselfcritically thinks religion must simply mean his own (whether as a zealot or simply from ignorance).

32 When discussing religion, political philosophers and critical theorists have a tendency to speak of contemporary Islam and historical Christianity (for the most part they gently skirt Judaism and ignore most of the rest of the world’s religions)

The Discourse of Religion in the Post-Secular Society

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The major interest shown by the global public in response to the death of Pope John Paul II and the election of his successor left a lasting impression of the paradoxical simultaneity of traditional religion and modernity. It was of all things the electronic mass media, themselves a major factor in both the dissolution of the symbolic language of traditional life worlds, and the global standardisation of cultural codes, that seemed to be instrumental in demonstrating the unbroken vitality of a two-thousand-year-old religious tradition in the midst of the secular society. These events provided an impressive reminder of the fact that the certain belief in a modernity, which is to be equated with secular culture, can be shaken.

Jürgen Habermas has termed this changed situation the 'post-secular society'.¹ According to Habermas, neither the progressive, optimistic understanding of secularisation as a linear process of progress nor the conservative, pessimistic model of secularisation as an expropriation of religious ideas and symbols captures the present social reality in which religious communities continue to exist within a secular milieu.² Does this also mean that we must abandon the notion of an inherent link between modernisation and secularisation? After all, the modernisation of societies is usually equated with secularisation. In recent years, there seems to have been a shift in emphasis within Habermas's conception of secularisation: away from the equation of societal modernisation with secularisation, towards a cautious view of a permanent coexistence of secular and religious convictions, tending towards cooperation.³ Throughout these changes in his concept of secularisation, however, Habermas has always been guided by the notion that societal modernisation should be understood as a learning process. Without this guiding vision, he believes, the modernising processes of economic, scientific, technical and bureaucratic rationalisation seem to add up to only one half of modernity, amounting to an increase in instrumental reason alone, without any increase in enlightenment and autonomy.

1 Jürgen Habermas, 'Faith and Knowledge', in *Equalvoices* no. 7, (November 2001)

2 Ibid

3 Cf. Asmus Trautsch, 'Glauben und Wissen. Jürgen Habermas zum Verhältnis von Philosophie und Religion', in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 111 (2004). 180-198

Linguistification of the Sacred: On the Theory of Religion Contained in *The Theory of Communicative Action*

In his main work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas follows Max Weber in assigning the secularisation process the key role in explaining the development of Occidental rationalism. Secularisation, understood as the linguistification of the binding forces of the sacred and the disenchantment of world views, forms the precondition for the proceduralisation of moral justification, political legitimation and social integration as understood in the context of discursive rationality. The modern differentiation process follows a developmental logic that is geared to a constantly expanding universalisation *qua* formalisation of competences. Thus the diagnosis of the complete disenchantment of religious world views and the total linguistification of the sacred bears the main argumentative burden in upholding the notion of the now irreversible, necessarily procedural nature of post-metaphysical thinking.⁴ At the same time, this genesis and unfolding of Occidental rationalism, understood as a process of differentiation, also creates the methodological preconditions for a normative view of modernity.

On closer inspection, Habermas's theory of secularised modernity proves to be based on a combination of Weber's theory of the differentiation of value spheres and Durkheim's notion of a linguistification of the sacred, through which the potential for rationality inherent in communicative action is freed for the first time. The 'socially integrative and expressive functions that were at first fulfilled by ritual practice' pass over into communicative action, and 'the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts.'⁵ The 'spellbinding power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding* force of criticizable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence'⁶ – according to Habermas's cogent theory. This conceptualisation of the modernisation process was criticised on the grounds that it supposedly leads to a dualistic separation of form and content. The tenor of the critique is that too sharp a distinction is drawn here between the reconstruction of anonymous rule systems and the critical analysis of the factors determining concrete life conduct. The developmental logic of world views, so the critique would have it, was distinguished too sharply from the typology of possible convictions.⁷ Since the process of linguistification of the sacred is then

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- 4 Cf. Michael Kühnlein, 'Aufhebung des Religiösen durch Versprachlichung Eine religionsphilosophische Untersuchung des Rationalitätskonzepts von Jürgen Habermas's, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 71 (1996), 390-409; James L. Marsh, 'The Religious Significance of Habermas's, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), 521-538; Leonardo Ceppa, Disincantamento e Trascendenza in Jürgen Habermas's, *Paradigmi. Rivista di Critica Filosofica* 16 (1998), 515-534
 - 5 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press 1987, p. 77
 - 6 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press 1987, p. 77
 - 7 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, London: Heinemann 1984, p. 196

understood as the emergence of 'culture-invariant validity claims'⁸, the critique continues, Habermas construes the social evolutionary process of a 'rationalisation of worldviews' too strongly and one-sidedly as a process of abstraction.⁹ This dissociation of factual validity and normative validity is seen as creating for the first time the conceptual gap which is then open to systemic forms of social interaction that engage neither with the semantic traditions of a society nor with the communicative rationality of communicative action. Habermas responded to objections of this kind by further developing the elements of the normativity theory underpinning *The Theory of Communicative Action*, which above all involved a loosening of the strong parallelisation of the categories of theory of meaning, on the one hand, and theory of action, on the other. This modified definition of the relationship between meaning and norms is also articulated in a modified theoretical position towards religion. The strongly evolutionist emphasis prevailing in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, according to which religion was believed to be undergoing a process of substantial dissolution, gave way to a mildly sceptical, antagonistic stance towards religion's still unexhausted semantic potentials.

II

Sceptical Abstinence: Differentiating Between Unconditional Sense and the Sense of Unconditionality

One of the strategies pursued by Habermas in response to the critique of earlier versions of the *Theory of Communicative Action* comprises the loosening of the close link between the comprehension of meaning, normative knowledge and the coordination of action. Whereas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* the comprehension of an utterance was linked so closely to knowledge of the conditions of validity that, from the standpoint of the speaker, 'the conditions of acceptability are identical to the conditions of his illocutionary success'¹⁰, later, in *Between Facts and Norms* for instance, a stronger distinction is drawn between semantic analysis of meaning, pragmatic analysis of normativity, and the theoretical analysis proper of the actions linked to the medium of language. It is acknowledged that the *Theory of Communicative Action* 'absorbs the tension between facticity and validity into its fundamental concepts'¹¹. In contrast to earlier tendencies towards a dualistic separation of facts and norms, Habermas now uses a stage theory of general meaning and validity to elaborate the inherent relationship between the two. Whereas at the level of general meaning the distinction between given and merely assumed identity of meaning is evident to just a single observer, at the level of general validity the tension that emerges between 'rational acceptability' and 'validity' then allows a redefinition of the relationship between norms that are *de facto* socially accepted and the ideal normativity of norms that merit acknowledgement.¹²

8 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press 1987, p. 73

9 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press 1987, p. 88

10 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, London: Heinemann 1984, p. 297f

11 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy, Cambridge: Polity Press 1996, p. 8

12 Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1998

The key idea in this changed conception of the theory of meaning is captured in the expression 'transcendence from within'¹³. In his introductory remarks on the theory of meaning contained in *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas applies the term to the generality of ideal normativity that is not explicable purely by semantics. 'Transcendence from within' denotes the pragmatically reconstructed act of idealisation that logically transcends local contexts of meaning. Habermas now uses this notion of immanent transcendence to redefine his understanding of religion. A sceptical, antagonistic position now supersedes the linear logic of social evolution that was present in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Habermas utilises the two-stage idealisation, and the notion of transcendence from within that is linked to it, to distinguish religion and philosophy, which he does using the notions of 'unconditional sense' and 'sense of unconditionality'. In his commentary on Max Horkheimer's dictum: 'To seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is a futile undertaking'¹⁴, Habermas distinguished between the philosophical sense of unconditionality and the unconditional sense that religions generate. A theory of communicative rationality can uphold the philosophical sense of unconditional normativity without having to assume a theoretically grounded unconditional sense of the kind generated by religions. The philosophical sense of unconditionality can be established through the act of idealisation termed 'transcendence from within'¹⁵, which must necessarily be performed in any communicative act. This use of the term 'transcendence from within' in relation to the conception of post-metaphysical, communicative rationality is not a casual one that would be relevant only in the specific context of an enquiry into the theory of communicative action from the perspective of theology or the philosophy of religion. This term denotes the systematically central relationship between the facticity of local validity claims and their transcontextual generalised normativity. Only in the light of this distinction can the philosophical sense of unconditionality be distinguished categorically from the unconditional sense generated by religion.

This distinction underlines the fact that post-metaphysical reason, which cannot take the place of faith, must remain abstinent. Philosophy cannot replace the solace that religion bestows. This does not mean that it must inevitably lapse into cynicism or indifferentism. Since procedural, post-metaphysical reason underlines the cognitive sense of moral judgements, it can indeed uphold the unconditional normative sense of the morally right. The normativity of these judgements is grounded in the reasoned insight of which all living beings are capable who are also capable of communicating through language. Yet the unconditional binding force that would translate this moral insight into a compelling motivation to act, cannot be generated by post-conventional, cognitive morality itself. Post-metaphysical thinking can explicate the cognitive normative sense of morality, but cannot answer the question as to why

13 "Transcendence from Within: Managing the Risk of Dissension through Lifeworld Backgrounds", in: Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1996, pp. 17-28.

14 Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*. Edited with an introduction by Eduardo Mendieta. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, ch. 3.

15 Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*. Edited with an introduction by Eduardo Mendieta. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, ch. 4.

we should be moral in the first place. Against this background, religious traditions retain a semantic potential capable of generating binding (and bonding) forces of this kind. Here, Habermas leaves open the question of whether religious tradition will in the long run be appropriated *in toto* through successful translation of those semantic potentials, such that the coexistence of religion and post-metaphysical thought would be but a temporary phenomenon. Overall, this second phase of Habermasian discourse on religion is at least characterised by the maintenance of a position of abstinent coexistence. This abstinence arises in response to the fact that the semantic potential of religion is seen to have been not yet fully secularised, and to persist. The resulting peaceful coexistence can even develop into a community of interests. Religion then seems a welcome ally in the struggle against a one-sided secularised modernity, as manifested for example in the one-sided dominance of the natural science paradigm of rationality, above all in its lofty metaphysical guise of the new naturalism.

In a further, third step, certainly clearly articulated in the essays published since the Peace Prize speech 'Faith and Knowledge', Habermas now fully advocates a permanent coexistence of religious and secular convictions. From the perspective of post-metaphysical reason, religion is thereby granted more than just temporary hospitality – it is granted full civil rights within the context of the post-secular society. Habermas now increasingly advocates a fallibilist attitude on the part of post-metaphysical thinking: finite secular reason subjects itself to the express proviso that it might err. This renunciation by secular reason of its superiority claim is reflected above all in Habermas's emphasis of the fact that fallibilism also applies to the secular citizen, who must now also accept the possibility that the religious conviction might also be true.

III

The Discourse of Religion under Fallibilist Conditions:

John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas on the Coexistence of Religion and Secular Reason

Many saw Jürgen Habermas's Peace Prize speech as a self-corrective step away from those earlier positions based on the strong assumption of an inherent link between modernity and secularisation. As we saw, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the process of secularisation was interpreted as a linguistification of the binding forces of the sacred, and as such understood as the fundamental precondition for the emergence of a modern, rationally organised and legitimated society. According to Habermas, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 finally led us to see the tension between religion and secular society in a new light. Those events, like the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, shed a rather harsh light on a global reality in which religious communities not only continue to exist in the midst of secular milieus, but in which isolated member of those communities also protest – with a hitherto unimaginable degree of violence and fanaticism – against situations involving what they interpret as experiences of offence and marginalisation by a majority secular culture. If the emergence of a modern society in which secular and modern convictions coexist on a permanent basis is nevertheless to be considered a reasonable fact, as a development

to be welcomed as an ongoing learning process, and not to be disdained as a cultural disaster, then reasonable principles for dealing with this fact need to be rendered capable of being acknowledged and applied. Principles of law and justice need to be formulated that are evident to religious and secular citizens alike. Like no other political philosopher and moral theoretician before or since, John Rawls has sought to formulate such criteria of justice that would be capable of winning rational acceptance by all citizens under conditions of pluralism. Political liberalism proceeds on the assumption that there is no epistemological scope for preferring a particular conception of justice tied to particular convictions concerning the nature of the person, or the sense and purpose of human life, or – to put it in a nutshell – any particular idea of the good. Rawls's conception of justice rests on the idea of a system of fair cooperation, not on any substantial understanding of the general good. At the level of the individual, this conception presupposes the political concept of the citizen, but no comprehensive theory of human subjectivity and identity. So this theory is political not only in the restricted sense that its exclusive purview is the political sphere of society. Rather, the conception of justice as fairness is designed to convince solely on the basis of reasonable political considerations, independently of any other philosophical or religious reasons.

The reasons for this assent can vary widely among the various ethical and religious doctrines involved. What is crucial is that their perspectives converge within that area of overlapping consensus which forms the political conception of justice. Rawls thus transfers to philosophy not only the Enlightenment principle of religious tolerance, but also the liberal principle of a separation of private confession and public institutions. Public institutions and the key elements of a political constitution are legitimate if and when it can be assumed that reasonable persons would assent to them. The moral truth claim linked to certain political options, on the other hand, remains completely embedded in those religious and metaphysical world views which themselves can no longer be justified through the public use of reason. Consequently, political liberalism does not claim 'to replace those comprehensive views, nor to give them a true foundation'¹⁶. It seeks rather to remain equidistant from religious and secular convictions. Rawls says of the Habermasian discourse that it does not maintain such equidistance. He claims that it is based instead on a hidden Hegelian metaphysical view of history that qualifies secular convictions as rationally superior. According to Rawls, this Hegelianism – and thus the residually metaphysical nature – of Habermas's theory of religion, is based on the assumed notion of a historically unfolding reason whose logic can be inferred from its empirical manifestations. Knowledge of this logic, so the argument goes, then offers the precondition for sublation of the substantial religious and ethical notions in the philosophical concept. At first glance, then, the Rawlsian conceptualisation of religion seems to offer the advantage of greater tolerance and stronger respect towards religious convictions, as it dispenses with this kind of gesture of sublation or inheritance.

The drawbacks of the Rawlsian conception, however, lie in the fact that the reasonable overlapping consensus remains dependent on truth claims, from the judgement of whose

¹⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press 1993, xx

legitimacy the theoretician abstains. According to Rawls, however, it is not only political theory and moral philosophy that have to refrain from reasoned judgement here; citizens too are not entitled to judge the truth claims of those grounds upon which their fellow citizens assent to the shared conception of justice. The consequence of this separation of reason as used in the public sphere and the private truth of the comprehensive doctrines is that the overlapping consensus consists in just that – nothing more than a formal overlap of perspectives at a given point – without any rational assent grounded in shared public reasons. The truth of this consensus is beyond the reach of the public use of reason. The overlapping consensus is a consensus made public, but it is not grounded in a reasonable public consensus-building process.

Yet Rawls evidently also requires a substantial yardstick by which to judge the truth of comprehensive doctrines. Rawls describes a comprehensive doctrine as reasonable not only when it is advanced by reasonable persons, but also when its substantial content is such that it 'does not reject the essentials of a democratic regime'¹⁷. The glaring example of fanatical, anti-democratic religions demonstrates that Rawls cannot maintain the distinction between true and reasonable in the original sense. 'Irrational, and even mad, comprehensive doctrines' need to be 'contained', so that they 'do not undermine the unity and justice of society'¹⁸. Rawls therefore has to assume that reasonable citizens always only ever affirm comprehensive doctrines that are themselves inherently reasonable. Inevitably, Rawls must assume that 'reasonable persons affirm only reasonable doctrines'¹⁹. We should note here that it is not the act of assent by reasonable citizens that makes a certain reasonable doctrine reasonable, but the substantial aspects of the doctrines themselves. Certain comprehensive doctrines are unreasonable on the grounds that what they say – for instance that a democratic order should be radically rejected – is untrue.

The fact that Rawls tends toward a criterion for exclusion that relates to the content of doctrines raises the suspicion that reasonable political arguments advanced in public are indeed linked to a hidden metaphysics of liberalism, i.e. to a particular view that considers political liberalism to be true. This view would seem to say that religions, at least in their unenlightened forms, raise false claims. Due to this falsehood, they tend towards political intolerance. Yet political liberalism never verifies this view of the falsehood of religion by putting it to the test of public reason. To some extent, secular liberals have already agreed in advance that religious convictions are untrue, and that this view no longer needs to be legitimated through public discourse in a manner that would enable all reasonable citizens to assent to it, regardless of the comprehensive doctrines they adhere to. Secular liberal citizens, then, never submit to the discursive test of a cooperative search for the truth of their own conviction that religions raise false truth claims. Evidently they do not seriously entertain the possibility that their own secular convictions might be false, and religious convictions true. They seem only to be interested in having their religious fellow citizens advance their false convictions in a politically reasonable, i.e. civilised, manner. This mildly patronising liberal paternalism provokes protest on the part of religious citizens, who after all wish to

17 Ibid., xviii

18 Ibid., xix

19 Ibid.

be taken seriously and respected in their conviction of the truth of religion. This protest is motivated not only by the resentment nurtured by those losing out in the modernisation process, which would be questionable. It is also an articulation of the legitimate appeal to the moral principle of universal respect, i.e. respect for the fact that religious persons also be respected as reasonable beings, which is to say reasonable beings capable of both rational insight and error. Habermas sees more clearly and better than Rawls that religious critiques of political liberalism can also contain this element of morally legitimate insistence on equal respect. The logical fallibilism of *post-metaphysical* reason proves less paternalistic than the *non-metaphysical* separation of reason and truth. The requirement that secular citizens also be willing to engage in a reasonable debate on religious truth claims and their secular appropriation by translation constitutes a more emphatic renunciation of secular reason's superiority claim than the Rawlsian abstinence towards the truth claim of religion. For this relationship of mutual respect to become truly reciprocal under fallibilist conditions, however, the religious person too must also be assumed to be fallible, and be required to acknowledge this fallibility. Yet this very attitude – a fallibilist attitude toward one's own basic convictions – seems to be irreconcilable with the nature of religious convictions.

IV

Fallibilist Reason and Certain Belief

Certain belief and a fallibilist attitude are not necessarily mutually exclusive. To demonstrate this, an appropriate epistemology of religious convictions is required.²⁰ A brief glance at the traditional conditions of religious belief shows that belief need not necessarily be understood as being in conflict with knowledge. Belief, and especially religious belief, possesses at least four dimensions, i.e. two cognitive and two non-cognitive dimensions. Traditionally, these dimensions were established by linking the distinction between *fides quae* and *fides qua* to the Augustinian distinction between *credere Deum*, *credere Deo* and *credere in Deum*. The two elementary non-cognitive dimensions are normally understood in terms of belief as faith and belief as an ethically and existentially significant basic attitude, with the latter forming the overarching and legitimating framework for all major value judgements and life decisions. Religious belief is of a cognitive nature to the extent that it must also be understood as an epistemic attitude, as a holding of certain propositions to be true. The fourth dimension, also of a cognitive nature, comprises what has traditionally been termed *fides quae*, belief in the content of the propositions themselves, i.e. the tenets of the faith. These propositional tenets of religious convictions, which are embedded in belief as faith, can now – like any other propositional conviction – be subjected to a fallibilist truth test. This enables us to distinguish two perspectives: the internal perspective of the faithful believer and the external perspective of the critical discursive reflection upon the claims raised. This is not to say that these two attitudes exist in absolute mutual competition, and that each would need to claim primacy of explanation over the other. This distinction is better understood as a differentiation between two 'explanatory levels' than as an absolute

20 Cf. Th. M. Schmidt, 'Glaubensüberzeugungen und säkulare Gründe. Zur Legitimität religiöser Argumente in einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft', *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* (2001), 248-261; idem, 'Das epistemische Subjekt', in: Gerhard Krieger/Hans-Ludwig Ollig (eds.), *Fluchtpunkt Subjekt*, Schöningh, Paderborn 2001, 105-120.

distinction between the internal and external perspectives. This kind of 'concession of a free movement between the levels of religion, and reflection on religion'²¹ avoids the two extremes of either immunising religious convictions against rational critique through recourse to authentic and incommunicable religious experience or reducing religious convictions by placing them on a non-religious basis. This smooth transition between the two levels of religion and reflection upon religion, is grounded not least in the specific epistemic demands made on rational religious persons under pluralistic conditions, namely their need to establish coherence between their own religious convictions and other, secular convictions.

Philip Clayton calls such persons 'secular believers'. Secular believers are persons for whom religious and secular convictions coexist. The constant reflexive switch they make between the internal and external perspectives does not correspond to the classical view of a *fides quaerens intellectum*, which assumes a linear learning process that turns an initially weak faith into an intellectually sound belief bolstered by reason. Instead, the Clayton model involves the continuous re-establishment of a cognitive balance between scepticism and certainty in order to continuously renew and restore epistemic coherence between secular and religious convictions, under the external pressure of new information and critique.

However, this attitude is not only imposed on religious persons from outside by the pressure to conform and by the conventions of a secular majority culture. Instead, the switching between the internal and the external corresponds to an inherent logic of the system of religious conviction itself. To a certain extent, this reflexive attitude has also always been ascribed to the traditional believer, as the formation of the system of doctrinal and institutional teaching typical of Occidental religion shows.²² We should therefore reject the view that religious belief always requires express and complete assent. At the level of the individual, religious convictions constitute the immediate justification for foundational convictions. This immediacy, however, does not exonerate these convictions from the requirements of inferential grounding and discursive justification. In these processes of justification, the convictions do not necessarily become any less certain or immediate, though they are brought into a state of *wide reflective equilibrium*²³ with other, secular convictions. Placing religious convictions in a coherent relationship with non-religious ones by establishing such a wide reflective equilibrium is a requirement that secular believers are themselves inclined to meet. Rational religious persons are already motivated to make their religious and non-religious convictions cohere in pre-political contexts. Therefore, this balancing of cognitive elements – itself an act of translation – can also be required of them in contexts where religious convictions arise in the public discourse of a pluralist society *qua* normative claims.

21 Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: Essay in Rationality and Religion*, Yale University Press, 1989

22 Cf. L. Honnefelder, 'Wissenschaftliche Rationalität und Theologie', in: L. Scheffczyk (ed.), *Rationalität. Ihre Entwicklung und Grenzen*, Freiburg/München 1989, 289-314

23 Cf. Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000

V

Learning Processes in the Post-Secular Society

Yet even if religious certainty can be reconciled with a fallibilist attitude, a tragic reading of the conflicts between secular and religious culture remains possible. Under post-metaphysical, fallibilist conditions there is no guarantee that the processes of mutual switching and translation, even if they are considered desirable by the actors concerned, will actually succeed. How, under post-secular conditions, once a strong view of secularisation as an unequivocal, linear and irreversible process has been abandoned, can a rational account of hope for historic progress be upheld? Here it would seem we reach the real border between faith and knowledge. The conviction that the modernisation process is directional cannot be grounded purely empirically or by formal reconstruction based on a strong theory of secularisation. Under post-metaphysical conditions, conditions of the radically finite nature of human reason, it is only possible to believe in the directedness of social development. This belief is not necessarily identical to religious faith. What remains is a 'chiliasm of philosophy'²⁴ that does not necessarily transcend the boundaries of empirical knowledge determined by critical reflection. However, the utopian ideal according to which social progress consists not only in the proliferation of consumer goods and an increase in the domination of nature, but also in a real increase in opportunities for a life led in authentic freedom and solidarity, does not arise from the formal reconstruction of problem-solving competences alone. This does not rule out the possibility that this certain belief can be tested, like a hypothesis, i.e. brought into a reflexive and coherent relationship with fallible knowledge. The volitional component of this belief grounds the binding force of the ideal, while the fallible knowledge component grounds the rationality of the hope. The model of the interdependence of the attitudes of belief and knowledge is helpful here, as I just outlined in relation to the case of religious belief. The distinction I drew between belief as faith in, and belief in the truth of, propositions also holds when we consider whether we may expect the processes of mutual learning and translation between religion and secular modernity to succeed. The appropriateness of a division of labour and cooperation of this kind between certain belief and fallible knowledge should be evident to a finite reason that might otherwise not be able to view its own discourses reflexively as a learning process, and for that reason should be demanded of it. If this were not evident, then it would also no longer be possible to demonstrate why religious and secular citizens should accept the possibility that their convictions might be false, or why that possibility should also be seen as a possible gain, and not exclusively as a threat or loss. Beyond this rational hope, however, there are no guarantees available to both religious and secular citizens alike that these mutual learning processes will be successful. As finite reasonable beings, secular and religious citizens alike face the same foundational predicament of having to place their faith, in the absence of any guarantee provided by a metaphysics of history, in the belief – or hope – that the requisite mutual translation between their basic normative intuitions and the rational testing methods of the analytical theory-building and political will-building processes will succeed in future. Secular and religious citizens alike must stand up and defend their convictions without recourse to epistemological protection or metaphysical guarantees. This is the precarious balance of the post-secular society, which can only be maintained through fairness and mutual respect between religious and non-religious citizens.

24 I. Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784)

On Artificially Moralising the Morally Irrelevant

Comments on Thomas M. Schmidt's lecture 'The Discourse of Religion in the Post-Secular Society'.

Jon Hellesnes, Professor in Philosophy, University of Tromsø

Thomas Schmidt has helped us to make sense of the strange term 'post-secular society'. He has also explained important points concerning religion, modernity and secularisation in the work of Jürgen Habermas. Schmidt has described the human condition as a situation in which we, secular and religious citizens alike, have to live without any guarantee provided by metaphysical eschatology. He has discussed conditions of peaceful coexistence between religious and non-religious citizens, pointing out the need for mutual translation between religious and non-religious '*Weltanschauungen*'. I have very much appreciated what he has said. There is, however, a possible disagreement between us when it comes to critique of religion. I shall limit my remarks to this point. Firstly, I would like to stress some brute facts of power.

Imagine a powerful church like the Church of Rome. This institution has defined the use of contraceptives as sinful. It has even implemented a policy of resistance against the distribution of condoms in Africa, where AIDS is pandemic. Imagine also a group of health workers trying to stop this kind of interference in a matter of life and death. How are we supposed to conceive of such a conflict?

To me it would be a case of misplaced academicism to view such a situation as primarily consisting of a problematic difference between conceptual systems, between discourses or between vocabularies – that is to say, as a situation in which the problem consists of translating something from one conceptual system into another. It appears instead to be a situation in which a group of sane and responsible people is trying to help a third party against the destructive influence of powerful people with weird ideas. In such a situation, what is required is an immediate critique of religion – for instance in the sense of David Hume.

As a critic of religion, Hume was primarily concerned with two issues: (1) the epistemic status of religious doctrines, with the doctrine of God's existence at the top, so to speak, (2) the relationship between religion and morality. With respect to the second point Hume held a rather original view. Unlike many others, he argued that the main influence of religion on morality is bad. When religious ideas intrude into morality, they tend to create artificial crimes, for instance defining it as sinful to use contraceptives or to eat pork. They also tend to create what in Hume's words are called 'frivolous species of merit' such as asceticism and self-mortification. This leads to much human suffering. David Hume never heard the statement 'if God is dead, everything is permitted'. Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and those inspired by them, lived more than a century later. But if Hume had come over such a statement, he would have found it extremely stupid. The idea that morality is in some sense dependent upon religion was to him a perversity.

I think that Hume has made us aware of what, in my terms, is the problem of artificially moralising something which there is no good reason to moralise, for instance questions of diet or food, questions of clothing etc. What is being moralised in such cases is something that, *prima facie*, is without moral significance, without any moral relevance whatsoever. What he is hinting at can be illustrated by the following religious measures: prescribing what to wear on one's head and how to dress, prescribing self-mortification with or without a whip, defining the borders of legitimate sex, prescribing the death penalty for certain ways of thinking, that is to say heresy. Referring to this kind of intervention in human affairs, Hume talked about 'preposterous distribution of praise and blame'.

Today, all of us, religious and secular people alike, should realise this: To moralise something that *prima facie* is morally irrelevant puts a heavy burden of proof on the party who is in favour of it. Arguments with some intersubjective sort of validity have to be produced, but if the step is taken into rational discourse, the dreadful and deadly consequences of religious intervention in the struggle against AIDS, exemplified above, immediately become a strong counter-argument. To realise this is to take a decisive step into secular discourse ethics. This version of the ethics of reason is indeed favourable for the culture of modernity on which the principle of tolerance is based.

It has become something of an academic commonplace that critical philosophy in the 18th century (with Immanuel Kant in the forefront) proved once and for all the impossibility of proving the existence of God. If this is so, which I think it is, the basis of belief in God cannot be knowledge. It has to be faith. However, it is normally accepted that mere assumptions are not enough to justify drastic interference in matters of supreme importance that involve other people. Why should religious assumptions constitute an exception? How can such assumptions authorise Catholic priests to interfere in the business of birth control and in the struggle against AIDS? How can we be supposed to respect them in doing so? Of course, all of us hold a lot of beliefs without sufficient evidence for them, and that is alright. It has to be so. It is part of the human condition to live by trust. It is, however, not alright to interfere in the life of others on the basis of such beliefs. In the latter case, there is a need for rational arguments. There should, I think, be more modesty in religious matters. This also applies to atheism.

Nowadays, we are witnessing the resurrection of a sort of atheism that was typical of the 19th century, namely atheism accompanied by the belief that atheism has a strong scientific basis, and that science, for instance neuroscience or biological psychology, is capable of proving all kinds of religious doctrines to be mere delusions. (I call this kind of atheism scientific atheism, not scientific atheism.) There is forgetfulness at work here of the fact that, if it is impossible to prove God's existence, it is equally impossible to disprove his existence. My plea for modesty in the religious sphere is addressed to people of all denominations, including atheists.

Hard Times for Democracy

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I

How are capitalism, religion and democratic solidarity related? I will begin with some reflections on the present use and meaning of these four concepts: capitalism, religion, democracy and solidarity.

(1) In the 1960s and 1970s, modern *capitalism* was called *late capitalism*, and this seemed to imply that modern capitalism, with its free markets for labour, real estate and money, had come to an end. Its final decay was supposed to be only a question of time, political power and successful regime change. During the 1960s and 1970s, the leftist alternative seemed to be clear and present. The variety of socialist alternatives was overwhelming. Grassroots democracy, democratisation of the economy, a strong social welfare state, state or market socialism, but socialism (or social democracy) at any rate. This was an illusion. Today, it seems that there is nothing left of socialism. Social democratic leaders have become neo-liberal defenders of the so-called 'Washington Consensus'. Socialism and great parts of the former left, old and new, disappeared, and what's left is liberal capitalism – ironically with the highest growth rates in China, which is still governed by an efficient and authoritarian communist party. We can once again make the striking discovery that the capitalist economy fits very well with any political regime that is efficient, even a communist dictatorship.¹

Yet, modern capitalism does not, as it is sometimes presumed, exclude solidarity *per se*. The relationship between *capitalism* and *solidarity* is ambivalent. Even if the negative external effects of capitalist growth are destroying all the existing social bonds of solidarity, as Marx and others have described again and again, capitalism does not only destroy solidarity, its self-referential 'expansion for expansion's sake' (Hannah Arendt) also uncovers and enables new manifestations of human solidarity. Although there is no internal link between capitalism and solidarity, as early liberal philosophers like Adam Smith or Jeremy Bentham believed, free markets and the accelerated growth of capital, manpower, and all the forces of production and productivity since the early days of *modern, rational capitalism* (Max Weber) are related *externally* to solidarity, and in particular to a *growth* and *extension* of *solidarity* that is democratic. Globalizing capitalism is, therefore, a necessary condition for a cosmopolitan expansion of solidarity, but not at all sufficient. Although rational capitalism, through its own logic of profit, never produces any kind of solidarity, nevertheless, without the unfettered growth of the instrumental and strategic rationality of

¹ Hence, one could modify Max Horkheimer's famous phrase from the 1930s to make it fit the global capitalism of the early 21st Century: 'Those who don't want to talk about the neo-liberal economy should be silent about communist dictatorship.' Horkheimer's original statement (in his essay on the Authoritarian State) was: 'Wer vom Kapitalismus nicht reden will, sollte vom Faschismus schweigen.'

all productive forces, nothing can exist that resembles John Dewey's 'great society', and that means a nationwide (or even wider) democratic solidarity.² As Marx put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, anticipating the spirit of American pragmatism: Solidarity or the 'unification of workers' was shaped and enabled by the 'railway,' 'extensive commerce' and 'the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.... The unification that took centuries for the workers (*Bürger*) of the Middle Ages to attain, given their miserable highways, is being achieved by the modern proletariat in only a few years, thanks to the railways.'³

The unification of the oppressed is not in itself democratic, but is linked *internally* to democratic solidarity simply because the great *promise* of democracy that is modern is the political and individual *self-determination* of *all* men. The rights-based and undetermined inclusion of *all* those who are addressed by politically-binding decisions is what makes democracy modern. Whereas classical (old Greek) democracy *never ever could* have had a real problem with slavery or the oppression of women, modern democracy, from its very beginning in the 18th century, had that problem and inspired people (and particularly *petit bourgeois* intellectuals) to strive against any kind of exclusion *in the name* of democracy. Therefore, especially those who are *oppressed* in modern times are usually fighting for democracy or more democracy. Even if they sometimes call it 'socialism' or 'communism', they are aiming for a kind of egalitarian democracy that is more inclusive than 'bourgeois democracy'. It is this specific appeal to those who are oppressed that has made democracy so attractive right up until the present that even authoritarian regimes like to use the name of democracy for their own oppressive purposes. The appeal of democracy to the people (*demo-cracy* = people's rule or self-rule) is at least the reason why, of all classical political ideas of good governance (good kingdoms, good aristocracies ...), only democracy survived.⁴

(2) In the 1960s and 1970s, not only theories that predicted the end of capitalism were in favour. At that time, a well-established social theory already existed that predicted and explained the necessary decay of *religion*, and that was the so-called *theory of secularization*. Whereas the theories of late capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s were broadly accepted by the left and rejected by neo-conservatives and neo-liberals, the theory of secularization united all political and academic parties, and objections came only from a small minority. That the time of *religion* was over, and that religion was going to be replaced by rational enlightenment, seemed sound to political philosophers, functionalist architects and sociologists as well as to Western liberals and Eastern

2 John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems: The Later Works 1925-1953*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press 1984)

3 Karl Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. & trans. T. Carver (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 9

4 Hubertus Buchstein/ Dirk Jörke, 'Das Unbehagen an der Demokratietheorie', in: *Leviathan* 4 (2003), 470-495

dictators. The argument was simple: 'Modernization leads to the decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals'⁵

But during the last 30 years we have observed that neither capitalism nor religion has vanished. On the contrary, religion seems more alive today than ever before. Even Max Weber's old and long-rejected (as it seemed) thesis of an internal link between religious, and in particular, *protestant rationalization* and *rational capitalism* (a hundred years after the first publication of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) have re-emerged and appear more vibrant today than ever before. Protestant sects still seem to be the ethical avant-garde of capitalism, but other religions follow the same track of rationalization. There is some evidence that religious neo-fundamentalism supports precisely those values which are most important to today's rational capitalism, and rational bureaucracy.⁶ Transcending traditional borders, religion sometimes supports and strongly reinforces the values that neo-liberal capitalism needs to expand. This is most obvious in the case of neo-fundamentalist protestant sects such as the *Evangelicals* in Latin America. But in a more moderate version, the same statement also seems true for the sub-Saharan or Asian Islamic fundamentalists.⁷ Sometimes religious groups oppose Western capitalism, as many of the nationalist or terrorist Islamic groups such as Hizbollah or the Taliban do. Sometimes religious communities do both, that is criticise capitalism in theory and support it (and some of its most important ethical values) in practice, as was the case with Opus Dei in General Franco's late days, or of the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Paul II.⁸

But religion is very different from modern capitalism when it comes to solidarity. Unlike markets and capitalism, *religion* is *internally* linked with *solidarity*.⁹ Yet, even if it is not opposed to democratic political solidarity, it is far from being *necessarily democratic*. In any case, religion was in the past, and still is, one of the most important *resources* of societal solidarity and normative integration. Hence, religious communities are often, although not always, very critical of the negative externalities of the uncontrolled growth of markets, capital and consumerism, and this criticism is sometimes mixed with strong criticism of Western democracy in particular. Even Evangelicals are never in favour of capitalism as such, because their priority is the moral and ethical foundations of capitalism. Even if the protestant *ethic* involuntarily invents and reinforces the *spirit of capitalism*, they are not the same.

5 Peter L. Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview', in: *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center 1999), 1-18, 2

6 Olivier Roy, *Der islamistische Weg nach Westen. Globalisierung, Entwurzelung und Radikalisierung*, (München: Pantheon 2006), 73ff, 105ff, 122ff, 268ff

7 Berger, 'Desecularization', 12ff, 16f; Manuel A. Vasques / Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred. Religion and the Americas*, (New Brunswick) 2003

8 Vasques / Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing*, 165 ff, 180ff

9 On the internal link: Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* I; II, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1981); Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2005)

(3) If solidarity is related externally to capitalist growth and internally to religion, how then is *solidarity* related to the modern, egalitarian, individualistic and universal notion of *democracy*? I have argued elsewhere that there is a very close connection between democracy and solidarity.¹⁰ Pragmatists like Mead, Dewey or Rorty have even equated the growth of democracy with the growth of solidarity. They were right to do so insofar as the modern ideas of *democracy* and *solidarity* are normative concepts, which coincide with the *egalitarian* idea of a reciprocal constitution of *individual* and *collective self-determination*.¹¹ Unlike the terms 'religion' and 'democracy', the term 'solidarity' is a new semantic invention, no older than the French Revolution, and, only decades after the revolution, 'solidarity' replaced the then much more convenient (and originally Christian) 'brotherhood' or '*fraternité*'. From that time on, solidarity (in the political sense of the term in particular) has been closely linked with democracy and with social movements which strove to achieve democracy, or more democracy.

Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept was also used in a broader sense by sociologists such as Durkheim or Parsons, who equated solidarity with the normative social integration of societies. But when it comes to the political system of modern society, the close relationship between solidarity and democracy was contained and reappeared in the foreground, at least in the Habermasian theory of communicative action.¹² Yet, one must keep in mind that solidarity is not something that is exclusively democratic, in particular when it comes to religious solidarity. Not only do the Taliban hate democracy, the protestant church also supported Hitler, and – not long ago – the Roman Catholic Church was in favour of fascism and military dictatorships and rejected human rights and democracy.

(4) On the other hand, the relationship of modern *democracy* to *religion* is no less ambivalent. The term *secularization* was used most prominently as a legal category that meant the expropriation of the real estate of the church by the French Revolution's republican (and strongly anti-Christian) government. Modern democracies replace biblical brotherhood with secular solidarity, and the frequent use of 'solidarity' in nearly all new constitutional and international legal documents during the last 30 years has gone hand in hand with a further devaluation of the always weak constitutional references to God or Christian background or privileges.¹³

But even if modern democracy is a completely secularized project, as a project it has some striking internal links with the *religious sources of solidarity*. All democratic constitutions combine ideas that originate from two ancient sources: republicanism and monotheism.¹⁴ Roughly speaking, modern democracies take from *monotheism* the ideas

10 Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarity. From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community*, (Cambridge: MIT-Press 2005)

11 Brunkhorst, *Solidarity*, Chap. I, 3

12 See in particular J. Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1992)

13 Erhard Denninger, *Menschenrechte und Grundgesetz*, (Weinheim: Beltz 1994)

14 Brunkhorst, *Solidarity*, Chap. I

of universal equity and of the equal value and worth of each individual human being – ‘that all men are created equal’ (*Declaration of Independence*). And from ancient *republicanism* they take the idea that democratic equality and freedom need a legal framework and an institutional embodiment, outlined in the constitutional law of checks and balances which in German is called ‘*Staatsorganisationsrecht*’ (untranslatable). Only the reference to the two very different sources of Christian transcendental universalism, and Roman law and Roman republicanism, which have been combined within the Catholic Church since the 12th century,¹⁵ can explain the specific and highly improbable dialectical mix of a *never moderated, radical utopianism* with *legally binding, procedural limitations*, which has been highly characteristic of all democratic constitutional revolutions since the late 18th century. Modern democracy no longer exists once this institutionalised tension between utopianism and legalism vanishes, and democracy faces a serious crisis whenever utopianism overrules legalism or legalism represses utopianism.

Now, there are several questions. The first one is: Does modern democracy not only historically originate from but also still *depend* conceptually on religious meaning? (II) Are there ways out of the strict alternative of either *dependency* or *independency*? Here, I guess, the early Habermas found one plausible way out (III). I will then discuss briefly whether the democratic nation state has solved the problem within the realm of a completely secularized society (IV). In the last section I will come to the very question addressed in my essay: What is the possible destiny of democratic solidarity in times of global capitalism, global religion and global public power? (V)

II

There are two mutually exclusive readings of the theory of secularization. I will call them *independency theory* and *dependency theory*. I start with a brief sketch of the classical 18th and 19th century, and then switch to the postmodern version of the *independency theory*.

For the *critique of ideology* from Holbach to Marx, from Freud to Sartre, modern political and practical concepts such as *enlightenment, civil society, emancipation, state, autonomy, positive law, popular sovereignty, universal moral dignity, freedom, equity, democracy* and *solidarity* can be completely justified within an exclusively post-metaphysical and post-theological conceptual framework. From this point of view, traditional religion, religious fundamentalism, monotheism and metaphysics¹⁶ are all ideological obstacles on the road towards a better life and a better society. Enlightenment is the great force of *liberation from religious heteronomy*: from ‘cheating priests’ (Holbach), from ‘opium for the people’ (Marx), from ‘illusion’ (Freud).

15 Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983)

16

Therefore, Marx once argued that we should get rid of the 'the nightmare' of 'the traditions of all dead generations'.¹⁷ Freud moved in the same direction with his famous goal of psychoanalysis: to overcome the dominance of the past over the present. Only then, Marx argued, will we become free to construct our own 'substance' and 'create' the 'poems of the future'.¹⁸ For Marx, modernity is equally distant from the pagan-republican nightmares of ancient Rome and Athens and the religious nightmares of Jerusalem and Christian Rome. Once modernity is completely developed, all dependency on these nightmares from the European past will disappear.

Postmodernists or neo-pragmatists such as Rorty agree with the independency-theory, but they argue (together with Blumenberg) against Holbach, Kant, Marx and Freud that classical enlightenment is not independent enough from the repressive, elitist and authoritarian universalism of monotheism and metaphysics.¹⁹ We can become independent of Marx's nightmares. But we can rid ourselves of the nightmares of the past *only* if we get rid of all ideas of justification or self-justification of freedom, democracy and solidarity, because scientific justification is the modern heir to the repressive universalism of monotheism and metaphysics, and self-reflection is only a modernist variation on the Platonic 'mirror of nature'.²⁰ If we forget about justification, validity and all claims of truth, then the nightmares of the European tradition that originate in Jerusalem, Athens and Rome will disappear, and we – unlike Marx's expectation – will *preserve* all the great old, but now *harmless* (because invalid), metaphors of the European past for our present use. Because we can make self-liberating and democratic use of them, we must not ban the old images and burn the old books. Rorty's basic idea is not to overcome metaphysics (like Marx) by changing the *substance* but (like Dewey or Gadamer) by changing its *interpretation*, and to reread people like Marx as people who are revolutionaries, not because of their *discoveries*, but because they have invented new and revolutionary *vocabularies* which enrich our life and strengthen our ability to cope with social problems. Marx was wrong to expect the creation of a new 'substance' from the socialist revolution, but he was right to inspire us to 'create' the 'poems of the future'.

Therefore, Rorty argues, the *domination of the past over the present*, which Marx and Freud were right to criticize, ends together with the end of justification, validity and truth. Only when this end is reached, will we be liberated, not, as Marx thought, *from* all the old metaphors and semantics, but free to use the endless sources of metaphoric meaning *for* our own purposes. Only then can we make emancipative and egalitarian use of these sources to construct our identity ironically, to transform contingency into individual freedom, to invent inspiring narratives of democratic solidarity. It is not *utopianism* that sets us apart from Marx but *justification*. Whereas Marx argues that the separation

17 Karl Marx, *Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, MEGA (Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe) I, 11, (Berlin: Dietz 1985), 97

18 K. Marx, *18. Brumaire*, 101

19 Richard Rorty, *Kontingenz, Ironie und Solidarität*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1989)

20 Rorty, *Der Spiegel der Natur*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1981)

of objective and universal truth from its melange with oppression is the condition for universal liberation, Rorty argues that only liberation *from* objective justification and universal truth makes us free to reinterpret the past, thus enabling us to make democratic use of all the old metaphors, and to use them as means or instruments of solidarity. If we take away the truth claims, we can see (for example) that the message of the Bible and the message of the Communist Manifesto are both the same, and we can combine them to make the world a better place.²¹ We should not try to convince everybody that our universal propositions are true but simply try to 'expand the reference of us as far as we can.'²²

On the other hand, opposing Marx and Rorty, there are the proponents of the *dependency theory*. Political theologians, such as Carl Schmitt on the right or Walter Benjamin on the left, object to the independency theory, and they defend a thesis which they both have in common, namely the thesis that all major political concepts of modern society are deeply dependent on Europe's Biblical heritage, and concepts such as *freedom, democracy, solidarity, empire, sovereignty, autonomy* etc. can therefore never be free and independent, or find justification without reference to religious meaning and substantial religious truth.²³ Philosophers like the late Heidegger or the late Horkheimer agree with Schmitt on this point when they suggest that 'only a God can save us' (Heidegger), or that there is 'no moral justice without God' (Horkheimer).²⁴ If there is no longer any objective religious legitimacy or justice behind positive law, then neither – so the right wing political theologians say – will the state have a chance of surviving when a serious crisis arises (Schmitt),²⁵ nor – so the left wing political theologians say – would the revolutionary opponents of the capitalist state have any chance of performing the "*waltenden Gewalt*" (Benjamin) of revolutionary or divine justice, and of making the one and only revolution that brings the history of decay to an end, to a messianic 'still-stand'.²⁶ Dependency on religious meaning is in all these cases something that is transcendental. Whatever we do, we cannot avoid it, and, if we try, we must repress the truth and follow illusionary projections of a '*Zeit der Neutralisierungen*'²⁷ (Schmitt) or false consciousness, commodity fetishism and reification (Benjamin).

21 Rorty, *Das Kommunistische Manifest – 150 Jahre danach*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1998);

Rorty, 'Heidegger wider die Pragmatisten', in: *neue hefte für philosophie* 23, 1984, 21

22 Rorty, 'Solidarity or Objectivity', in: J. Raichman / Cornel West, ed., *Post- and analytical Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press 1986), 3ff

23 Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, (Berlin: Duncker&Humblot 1990, 1922); Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in: *Gesammelte Schriften* I 2, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1978), 693ff

24 An important difference still remains. For Heidegger it 'a God', and that means he refers to a pagan idea of divinity, and for Horkheimer it is the biblical monotheistic God

25 Schmitt, *Theologie*, 49; Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, 'Die Entstehung des Staats als Vorgang der Säkularisation', in: *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1991), 92-114, 112

26 Jacques Derrida, *Gesetzeskraft. Der mystische Grund der Autorität*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1991)

27 English: 'Times Neutralization'. This is the title of an appendix to Schmitt's essay: *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 1932, Engl. transl.: Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Schmitt's basic assumption is that the process of secularization can never reach a rational foundation or a reinterpretation of individual freedom and democratic solidarity that is *independent* of religious, and in particular Christian, claims of truth. On the contrary, every step that follows modern ideas of Enlightenment and rational discourse is a necessary step of decay, and a victory of the Antichrist. All we can do to prevent accelerated decay (*katechon*) is to defend authoritarian state power against all temptations of equal freedom and democratic solidarity. For Schmitt, *secularization* means that concepts which stem from a process of secularization can never emancipate us from their theological origins, and *democracy, popular sovereignty, autonomy, enlightenment* and so on are therefore damned from the very beginning. 'Secularization' in Schmitt's reading is an ironic term that denies its own possibility.²⁸ Walter Benjamin is not so far from this version of a negative philosophy or theology of history. But there is an important difference.

In contrast to Schmitt, for Benjamin there was never a better past and, for Benjamin, Schmitt's authoritarian Christian state (with inquisition, torture and *ius ad bellum*) was a nightmare. His political theology relies on the idea of a *weak messianic power* which is completely internal to Modernity and in particular to modern art. His utopia is not the *past* (of a realm of God that has existed since the birth of Jesus the Christ) but the *future*, the coming messianic redemption from all evil. Benjamin's completely unorthodox theological, or, as Habermas once called it, his *crypto-theological*, point is that modern society destroys all strong (and metaphysical) powers of (as we now can see) false Messiahs, and leaves us only a weak messianic power, which is the power of the true Messiah. His power is strong enough to make the one and final revolution, not despite but because of its weakness. This is the case because the messianic power, for the first time in its long and disastrous history, is not completely, but nearly completely internalized within modern society, and hence can transform society from within.²⁹

Therefore, only inner-worldly forces, *revolutionary action, aesthetic performance* or *aesthetic criticism* can disclose the '*waltende Gewalt*' of messianic justice. True universal

28 It is against this reading of 'secularization' that Hans Blumenberg's: *Legitimität der Neuzeit*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1976) was directed. Yet Blumenberg goes too far to drop the term in defence of the legitimacy of the modern age, simply because Schmitt makes a very idiosyncratic use of 'secularization', which differs completely from Weber, from whom Schmitt took it. For Weber, secularization means, for example that the spirit of capitalism works well even after its religious roots in the *protestant* ethic are no longer vivid. There still remains then a serious problem (of freedom and meaning of life) caused by secularization, by which is meant the loss of all ethical roots of this now mere instrumental ('purposive rational') spirit (see the end of his: *Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*). But, conceptually, Weber had (unlike Schmitt, Heidegger and Horkheimer) no problem replacing the religious ethics of Protestantism by completely profane ethics through a further rationalization of values ('*Wertrationalisierung*'). It is along this Weberian track that Parsons pursued his concept of an ongoing evolutionary process of value generalization (see in particular: Talcott Parsons/ Gerald Platt, *Die amerikanische Universität: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der Erkenntnis*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1990).

29 Benjamin has developed the idea of a weak messianic power in close contact with his friend Theodor W. Adorno, and it is obviously an unorthodox mix of Jewish, Christian and historical-materialistic sources

solidarity is revealed by *criticism*, is performed in *works of art*, and – in the end – is realized by a *revolution* that is at the same time the performance of divine justice. This revolution realizes the true *messianic solidarity*, with all the living and the dead victims of so-called historical (including social democratic) progress, and it leaves behind all viable, hence reformist, institutionally limited and legally self-organized versions of *democratic solidarity*. In Benjamin utopianism clearly trumps legalism.

Unlike Marx, for Benjamin the paradigm of *criticism* is not the *critique of ideology* but *aesthetic criticism*. Hence, a radical critique of modern society, Benjamin argues, presupposes not only (with Marx) the unchaining of all forces of technical productivity, but also (against Marx) the unchaining of the latent and, only in works at the vanguard of modern art, present actuality of the biblical tradition. The *humpbacked gnome* ('*bucklig Zwerg*') of theology must become the secret director of the Marxist project. For Benjamin, the socialist revolution would not be realized if it were achieved without the material equivalent of redemption and resurrection.

To conclude: Benjamin concurs with Schmitt's fundamentalist criticism of liberal and social democratic progress, but for him the potential that leads out of the 'catastrophe' of *all* former history, on which Paul Klee's famous Angel of History looks back, is nothing else than a *self-radicalization of modernity*.³⁰ It is here that Benjamin's idiosyncratic (*eigensinnige*) version of modernism and criticism becomes relevant to Habermas's theory of communicative action.

III

In the early 1970s, Jürgen Habermas made a pathbreaking attempt to reinterpret Benjamin's basic idea of the weak messianic power of aesthetic criticism in terms of a theory of communicative action.³¹ For Habermas, Benjamin's idea of aesthetic criticism is interesting not because of the idea of a messianic revolution that ends all revolutions and all history, but because, in important aspects, Benjamin's aesthetic criticism fits an unrestricted, no longer technically or functionally one-sided, and no longer stubborn instrumental interpretation of rationality that is modern. It appears to Habermas that there is a plausible way to reconstruct Benjamin's crypto-theological idea of aesthetic criticism within the categorical framework of a theory of communicative rationality.

Habermas agrees with Marx and Benjamin that the democratic, liberating and productive potential of modern society is repressed in some important respects by modern capitalism, class rule and other forms of structural domination. But one of the strong post or neo-Marxist points of the theory of communicative action is that it covers both Marx *and* Benjamin, because it replaces the old Marxist idea of the unchaining of all the *productive*

30 Benjamin, *Geschichte*

31 Habermas, 'Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik – die Aktualität Walter Benjamins', in: Siegfried Unseld, ed.: *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1972), 173-223

forces of technical productivity with the post-Marxist idea of unchaining all the *productive forces of communication*. This includes, at the one end of a communicative continuum of practices, the fact that even the potential of technical productivity can only be made explicit in reaching an understanding in a *theoretical discourse* – and the basic idea of communicative power includes, at the other end of the same continuum, the interpretation of the world in the light of our needs (including the need for redemption from injustice, suffering and oppression), and this interpretation of our needs, Habermas argues later in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, can only be made explicit by *aesthetic criticism* or *expressive* (or *therapeutic*) *discourses*. To achieve the latter we must make use of the semantic potential of the past, and to do this, we must take seriously the claims of validity which are related to the old narratives and past ideas of tradition.³²

This is the reason why Habermas calls Benjamin's version of aesthetic-theological-political criticism '*redemptive criticism*' ('*rettende Kritik*'), which he distinguished already in his 1972 Benjamin speech from the *consciousness-raising* critique of ideology ('*bewußtmachende Kritik*'). With this distinction, Habermas decentres both redemptive and consciousness-raising criticism. Whereas, for Benjamin, *redemptive criticism* was still the one and only revolutionary method of criticism, and whereas, for Marx, it was the critique of ideology that made a similar claim to totality and total truth, Habermas's theory of communicative rationality *pluralizes* the universe of critique into a lot of different perspectives which no longer cover the old Hegelian and Marxist unity of reason and reality or reason and revolution. Therefore, Habermas's idea of '*redemptive criticism*' resembles in some respects Rorty's *radical reinterpretation* of traditions, but there is an important difference.

For Rorty, the *loss of validity and truth* is all that is needed to disclose the semantic richness of the past for present expropriation, whereas, for Habermas, the disclosure and radical reinterpretation of the tradition presupposes that we take the metaphysical or theological *validity claims* of the past seriously. This is what connects him with Benjamin and separates him from Rorty. For Habermas, it is the loss of these claims in particular that *closes* access to the semantic richness of the past which is needed to create *new* identities and *new* narratives of solidarity. Only our claims to validity, which are co-original with the evolution of communicative language, connect the past with the future through our present talk. The point that Habermas makes in connection with Benjamin is that the sources of radical reinterpretation and public solidarity *can dry up through the repression of validity claims which are related to the semantics of our tradition*.

For Habermas, this conjecture has two implications: *Firstly*, redemptive criticism implies that there is no democracy without a political (or practical) idea of *truth*. It must have a post-metaphysical meaning only. *All* who are concerned must be included in the process of collective self-determination, and, when it comes to the way we organize our

³² This idea goes back to interpretation of Freud in: Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1968)

relation to the tradition publicly, then also those who are no longer able to talk have to be represented in a public discourse that claims to be valid for everybody. That is why Habermas argues today, as he always did, that a 'post-truth-democracy could be no longer democratic'.³³ Secondly, repression and domination not only have, as Marx or Rorty suppose, the materialist or social structural meaning of *economic* expropriation and *political* oppression, but also, as Bloch, Benjamin and Adorno, or later Foucault and Judith Butler, argued, the *ethical*, *cultural* or *meta-political* meaning of discourse-power, discourse-police, semantic exclusion, silencing etc. Therefore, the truth claims of the silenced voices matter when it comes to a public discourse about our common way of life, in local communities as well as in global communities/ community.

The point Habermas makes against Marx and Benjamin is that *consciousness-raising critique of ideology* does not necessarily exclude *redemptive criticism*, and vice versa. Both versions of modern criticism raise complementary claims to different aspects of truth in an open spectrum of different discourses. The *distinction* between these two types of criticism can be integrated into a post-metaphysical and secular framework of discourses, and hence overcome the contradiction between the independency theory and the dependency theory on the grounds of a communicative rationality that is modern. The idea of *redemptive criticism* opens the *independent* and self-reflexive realm of autonomous discourse for validity claims which *depend* on the semantic potential of the past. What is true for the dependency theory is that there is no sufficiently *universal*, *equal* and *free* public discourse if it is – as Rorty or Marx presuppose – closed against the claims of validity that stem from the voices of the past. But, on the other hand, any undistorted practical discourse presupposes self-reflexive autonomy, egalitarian access, freedom of speech etc.³⁴ Therefore, all the repressed, silenced, lost and forgotten voices of the past can come back as present voices within the modern discourse, if, and only if, we drop any idea of higher truth, and make the same counterfactual claims to validity for the voices of the past as we do for any other proposition.³⁵

What Habermas needs from intellectual projects such as Benjamin's crypto-theology, Adorno's negative dialectics or Derridas's deconstructivism is what can be rationally reconstructed in terms of communicative rationality, and that is a theory of redemptive criticism, and he needs it *first and foremost* because *communicative rationality* has the same extension as *universal solidarity*. Communicative rationality is merely the discursive side of the performance of solidarity. It is not separate from but part of the performance and expression of solidarity. Secondly, Habermas needs a rationalized equivalent for the kind of *universal solidarity* that Benjamin (or Horkheimer) always had in mind and that was present in all monotheistic religions, simply because the communicative concept of truth implies universal acceptability for all potential speakers, dead or alive, born

33 My translation. The German original goes: A 'post-truth-democracy... wäre keine Demokratie mehr': Habermas, 'Religion in der Öffentlichkeit', in: Naturalismus, 119-154, hier: 150f

34 On undistorted ('*unverzerzte*') vs. distorted ('*verzerrte*') communication see Habermas, Erkenntnis

35 Habermas, 'Kommunikative Freiheit und negative Theologie', in: Emil Angehrn, Hinrich Fink-Eitel, Christian Iber, Georg Lohmann, ed., *Dialektischer Negativismus*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp) 15-34

or unborn. For Benjamin (and Horkheimer), a truly universal solidarity must not only include all potential (or potentially silenced) speakers (or all men) who are alive today and in future, but also those who cannot raise their voices because they are dead. As Habermas demonstrates, any reconstruction of Benjamin's redemptive criticism in terms of communicative rationality must drop the religious hope that all men should be *substantially* re-presented, but he keeps the idea of a virtual participation through present *interpretation*.

Yet, even if we – for the sake of the argument – accept this rational and post-substantial, hence post-metaphysical reconstruction of Benjamin's *weak messianic power*, there remains a conceptual problem with the religious sources of solidarity. The actual problem is not a problem of understanding Benjamin, the problem is that the communicative constructions and reconstructions of redemptive criticism, expressive discourse etc. *do not cover*, and *cannot make explicit*, the 'opaque core of religious experience'.³⁶ The problem is that there exists a stubborn religious experience in society, and this experience is, *firstly*, 'abysmally alien' ("*abgründig fremd*") to 'thinking that is discursive' and, *secondly*, this experience is not simply irrational or un-enlightened. On the contrary, it still works as a *reasonable* or *comprehensible source of public solidarity*. It is reasonable or comprehensible because the religious sources of solidarity still create important (theological and philosophical) *arguments*, inspire *practical learning processes*, motivate the (sometimes and in some respects) reasonable use of *political communicative power*. Religious experience is therefore, and insofar as it is an important source of public learning processes, not a private but a *public matter*.

Extreme criminal actions by fundamentalist groups are not merely a problem of public security and penal justice, they can also – and Derrida (in his Adorno-speech) *and* Habermas (in his Friedenpreis-speech) did so immediately after September 11 – serve to remind us that Western perspectives may be one-sided, exclusive, silencing, that our way of practising secular politics may not be secular enough, that our liberal universal cosmopolitanism could be latently imperial and repressive. Terrorism does not come out of the blue or out of the evil heart of darkness. Terrorism, anti-Western nationalism and other more or less aggressive fundamentalist movements have social causes, which are different from case to case, but usually hang together with the experience of repression, expropriation, torture, colonialism or imperialism. They have these social *causes*, even if the *reasons* given for anti-imperialist activities are the worst.

IV

The Habermasian idea of overcoming the contradiction between the independency and the dependency theory on the grounds of communicative rationality comes close to but never reaches the core of religious experience, which remains opaque. But the Habermasian

36 Habermas, *Naturalismus*, 150 (also the following quote from here)

idea seems to fit very well with what one could call, in Rawlsian terms, the ideal theory of a modern democracy. This is the case because up to now, despite all its faults, the modern democratic public sphere seems to be capable of opening itself again and again to any claim of voices excluded from validity, and *learning* from these voices, hence transforming the *many* and *overlapping* clashes of civilization and social classes, which modern society produces, constructs and experiences every new decade, into a radical reformism that leads to the 'inclusion of the other'.³⁷ The political idea of the *inclusion of the other* misses the 'opaque' and 'abysmally alien' core of religious experience, but it is the best translation we have of the Jewish-Christian hope for redemption into a completely secularized public language, and it is not only a translation into the language of philosophical discourse, but also a translation into the language of constitutional law.

Since the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, we have been able to observe impressive progress in terms of social and institutional learning, which has regularly led to the inclusion of formerly excluded voices, persons, groups, classes, sexes, races, countries, regions etc. In the words of Rawls: 'The same equality of the Declaration of Independence which Lincoln invoked to condemn slavery can be invoked to condemn the inequality and oppression of women.'³⁸ The experience of a successful learning process of social inclusion can be, and has been, extended to the virtual voices of dead generations as well as to the real voices of non-Western cultures.

Yet the reality of Western democracies often looks different, and the faults and even crimes against international law, and the violations of human and civic rights range from symbolic exclusion through imperialist war to declared or non-declared states of siege. The story of impressive normative learning processes is not the whole story. If we tell the whole story, then we have to accept that in many cases (and, in some way, in all cases) the expansion of social inclusion took place at the price of new exclusion, or new forms of first latent, and later manifest oppression. The history of Western civilization and Western democracy is not only a success story of expansion through the inclusion of the other. It is at the same time a story of expansion through imperialism. After the first European division of the world in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 between Spain and Portugal, imperialism vanished and reappeared with ever new means, and under ever new guises and labels, even anti-imperialist labels.³⁹ It is true that the many faces of imperialism are always followed by new pushes of social inclusion. But the story is also true the other way round. From the Christian robbers, missionaries, inquisitors and humanists of the 16th century, including Vitoria's vehement criticism of the project of civilizing the heart of darkness of the 18th century, including both perspectives, that of Kurtz and that of Marlow, followed firstly by the humanist project of the gentle civilizers

37 Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp)

38 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia 1993), XXIX

39 Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press 2004)



of nations of the 19th century⁴⁰, then followed by decolonization, developmental politics and nation-building since the 1960s, towards humanitarian intervention and the war on terrorism of our present age – every expansion of inclusion, every new emancipation, every expansion of democracy and human rights has at the same time been a reinvention of exclusion and oppression, and even the present state of inclusion of the other in the new cosmopolitan civil society sometimes appears to be nothing other than the expression of the highly exclusive ‘class consciousness of frequent travelers’ like ourselves.⁴¹

But all this does not change the fact that all modern democratic constitutions rely on the one universal legal principle of the *exclusion of inequalities*.⁴² I would call this with Christian Joerges the *facticity of normativity*.⁴³ The normative facticity of the exclusion of inequalities becomes manifest when communicative power appears as the ‘power of revenge’, as ‘*rächende Gewalt*’ (Habermas). Legal textbooks, and in particular constitutional textbooks are not only talk, they are ‘objective spirit’ (Hegel). They can be misused, they can be implemented by and in the particular interest of a small ruling class, but they ‘can strike back’ as well.⁴⁴

Yet the *objectivity* of the constitutional *spirit* of the revolutions of the 18th century is the modern nation state. This state always had many faces, and they include the Arendtian face of violence, the Habermasian face of administrative power, the Foucaultian face of surveillance and punishment, the faces of imperialism, colonialism, war on terror and so on. But the nation state, once it became democratic, not only had the *administrative power of oppression and control* but also the *administrative power to exclude inequalities* with respect to *individual rights, political participation and equal access to social welfare and opportunities*. Only the modern nation state had not only the *idea* but also the *power* to do that. Up until now, all advances in the reluctant *inclusion of the other* are advances of the modern nation state. National constitutional regimes have solved the *three basic conflicts* of the modern capitalist and functionally differentiated society. They have solved the crises of the

- (1) *religious civil wars* from the 16th and 17th centuries (which the absolutist monarchies of the 17th and 18th centuries or the developmental dictatorships of the 20th century could only repress relatively effectively),
- (2) *constitutional fights over public autonomy* (or public autonomy vs. administrative power) from the 18th and 19th centuries,

40 Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations. The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870 bis 1960*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press) 2001

41 Craig Calhoun, “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually existing Cosmopolitanism”, in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 1001, 4/ 2002, 869-897; see also: Calhoun, “‘Belonging’ in the cosmopolitan imaginary”, in: *Ethnicities* 3 (4), 531-553

42 Thomas H. Marshall, *Bürgerrechte und soziale Klassen*, (Frankfurt: Campus 1992), 33ff; Rudolf. Stichweh, *Die Weltgesellschaft*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2000), 52

43 Christian Joerges/ Ellen Vos, ed., *EU Committees: Social Regulation, Law and Politics*, (Oxford: Hart 1999)

44 Friedrich Müller, *Wer ist das Volk? Eine Grundfrage der Demokratie, Elemente einer Verfassungstheorie VI*, (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1997), 54

- (3) *social class conflicts* from the 19th and 20th centuries (which authoritarian or communist regimes could only repress, most often at the expense of the lowest and weakest classes or ethnic or religious or other groups).

In the end, it was the advance of egalitarian mass democracy that transformed the bloody revolutionary fights over public autonomy into a *permanent and legal revolution*.⁴⁵ And it was the legally limited yet still untamed utopianism of democratic constitutional regimes that tamed the social class conflicts of modern capitalism by implementing the freedom of markets *together* with the freedom *from* the negative external effects of markets, and it was the communicative power of the same legal utopianism that implemented the equal freedom of *together* with the equal freedom *from* religious and other belief systems.

In all these cases of revolutionary conflicts, the modern democratic nation state was able to disclose two sources of solidarity and fuel social change and radical reformism from the still existing *religious sources*, as well as from the new and independent *profane sources* of solidarity, which were the original invention of 18th century enlightenment.

V

The modern nation state until 1945 was the state of the regional societies of Europe, America and Japan, and the rest of the world was either under their imperial control or kept outside. Until the middle of the 20th century, the *exclusion of inequality* meant internal equity for the citizens of the state, and external inequality for those who did not belong to the regional system of states. There was no serious or legal claim for a *global* exclusion of inequalities.

Yet, during the time from 1945 until the present day, classical imperialism (not hegemony) vanished, Eurocentrism was completely decentred, state sovereignty was equalized, the state went global and, together with the globalisation of the modern constitutional nation state, all functional sub-systems which – from the 16th century until 1945 – were bound to state power and to the regional societies of Europe, America and Japan, became global systems. Even the rational and secular, *regional culture* of Europe and North America has become a rational and secular *culture of the world*, and it constitutes the basic orientations of all main actors of the global society – of states, organizations and human individuals.⁴⁶ At the end of the 20th century, human rights violations, social exclusion of global and local regions and tremendous inequalities did not disappear. But now (and this is the difference between the beginning of the 20th and the 21st centuries) they are perceived as *our own problems*, and not only because we need each other to solve our specific problems, but because we now *have* serious and legally binding claims for the *global exclusion of inequalities*.

45 Justus Fröbel, quoted from: Habermas, 'Ist der Herzschlag der Revolution zum Stillstand gekommen?', in: *Die Ideen von 1789*, Frankfurt 1989

46 On global culture: John W. Meyer, 'World Society and the Nation-State', in: *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 103, 1/ 1997, 144-181; Meyer, *Weltkultur*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2005)

The dependency of the life of *all* human individuals on access to the educational and the economic system, which is simply a brutal fact, together with the formative power of existing world culture, makes individualism and rational life plans unavoidable for everybody, without a single exception. This global society is a *completely secularized society*, with rational power politics, positive law, experimental sciences, academic professions, autonomous art, instrumental economy and technique, a *secularised* global human rights culture, global mass culture and a global semantics of political and economic progress, and, last but not least, an *autonomous sphere of religious values* – which stands not *vis-à-vis* but is located *within* the modern, functionally specialized, and hence secular society.

The most dramatic effect of this process of formation of the global society is the decay of the ability of the nation state to exclude inequalities – even within the highly privileged OECD-world. This first becomes very significant in the *economic system*, where we can observe the complete transformation (1) of the *state-embedded markets of regional late capitalism* into the *market-embedded states of global turbo-capitalism*.⁴⁷ Yet, surprisingly enough, when it comes to the religious sphere of values, we can make a similar observation. Religion also went global, was decontextualized, individualized, universalized, deterritorialized, detraditionalized, in particular by the strong impact of fundamentalist movements of all modern religions.⁴⁸ Hence, the same proposition that is true for the capitalist economy applies to the global society, and is true for the autonomous development of the religious sphere of values. We now are confronted with the transformation (2) of the *state-embedded religions of Western regional society* into the *religion-embedded states of the global society*.

During the last three decades, the freedom *of and from* markets and the freedom *of and from* religion have to a certain extent been (not de-regulated but) *deconstitutionalized*. The first striking effect of this deconstitutionalization is that the freedom (and fierce, sometimes warlike competition) *of* markets explodes globally, and the freedom *from* its negative externalities decays rapidly. And the second striking effect is that the freedom *of* religions explodes, sometimes so much that it leads to religious war, but, at the same time, the freedom *from* religion comes under pressure from a global public.

The rapidly emerging *global public* has also emancipated itself from the bonds of the nation state, and it has therefore also been *deconstitutionalized*. What becomes obvious now, after the experience that the quill of a cartoonist in a Danish provincial newspaper

47 W. Streek, 'Sectoral Specialization: Politics and the Nation State in a Global Economy', paper presented at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Stockholm 2005. As we now can see, the talk about *late capitalism* was not wrong but has to be restricted to state-embedded capitalism, and state-embedded capitalism is indeed over. But what then came was not socialism but global disembedded capitalism, which seems to be as far from the state-embedded capitalism of the old days as from socialism.

48 Roy, Weg; Berger, Desecularization; Vasques / Friedmann Marquardt, Globalizing the Sacred.

can cause a global hurricane, is that the global public not only enables the first flourishing of a cosmopolitan civil society, but at the same time lacks all the constitutional regulations and the dense legal networks that alone can guarantee *equal* freedom of speech, and that existed up until now only within the democratic nation state.⁴⁹ Hence, also for the global public, the great hope of a globalization of deliberative democracy, it seems that the same proposition that is true for capitalism and religion again becomes true for the global public.

With the change (3) from a *state-embedded public* to *public-embedded states*, we will be forced to experience the return of the old European problem of heavy fights over public autonomy. Yet, all the nightmares that appeared in Europe one after the other, each at a comfortable distance in time of a hundred years, now appear all at once on a global scale: hard times for democracy and solidarity. But, perhaps the capacity of the global society to solve problems has grown with all the new communication media, and is now big enough to also cope with the return of class struggle, religious civil wars and constitutional revolutions.

49 Cass R. Sunstein, *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech*, (New York 1993)

Challenging Habermas on the Moral Legitimacy of Religious Voices in Democratic Politics: Why Overlapping Justifications of Human Rights May Leave Secularist Worries Uncalled-for

Comments on Hauke Brunkhorst's lecture 'Hard Times for Democracy'.

Tore Lindholm, Associate Professor at Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo

Habermas starts out from the observation that "religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance since the epochmaking change of 1989-1990". (1)¹ – Notably, recent processes of religious revival and desecularization took hold first outside the West. During the 1990s public and scholarly debates about the legitimacy of religious voices in politics became very prominent in the US. And by the beginning of the new Millennium a more obstinately secularized Europe also has to deal with the challenge of religious voices in politics, partly as a result of more recent influx of immigrants, in tandem with processes of globalization.

I fully share Habermas's appraisal of the importance of the observed phenomenon, in particular for providing test-cases to our thinking about *democratic political morality for irreversibly plural polities*. However, I cannot share Habermas's particular "justificatory-liberal" response to the perceived challenge arising in the public spheres of pluralist democracies: the challenge of an emerging (or a reemerging) practice of *public political argumentation that is overtly and candidly religious*.

So, I shall first praise Habermas, then address his position following the lead of his own presentation: as progressive modifications of Rawls's views, then offer my objections to Habermas's proposal and finally indicate my counterproposal. I shall suggest that a proper morality for political argumentation in pluralist democracies ought not require that differing parties justify public policies from – somehow – shared or identical grounds. Democratic political morality is better served by counseling that differing parties engage in *overlapping justifications* and solidaric support of shared institutionally embodied principles, such as the institutions for equal protection of human rights for all. Even if most

1 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the public sphere", at page 10. This is Habermas's Holberg Lecture prepared for the Holberg Prize Seminar, University of Bergen, 29 November 2005. Bracketed numbers in the text refer to pages of the longer version of the lecture distributed to participants in advance of the Seminar

members of most polities submitted *for good reasons properly their own* to internationally codified human rights we would still not have established a universal political ethics, not all the way down. But a gain in practical feasibility might more than compensate, I think, for the loss of a philosophical universalist ethics that cannot by right be justified in the circumstances of irreversibly plural polities.

Praise

My praise of Habermas is threefold

First, I commend Habermas's choice of topic for the 2005 Holberg Prize Seminar: the philosophically puzzling and politically urgent problem of coming to terms with the moral legitimacy of religious arguments in the public political discourse and political decision-making of pluralist democracies.

Second, I applaud Habermas's point of departure for this discussion: John Rawls's Political Liberalism and in particular Rawls's conception of the 'public use of reason.' According to Habermas, and following Rawls, we are to ask: How does the constitutional separation of state and church² influence the role that religious voices, traditions, communities and organizations are allowed to play in civil society and the political public sphere? And above all, how does the separation of state and church affect the legitimacy of public religious argumentation in the political opinion and will formation of citizens themselves? (6)

And third, I welcome that Habermas in one respect improves significantly on Political Liberalism's answer to the presumed problem of demarcating morally legitimate uses of religious arguments from *morally illegitimate* uses of religious arguments in public political arenas. In Rawls's view, drawing solely on religious doctrines (or rather: "comprehensive doctrines") in political discussions in public arenas has democratic moral legitimacy only "provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support." (18)³ This Rawlsian proviso Habermas mitigates: He proposes that religious citizens, just to the extent they neither hold public office nor are candidates for such, be relieved from the moral duty of satisfying the proviso. The burden of satisfying such a "strict demand" should be placed, so Habermas, "solely at the door of politicians, who within state institutions are subject to the obligation to remain neutral in the face of competing world views; in other words it can only be made of anyone who holds a public office or is a candidate for such." (18)

So Habermas's revision, in my view for the indisputably better, is his *narrowing down of the scope* of Rawls's proposal for a moral screening of public political arguments based

2 Incidentally: In Norway, the host country of the Holberg Prize, the constitutional separation of state and church is still unfinished business

3 Habermas is quoting John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol 67 No. 3, 1997:783f; italics are added by Habermas

solely on religious or otherwise comprehensive doctrines. As for the rest of Habermas's proposals I am less sanguine.

Habermas's progressive modifications of Rawls

Another aspect of Habermas's revision of the Rawlsian *proviso* is that he transforms Rawls's understanding of the underlying problem in a candidly secularist direction: from a problem of devising moral grounds for requiring that political arguments, if they are based solely on comprehensive doctrines and not in the end supported by "proper political reasons", be weeded out, to one of devising moral grounds for requiring their translation from the vocabulary of a specific religious community "into a generally accessible *secular* language." (19, italics added) Says Habermas: "Every citizen must know and accept that *only secular reasons* count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations." (20, italics added)

So Habermas differs from Rawls not just by restricting his liberal translation filter to that stage of public opinion and policy formation at which religion-based political arguments would "trespass" on the threshold to government officeholders dealing in binding public decisions to be implemented coercively. Habermas also departs from Rawls by making his (significantly contracted) version of the liberal constraint on such arguments explicitly *secularist*, in contrast to a constraint articulated in terms of "proper political reasons" (whatever that is).

To proceed, I need to nail down more exactly *why* Rawls, Habermas and other "justificatory liberals"⁴ do spot a moral challenge in the practice of political argumentation that is overtly and candidly religious, when exercised in (variously demarcated) public arenas of pluralist⁵ democracies? The answer is not entirely obvious; it is not that justificatory liberals straightforwardly reject religious doctrines as false and religious faith as illusory. I shall try to elucidate, beginning with Rawls's terms "reasonable comprehensive doctrine" and "reasonable pluralism."

Now, a *comprehensive doctrine* is reasonable, in Rawls technical language, only if it endorses the constitutional essentials of a pluralist democracy and its corresponding political institutions, affirming "equal basic rights and liberties for all citizens, including

4 The term "justificatory liberalism" originates perhaps with Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Convictions in Liberal Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002:11. Eberle includes John Rawls, Charles Larmore, Bruce Ackerman, Robert Audi, Amy Gutman, Thomas Nagel, Lawrence Solum, and Gerald Gaus. I herewith add Jürgen Habermas's name to this impressive list of justificatory liberals.

5 I shall use the terms "pluralist" and "pluralism" to indicate a *normative pro-stance* to the fact of societal plurality or diversity as to people's religious, life-stance, moral, or philosophical doctrines and commitments. This usage differs from that of Rawls, who tends to use the terms "pluralist" and "pluralism" to indicate *factual* plurality. When alluding to Rawls's language I may occasionally use "secularism" in square quote.

liberty of conscience and the freedom of religion. On the other hand comprehensive doctrines that cannot support such a democratic society are not reasonable.”⁶

Rawls commendably emphasized (and, not so commendably, dubbed) the contemporary predominance of the “fact of reasonable pluralism.”⁷ This expression denotes, in Rawlsian parlance, a salient *factual* feature of a polity, namely that its citizens (all or most of them) adhere distributively to a “plurality of reasonable but conflicting comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral”.⁸ The co-existence of conflicting comprehensive religious or life-stance doctrines is of course a well-known political predicament. And, partly thanks to Rawls, it is now widely accepted that factually diverse or plural polities call for political pluralism (in the normative sense, that is to say: implying a widely shared and institutionally embodied pro-stance to plurality as legitimate).

More questionable, however, is the informal inference Rawls, on behalf of citizens of plural democracies, as it were, immediately draws from “the fact of reasonable pluralism”: “Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their [reasonable but] irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake.”⁹

Now, Rawls’s answer to the question he believes “citizens need to consider” is a decisive step and, in my view, a dire misstep: Rawls proposes “that in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth and right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens.”¹⁰ From here follow, in a complex and convoluted train of arguments, Rawls’s controversial tenets about “the public use of reason”, “the criterion of reciprocity”, and “the duty to civility”, tenets to which Habermas in turn subscribes, albeit with frankly secularist revisions.

Let me try to make clear why I have attributed to Rawls what I hold to be a grave misstep. The following two statements (I) and (II) are both lifted with innocuous modifications from Rawls as quoted in preceding paragraphs. But, (I) and (II) are I submit at odds.

(I) Citizens of a pluralist democracy realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their reasonable but irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines.

(II) A comprehensive doctrine is reasonable only if it endorses the constitutional essentials of a pluralist democracy and its corresponding political institutions.

6 Rawls 1997:801

7 See note 5 above

8 Rawls 1997:766

9 Rawls 1997:766

10 Rawls 1997:766

I take the term “realize”, occurring in (I), to indicate a claim of epistemic validity for the tenet that citizens, being committed to one of a set of reasonable but irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines, cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding. According to (II) each reasonable comprehensive doctrine endorses the constitutional essentials of a pluralist democracy and its corresponding political institutions. It follows that citizens’ “realization” that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their comprehensive doctrines must, somehow, be unfounded and wrongheaded. Why? Because *each citizen* is by assumption committed to one of a number of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. (Moreover, each such commitments may, we may assume, be internally well-grounded.) In virtue of her commitment to some reasonable doctrine she endorses the constitutional essentials of a pluralist democracy and its corresponding political institutions (never mind that the comprehensive doctrine she is committed to is irreconcilable with the comprehensive doctrines other citizens are committed to, albeit not on any matters crucial for embracing a common political framework). Now, in my understanding, such a broadly shared endorsement of one’s polity’s constitutional essentials and political institutions – across the divides of in other respects irreconcilable religious, philosophical or moral doctrines – may amount to substantive agreement and mutual understanding about matters of key political import in a pluralist democracy. I defend and exploit this view below.

But, Habermas follows Rawls in holding that in a democracy in which “reasonable pluralism” prevails, democratic political morality requires more *in principle* than what could (as just shown) amount to each party’s internally well-grounded support of their polity’s constitutional essentials and each party’s internally well-grounded loyalty to its corresponding political institutions.

So, overlapping support from mutually irreconcilable grounds would not suffice, measured by the idea of political legitimacy Habermas and Rawls shares. Why? Because public justifications of coercive policies, to have moral political legitimacy, must be “based on *the criterion of reciprocity* [which] says: Our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions – were we to state them as government officials – are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept these reasons.”¹¹

I take Rawls to imply that *citizens* when engaging in “the public use of reason,” based on “the criterion of reciprocity” and observing “the duty of civility,” reason from identical or shared principles, “puritanically” untarnished by competing comprehensive doctrines. This understanding Habermas gives a candid secularist twist: Relying on particular religious grounds in political argumentation would transgress against the criterion of reciprocity as a moral requirement. After all, not all citizens are religious, much less do they adhere to the same religion or denomination. I submit that this concern with rational homogeneity explains why Habermas, Rawls and other justificatory liberals do spot a moral challenge

11 Rawls 1997:771, italics added

in the practice of political argumentation that is overtly and candidly religious, when exercised in (variously demarcated) public arenas of pluralist democracies.

Habermas accepts much of Rawls understanding of the problem situation for devising a morally suitable moral regulation of political argument in pluralist democracies. For him, too, the challenge is to spell out and justify an answer to the question about *what kinds of reasons citizens may reasonably give one another*, across the divides of their irreconcilable doctrinal commitments.

I finally mention that Habermas introduces a further revision of Rawls to which, other things being equal, I would assent. The challenge of moral legitimacy for citizens' justifications of coercive policies cannot be restricted only to cases where fundamental political matters are at stake. Habermas finds a limitation to fundamental political questions quite unrealistic. A moral duty of civility satisfying the criterion of reciprocity would apply whenever coercive laws and measures are at stake, since in "modern legal systems basic rights in both legislation and adjudication apply immediately to specific statutes so that almost all controversial legal issues can be redefined such as to become issues of principle." (45)

Habermas's general vision of democratic moral legitimacy, from his "justificatory liberal" point of view, is nicely captured in the following quote from his Holberg lecture:

In a secular state only those political decisions are taken to be legitimate as *can be impartially justified in the light of generally accessible reasons*, in other words equally justified vis-à-vis religious and non-religious citizens, and citizens of different confessions. A rule that cannot be justified in an impartial manner is illegitimate as it reflects the fact that one party forces its will on another. Citizens of a democratic society are obliged to provide reasons for one another, as only thus can political power shed its repressive character. This consideration explains the controversial 'proviso' for the use of non-public reasons." (11, italics added)

Requiring political justification from "generally accessible reasons" in a pluralist democracy is, I submit, perhaps not so reasonable. Some pages down in the text comes a dictum I find even more ominous:

Every citizen must know and accept that *only secular reasons* count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations. (20, italics added)

Religious citizens may not be reassured about the impartiality of Habermas's moral doctrine.

Now, requiring a *secular state* is of course uncontroversial, even to most religious people, especially once plurality of religious and life-stance doctrines prevails in their polity (and it does in well nigh every country in the contemporary world). But, has Habermas offered religious citizens good reasons for accepting that their own political arguments and reasons be subjected to liberal legitimacy control, say by being sifted once they would trespass the

threshold of officeholders through Habermas's translation filter into generally accessible and secular reasons? And why should such filtering of religious arguments help avert political repression? Habermas clearly assumes this much:

Majority rule turns into *repression* if the majority deploys religious arguments in the process of political opinion and will formation and refuses to offer those publicly accessible justifications which the losing minority, be it secular or of a different faith, is able to follow and to evaluate in the light of shared standards. The democratic procedure has the power to generate legitimacy precisely because it both includes all participants and has a deliberative character; for the justified presumption of rational outcomes in the long run can solely be based on this. (25, italics added)

However, the institutional thresholds between the 'wild life' of the political public sphere and the formal proceedings within political bodies are also a filter that from the Babel of voices in the informal flows of public communication *allows only secular contributions to pass through*. In parliament, for example, the standing rules of procedure of the house must empower the house leader to have religious statements or justifications expunged from the minutes. The truth content of religious contributions can only enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making if the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere itself. (22)

Habermas sets out, in my view uncontroversially, from the constitutional separation of state and religion/life stance. I assume we may also include, as similarly uncontroversial, that the state be strictly impartial yet respectful¹² toward the diversity of competing religions and life stance communities as regulated by internationally codified human rights norms for protection of freedom of religion or belief (non-religious conviction). But Habermas has so far failed to provide an explicit argumentative bridge *from* his uncontroversial point of departure in the separation of state and religion to his contestable charges against the free use of religious arguments (or arguments based in "comprehensive doctrines") in parliaments, courts, government administrations and public campaigns for political office.

There is no contradiction between accepting as morally mandatory the constitutional separation of state and religion and at the same time welcoming good, candid and pertinent religious arguments in the official arenas Habermas wants to salvage from incursions from "the 'wild life' of the political public sphere". Of course, there are obvious differences between the various official public arenas Habermas addresses. From courts we expect judgments and decisions based on recognized sources of law according

12 Heiner Bielfeldt, "The Liberal Concept of Political Secularism," in Ronald Tinnevelt and Gert Verschraegen, eds: *Between Cosmopolitan Ideals and State Sovereignty*, Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006:99-108. Bielfeldt expressly makes the human rights to freedom of religion or belief, as codified in international treaties and jurisprudence, the normative basis of political liberalism, emphasizing "respectful non-identification" by the state with religions as its linchpin. Bielfeldt's paper was available at time of the 2005 Holberg Seminar.

to sound jurisprudential procedure. But even for tribunals of law disallowing the use of religious language or reasons is, in my view, neither here nor there. And as to the other arenas of official public discourse such rules smack of secularist dogmatism. Turkish authorities have banned wearing the hijab to Muslim women employed by the government from parliament to kindergartens, arguing that Turkey must heed its virtue as a secular state. The comparison is perhaps unfair to Habermas. But what is equally missing from Turkey's and Habermas's secularisms, is an overriding concern about *securing impartial and non-discriminatory effects* of state laws, political programs and administrative measures, in particular for religious or life-stance minorities, dissidents, deviants, and heretics. A properly secular state's legitimate regulatory undertakings, pertaining to competing and quarreling religions in society, should not be distracted by a concern about the language used nor worry about the origins of reasons drawn on in official political discourses. Habermas's justificatory-liberal vindication of rules of procedure of parliaments empowering speakers "to have religious statements or justifications expunged from the minutes" I find particularly disturbing.

Objections

My main objection to Habermas is directed against his assumption of a generally accessible "Secular Esperanto For Political Reasoning" available for the purpose of impartial political justification in plural societies. In this respect, Habermas has parallel assumptions to those of Rawls, when tackling the challenge of religious, respectively comprehensive, argumentations in democratic politics of religiously, morally, ideologically and culturally diverse societies. To wit: they assume the availability of a *generally accessible* secular language cleansed of the vocabulary of particular religious communities (Habermas), respectively the availability a public properly political language from which tenets distinctive to particular comprehensive doctrines are eradicated (Rawls).

I object to these parallel assumptions, noting first that the practical directives for morally legitimate political argumentation linked to these assumptions may often prove unworkable. (We have indisputable examples of overlapping justifications of common morally binding normative institutions in the modern world. Do we have cases of constitutional agreements justified from shared principles all the way down?) But – most important – the respective assumptions about the general availability of "Esperantos For Public Reasoning" (whether in Rawls's "properly political" version or in Habermas's "discursive-secular" variety) are redundant and counterproductive from the normative point of view of a democratic political morality for citizens engaged in debating and resolving political matters in the public arenas of irreversibly plural societies.

A Counterproposal:

Overlapping Justifications of Human Rights

I shall suggest that a proper morality for political argumentation in pluralist democracies need not require that differing parties assess policies on identical or shared grounds all the way down. Political morality and reasonable civic solidarity are better served by differing parties striving for overlapping justifications and a settled consensus on shared

political frameworks. My model example is the struggle for general justification and embrace of human rights for all, each party – group, fraction or individual – submitting *for good reasons properly one's own* to the universal principles and norms that are codified in international law and incorporated, with some variations, into most national constitutional frameworks worldwide.

Let me indicate how overlapping justification of human rights fits into a Principle of Public Justification that is *more liberal* than that of justificatory liberalism:

A coercively implemented law L (or a bill of rights, or a government program) is wrong unless each (or by far the most) members of the public deliberating under factually prevailing circumstances would endorse L given *their own' good reasons*.

The above formula may fit *overlapping support* of, say, human rights bills, or constitutions, or laws from mutually irreconcilable doctrines and convictions, across those divides of religions and life stances that in most modern polities surely have come to stay. It can of course also be interpreted to fit justificatory liberalism's requirement of homogeneous moral groundings. Nothing that I know of militates against the moral legitimacy of the first interpretation, which surely is infinitely more realistic.

According to Habermas, "overlapping justifications" of shared normative frameworks does not qualify as *reasonable* public consensus, since (as he said at the Holberg Seminar in Bergen) it is just "publizierte Konsensus." – Now that is a perspicuous point, indeed.

What makes publicized human rights bills, constitutions, and basic law texts amenable to reasonable and well-grounded overlapping justifications is precisely their eminently public availability as embodied normative structures that have become, or may become, binding on all. Being "publiziert" they are available for deliberative probing, serious criticisms and debate across the divides of differing religions, life stances, ideologies, and philosophies.

At this juncture I cannot but challenge Habermas, the indefatigable philosopher of political reason and "Öffentlichkeit," to have another critical look at the ongoing worldwide project of fortifying overlapping justifications and espousals of universal human rights: norms, codifications, mechanisms included. I submit that inter-religious and intra-religious discourses, long in process worldwide, about the moral legitimacy of universally applicable human rights, particular in the field of freedom of religion or belief, may make the secularist worries of justificatory liberals uncalled-for.¹³

13 For materials on and evidence for the ongoing struggles, across the divides of faiths, convictions, and ideologies, to establish well-grounded, internally legitimate, and mutually trustworthy groundings of internationally codified human rights on freedom of religion or belief, see Tore Lindholm, W. Cole Durham, Jr., Bahia G. Tahzib-Lie, eds., *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: Leiden, 2004:19-61, 777-789 and *passim*.

Ludvig Holberg in the Unfinished Scandinavian Project of Enlightenment

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The *Holberg International Memorial Prize* is named after Ludvig Holberg (1684 – 1754). Holberg had his childhood and youth in Bergen and his academic career at the University of Copenhagen. Professor Holberg was a highly productive and influential scholar, public intellectual, essayist and playwright. His collected works amount to 20 000 pages, the larger part of which can be classified as cultural and social science. He was the dominating intellectual figure in Denmark-Norway during the first half of the 1700s. As a much read classic he influenced later generations in Scandinavia, Søren Kierkegaard and Henrik Ibsen included (Billeskov-Jansen 1974, Langslet 2001).¹

Holberg contributed to all four fields of today's cultural and social sciences: the humanities, social science, law and theology. Also in his own less specialized time, his knowledge and interests covered an unusually broad range of themes. Consequently he has been named as either a precursor or the first practitioner of several scientific disciplines in Denmark and Norway, including law, history, philosophy, political science, education and economics. Because of his topics, analytical approaches and general social theory, it is also reasonable to identify him as a precursor or first practitioner of sociology in Scandinavia (Kalleberg 2006a: 109 – 111).

Holberg's scholarly and artistic contributions were translated into several languages, or first published in the *lingua franca* of that time, Latin. He was a great success as a playwright in the German-speaking part of Europe: 'until the last quarter of the eighteenth century Holberg dominated all German theaters... Between 1748 and 1865, more than 2000 Holberg performances took place in Germany' (Greene-Ganzberg 1994: 83). In the 15th edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1982) it is claimed that: 'Holberg was, with the exception of Voltaire, the first writer in Europe during his generation. Neither Pope nor Swift approached him in range of genius or in encyclopedic versatility.' This evaluation, first articulated by the prominent critic Edmund Gosse in the 9th edition of *Britannica*, can obviously be challenged for being exaggerated, but it is nevertheless an interesting indication of Holberg's visibility and international recognition in an earlier period of European history. Holberg was also reviewed in the first *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by Seligman and Johnson in the 1930s.

1 Kierkegaard noted in his journal for 1836-1837, in a reflection on Hamann, that Kant, Goethe and Holberg were examples of independent minds, who introduced real improvements and not only modifications of existing ways of thinking (Kierkegaard 1968: 152). In Oslo around 1860, Ibsen was a member of a group of critical intellectuals where many knew Holberg almost by heart. The circle was called "The Learned Holland", based on a quote from Holberg. Ibsen who loved Holberg from his early youth, had here the nickname Gert (Westphaler), the main figure in one of Holberg's comedies (Ording 1927: 5, 215 - 247, Meyer 1967: 181, Figueiredo 2006: 53, 213).

Today, Scandinavians mainly know Holberg as the author of classical comedies. During almost three centuries – from 1722 onwards – his comedies have been regularly staged in Scandinavia, plays such as *Jeppe on the Hill*, *Erasmus Montanus* and *The Tinker Turned Politician*. Many have also read something from his ‘moral thoughts’ and ‘epistles’, enlightening essays on all kinds of subjects. Very few, however, would be able to mention the title of one of his scholarly works. Outside of Scandinavia, Holberg is now known only by specialists. In this international context, then, there are good reasons for presenting the man, his work and historical importance.

Because of the occasion it is also natural to relate Holberg’s contributions to the *oeuvre* of Habermas. Obviously, it is easy to find differences between the two, being children of so different times and places. But it is also easy to detect similarities in themes and approaches. Holberg was also an interdisciplinary oriented sociologist with a strong interest in civil society and publics of different kinds, and he was a critical theorist. His work is easy to relate to a basic perspective in Habermas’s social theory: modern societies as unfinished historical projects (see Habermas 1961: 13 – 55, 1984: Ch. II.3/4, 1987: Ch. 8, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2005a: Ch. 11). Holberg belonged to the first generations of contributors to these projects of modernity. He had a clear understanding of the inescapable fact that such improvements of institutions and mentalities could only be realized as long-lasting historical projects.

In some ways we are closer to Holberg and other contributors from his generation – such as Montesquieu – than to many scholars from generations after Holberg, such as Marquis de Condorcet or Herbert Spencer. Holberg wanted improvements, but was well aware of the great contributions of earlier generations, and did not have a superstitious belief in linear progress. The new could include socio-political, military and cultural regressions. His cosmopolitanism is also closer to globalized, post-national mentalities in our time than nationalistic attitudes during the 19th and 20th centuries. Holberg was – as Habermas a quarter of a millennium later – a passionate European.

Holberg’s background, habitus, education and scholarly production

Holberg’s hometown is located on the west coast of Norway. Bergen had long been an important European trading city and was then the second largest in Denmark-Norway.² During Holberg’s childhood, almost half the city’s population were non-Norwegians, who came from different parts of Europe, especially from its north-western corner – Germany, Holland, Scotland and England. The city was characterized by a strong work ethic, no time should be lost to idleness (Holberg 1737/1969: 33).

2 Denmark and Norway were in a union from 1380 to 1814. This multi-national monarchy in the 18th century also included parts of Germany (Schlesvig and Holstein), the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, the Danish West Indies (now the Virgin Islands of United States) and possessions in India (Trankebar) and Africa (Ghana).

Holberg's mother came from a large, rich and powerful family of business people, priests and civil servants. Her father was a priest and her mother's father had been a bishop in Bergen, one of the most powerful positions in this Lutheran state. Holberg's father probably came from small, poor and independent farmers further north in Norway. He had worked his way up from ordinary soldier to become a leading military officer and nobleman, several times in charge of Bergenhus fortress. (The Holberg Prize ceremony takes place in Håkon's Hall, which is part of Bergenhus.) This was unusual social mobility in those days and Ludvig was always proud of his father's career. It was only based on personal achievements he underlined in his autobiography (Holberg 1943: 2).

Holberg attended a German elementary school in Bergen. He could learn the vernacular at home and in the streets, his mother insisted. He probably also learned some English during childhood. At the age of nine he became a pupil at the cathedral school – established in the 1150s – where he learned Latin. (His teacher later became a professor in Latin literature at the University of Copenhagen.) When looking back at mature academics, their opinions and values, there is often a tendency to exaggerate the influence of other authors during adult life, failing to notice influences in childhood and adolescence. Holberg was well aware of the importance of early socialization for our habitus in adult life. His interest in and respect for agricultural improvements, trading, responsible and profitable money-management, efficient state governance, protestant work ethic, human equality, peace and cosmopolitanism can be traced back to significant influences from his family and local communities during childhood and youth.

Holberg got his academic education in theology at the University of Copenhagen, in the Danish-Norwegian type of Lutheran Protestantism. He graduated in 1704 and was proud of this education (Müller 1943: 80). He did not specialize in theological fields in his later career, but wrote also about church history and the history of the Jews. He occupied three different professorships at the University of Copenhagen, in 1) metaphysics and logic from 1717 (responsible for propaedeutic teaching, today often called "critical thinking" and "argumentation"), 2) Latin oratory (1720, covering Latin literature) and 3) history (1730). In 1737 he was made *kvestor* of the university – responsible for the management of the university's economic resources – not having to teach.

Holberg's *magnum opus* was the great history of Denmark – *Danmark Riges Historie* – 2,500 pages in three volumes, published in the 1730s. He described, explained and evaluated historical developments up to the transition to absolutism, ending the book with a focus on the reign of King Frederick III (1648 – 1670). The contribution is characterized by a strong generalizing ambition, not least with regard to the advantages of absolutism, which makes it natural to also characterize it as a work in political sociology or political science. It was required reading for Danish historians for one and a half centuries. In 1729 he published a book on the history of Denmark and Norway – after the Bible, the most read book in Norway during that whole century – in 1737 a *Description of the Famous Norwegian Commercial City of Bergen*. In 1738 he published a *General Church History*, in 1742 a *Jewish History*. In his *Several Comparative Histories of Heroines* (1745), his recognition of women as equal to men was easy to see, as was his

cosmopolitical interest in people and societies outside of Scandinavia and Europe. His most influential scholarly book among a wider public was the one on natural law and the law of nations – *Naturens og Folkerettens Kundskab* (first edition in 1716).

His best known single book internationally was the socio-philosophical novel about *Nicolai Klimii iter subterraneum* (*Nils Klim's Subterranean Journey*), first published in Latin in Leipzig in 1741. This entertaining book can be read as an introduction to basic insights in the great natural law tradition from Grotius and Hobbes to Pufendorf and Thomasius. It is a masterpiece in its combination of enlightenment and entertainment. One finds the same themes in *Moralske Tanker* (*Moral Thoughts*) (1744) and *Epistler* (*Letters*) (1748 – 1752).

Scandinavian modernization and enlightenment

'The age of enlightenment' is too often talked of in the singular and as something that ended with the transition to 'romanticism', i.e. the century from the English *Glorious Revolution* to the French Revolution. The French model is often assumed to be the paradigmatic one. It would be more appropriate to take England as *the* model if one were forced to choose only one. In most contexts, however, it is more adequate to distinguish between different models of modernization and enlightenment, similar only on a more abstract level. There always were – and are – several projects of enlightenment. And there are regions of the world today where projects of socio-cultural enlightenment have only recently or barely emerged.

Parsons (1977) has presented an analysis of the emergence and dynamics of modern societies. Two of his general perspectives are: 1) Modern societies emerged – unexpectedly – in the north-western corner of Europe during the period from the Protestant Reformation to the American and French revolutions. 2) Modernization was characterized by three intertwined processes of transformation – three revolutions – economic (industrial market economy), political (USA 1776, France 1789) and socio-cultural ('educational revolution' in his terminology). Another label for the third type of revolution, the transformation of mentalities, is to refer to different enlightenment processes in civil society – as in science, art, morals, education and religion – and their importance for all kinds of modernization processes.

When Marx and Engels in 1848 looked back, they vividly described modernization in these well known words: 'All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air..'. Several of the developments characterizing modernization during the early modern period were aggregated and unintended consequences of individual and institutional action. A classic analysis of this is Max Weber's (1920) on the inter-institutional relationships between religion (ascetic Protestantism) and capitalism.³

3 Weber's analysis and its further development, represents one of the most sophisticated insights in modern sociology, competing in robustness with successful theories in the natural sciences (Boudon 1986: Ch. 7).

The macro-region around the English Channel and the North Sea where modern societies first emerged, has also been called the 'cradle of capitalism' (Heerma 1998). Scandinavia is located in this region, influenced by and influencing the dynamics of modernization processes in this early modern period. During his childhood and adolescence, Holberg was exposed to such processes, connected to agriculture, fisheries, trade, military affairs, state governance, church and the sciences. As a successful academic he was active in one of the city-centers in this dynamic part of the world.

The modernization of economies, political-administrative systems and civil societies has to be conceptualized as historical projects covering generations and centuries (Parsons 1977: 241, Dahl 1989: part VI, Habermas 1996: 44-46, Habermas 1998a). In the north-western part of Europe during the 18th century, we can identify an English, French and German enlightenment, and also a Dutch, Scottish and Scandinavian one (Porter 2001: Ch. 6, Schneider ed. 2001: 9 – 24). Science and public enlightenment based on scientific knowledge were important in all countries during the classical European enlightenment. But economies, cultural traditions and inter-institutional interdependencies were different. The French enlightenment was antagonistic in relation to the Catholic Church, whereas 'Enlightenment in Britain took place within, rather than against, Protestantism' (Porter 2000: 99). The process of enlightenment in Scandinavia was similar to the British and German pattern with regard to religion. Holberg did not contribute to the early enlightenment project despite the fact that he was educated in theology and was a Christian, but to a large degree because of it.

Denmark-Norway and Sweden were important military powers in the northern part of Europe during this period, whereas 'Germany' – first united at a much later stage – was a fragmented area. Only Prussia had more soldiers per inhabitant than Denmark-Norway in the 18th century, only Great Britain more ships (Knudsen 2001: 45).

Universities were important institutions for development of natural and socio-cultural sciences and cultural modernization in Holland, Germany, Scandinavia and Scotland during the seventeenth century (Ben-David 1984: 112). In the early modern period, the old universities in Uppsala and Copenhagen had educated, or had as professors, persons who were well known contributors to the emerging natural sciences. This can be illustrated with names such as Ole Rømer, Nils Stensen, Olof Rudbeck and Anders Celcius. Samuel Pufendorf (1632 – 1694) was born in Saxony, but was a professor at the new university in Sweden (Lund) at the time he published his most important book on natural law and the law of nations. Carl von Linné (1707 – 1778), the most famous individual in the Scandinavian enlightenment, was a professor at Uppsala University.

Holberg: The first Scandinavian sociologist

In one sense it is an anachronism to talk about Holberg as a sociologist. Auguste Comte first invented the word *sociologie* in 1839 (Levine 1995: 14, Merton 1995: 230); as a discipline it was first institutionalized in American universities at the end of that century. Nevertheless, it is common to refer to contributors as sociologists before the 19th century,

and with good reasons. Scientific disciplines generally have a longer intellectual than institutional history, and practices may be much older than terms referring to them.⁴

Aron (1965: 17) discusses Montesquieu – Holberg’s contemporary – as the first sociologist and Habermas (1963: 216) refers to ‘the three great Scots’ (Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and John Millar) and their transformation of social philosophy (in the natural law tradition) into historical-comparative sociology. It can be fruitful to go further back than this, identifying contributors like James Harrington (1611 – 1677) and Thomas Hobbes as among the first (political) sociologists. The modern social sciences emerged at the same time as the natural sciences, as integral parts of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century (Engelstad et al. 2005: Ch. 2, 3).

Holberg fits well into this perspective (Kalleberg 2006a: 109 - 115). His basic understanding of man and society is articulated within the conceptual framework of natural law, in the tradition from Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645) via Thomas Hobbes and John Locke to Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius. Pufendorf was especially important to him. Pufendorf can be characterized as the first German sociologist, identifying and analyzing an autonomous social realm as the space for human beings endowed with free will. He expanded the scope of the concept of natural law to an empirical, historical-comparative sociology (see Wolf 1963: 320 – 328).

Holberg focuses on basic social processes, outside of state and church, such as family relationships, socialization of the newborn child, symbolic interaction in language, authority in working life, reading publics, artistic and scientific institutions. His book on natural law from 1716 – profoundly influenced by Pufendorf – is a clear statement of his understanding of human beings, life in small groups, the main institutions in a nation state and the relationships between states, including questions about peace and war. He has a clear understanding of social institutions as socially constructed, for instance when describing and evaluating different types of families, varying over time and between cultures (Holberg 1716, Vol. 2, Ch.1).

As a sociologist, Holberg uses the same type of data as we do today – qualitative and quantitative, based on observations, conversations and existing documents – and with similar general approaches, such as documentation of states of affairs, historical and societal comparisons, explanation of social change by reference to the intentions and actions of individuals (see Engelstad et al. 2005: part II). He systematically insists on the importance of free will and rejects all kinds of deterministic explanations in social and cultural fields, be they based on biology and natural environment (as Montesquieu’s geographic determinism), or on religious determinism (assuming that God or demons - in the last instance – determine events) (Kalleberg 2006a: 115 – 119).

4 The English term scientist – a non-gendered translation of the German *Naturforscher* – first came into the English language during the 1830s (Merton 1995: 227). Obviously, real social phenomena, as the role of scientist and individual scientists, existed before the term was created, and so had implicit conceptions of such real life phenomena.

Lafont (1999) has described and discussed the linguistic turn in the social and cultural sciences, tracing the development from the second half of the 18th century – from Hamann, Herder and Humboldt – to our time (Apel and Habermas). It is worth noting that Holberg – as Pufendorf in 1673 – uses one chapter in his book on natural law to discuss language, insisting on the importance of the basic fact that human beings are the only living creatures that coordinate themselves in a common symbolic world.

Literary and reading publics in early Danish-Norwegian enlightenment

Publics are essential institutions in the modernization of Europe and first emerged in its north-western corner. According to Habermas (1989: xvii), such public fora did not exist until the end of the 1600s in England and the beginning of the 1700s in France.⁵ Modern publics emerged in Denmark-Norway during the first half of the 1700s. One of these was a national theatre, staging performances in the mother tongue. Until 1722, there was no public theatre in Copenhagen. This was irritating for people with *Bildung und Besitz*, the social basis for the emerging theatre and reading public, comparing Copenhagen with Paris and London. In September 1722, the first theatre was opened. It needed new plays where people could recognize themselves and their social situations. Professor Holberg more than satisfied the demand, writing 25 plays during a three-year period. He was able to amuse and entertain, to criticize and stimulate self-reflection in society. The basic perspectives were the same as in the book on natural law.

One of his most popular plays was, and is, *Erasmus Montanus*. Holberg here criticizes academic snobbery and disputations about unimportant issues. He is critical of popular superstition and irrational beliefs, among both high and low. The play is about a student, Rasmus Berg, who has studied at the university in Copenhagen and has learned so much that he no longer understands the simple language and thoughts of his parents and old friends. He has been elevated into the grandeur of an esoteric scholar, his name consequently transformed into the Latin Erasmus Montanus (*berg* in Danish means *montanus* in Latin). Holberg also criticizes common people. At the end of the play the young student has to accept the common-sense truth that the earth is flat, in order to get his beloved one.

Holberg chose to write in Danish, starting with his first book in 1711, on the history of important European states. There was such a language shift taking place all over the macro-region of north-western Europe, exemplified for instance by Francis Hutcheson (1694 – 1746) in Glasgow and Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) in Leipzig and Halle. Professor Thomasius had also started to lecture in German in the 1690s. Holberg visited him on his tour to Dresden, Leipzig and Halle in 1708.

5 In this modern classic on the rise and fall of the public sphere, Habermas (1989) primarily focused on publics connected to the arts and general political discourse, not functionally specialized publics, as in science and law, and their communication with larger publics.

Reading publics emerged, a phenomenon of essential importance in the general modernization processes. A new dialectic of world-historical significance was created, taking place in reading and debating publics. The written word stimulated clarification of arguments, printing made possible much larger publics, including the possibility of taking many more affected interests into account in public discourse. Holberg was eager to encourage the establishment of such publics and – against skeptics and critics – downplayed the danger of excesses, because – as he wrote – ‘that which is *published* by means of printing, immediately comes into the hands of everyone and can therefore immediately be repudiated’ (Holberg 1931: 33).

The creation of reading publics is an example of reinforcing interdependencies between different sectors and actors in society, such as between printers with economic interests, technologists with inventions, businessmen (for whom reading and writing helped long-distance trade), publishers and authors, and religious people. The Bible was translated into the vernacular in the protestant part of Europe. It was required that everyone should be able to read for himself, independently of the church. But when people could read the Bible, they could also read other texts.

Phenomena such as the emergence of reading publics cannot be explained with reference to one type of factor alone, for instance technology. The Arabic and Chinese world had printing technology at the same time as or before the Europeans, but the new technology was not widely used and did not stimulate revolutionary cultural transformations in these societies (Huff 1993: 222 – 226).

Holberg as critical theorist

Holberg not only documented, compared and analyzed social phenomena. He also ‘criticized’ them, evaluating them as better or worse according to different value standards and norms, for instance having to do with efficiency, equality or dignity. He insists that there is, and should be, a ‘natural equality’ among people and argues that every human being deserves the same respect and dignity. On this explicitly normative basis he rejects the old Greek conception of natural slaves. Holberg notes that there are states in the contemporary Christian world where slavery is practised. He is critical of this and insists that they are doing the wrong thing, both as natural human beings and as Christians (Holberg 1716: 112 – 115).

Holberg was a consistent critic of the discrimination of women. He insisted that females were as intelligent as men and that they could and should have the same positions. Here he referred to equality and equal dignity among human beings, but he also – as a typical Protestant – was interested in usefulness and the efficient use of resources. Discrimination on the basis of sex disposed for underutilization of the cognitive and moral resources in society and should be criticized because of that. He also referred to inconsistencies: If women could be queens, they should also be allowed to be accountable for making contracts in the marketplace.

The feminist theme was an important element in his internationally best known book, the utopian novel about *Nils Klim's Subterranean Journey* (1741). It is a book similar to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Nils Klim visits several nations in the interior of our own planet. Holberg was able to criticize institutions in contemporary society, be it the unfruitful and irrelevant disputations in the universities, the discrimination of women, irrationalities in Protestant and Catholic doctrines or the lack of religious tolerance. In one of the countries Nils visits, it is the women who have all the important positions. Everyone there finds this natural. Nils, with his sophisticated European sensitivities, is deeply shocked and wants to correct this barbaric absurdity back to normal patriarchy.

Holberg practised social criticism and normative argumentation in his academic work. After the normative turn during the last decades – symbolized by contributions from Rawls and Habermas – Holberg is in this respect closer to us than to social scientists 50 years ago. They insisted on non-cognitivist positions, presupposing that normative questions could not be discussed and agreed with convincing reasons (see Engelstad et al. 2005: Chs. 4, 13, Kalleberg 2007a).

It is often mentioned that Holberg was not original as a theorist of natural law, but primarily relied on others, especially Pufendorf. Some also claim that he was a more or less unprincipled eclectic, only compiling thoughts from others. It is correct that Holberg was not an original contributor to basic theoretical ideas and approaches in the great natural law tradition. He made the tradition his own and disseminated it to a larger public. But Holberg's independence and originality in this field are often overlooked. Even in a north-west European context he was an unusually early feminist and – perhaps even more surprising at that time – an unusually early and systematic critic of slavery. These highly important insights can not, for instance, be found in Pufendorf's work. In 1792 Denmark-Norway was the first country in the world to prohibit the slave trade (Knudsen 2002: 61). It has been difficult to explain the political background for the ban on the Atlantic slave trade and its actual effects (Hopkins 2000), but it seems reasonable to assume that the writings of Holberg had also influenced changes in public opinion on the issue of slavery and slave trade.

It is not reasonable to denigrate Holberg as just an eclectic. His natural-law based analysis of history, culture and society had a high degree of coherence. In his practice he was consistent in the use of these insights when active in his different roles. He designed and developed a specific position in this absolutist, early modern state, as a playwright, essayist and disseminating scholar. This position made it possible for him both to criticize and contribute to reform of institutions and mentalities in the broader society and to influence changes in the university. It was probably this substantive orientation and consistency in Holberg's activities, being a Socratic gadfly contributing to the transformation of social and cultural reality, that so impressed people like Kierkegaard and Ibsen.

On human freedom Holberg was more coherent than mainstream social scientists two centuries later. During mid 20th century some social scientists believed in the Law

of Causality as passionately as religious people believed in God. Holberg – on the contrary - rejected both naturalistic and religious determinism, insisting on human freedom, recognizing the intellectual inconsistencies and the dire moral consequences of deterministic positions in social and cultural studies and life (Kalleberg 2006a: 115 – 119, 128).

Holberg also contributed in the way he used examples, from history, literature, legal traditions and daily life. The examples were real, not artificial constructions of little relevance. His use of examples should not be evaluated only as a pedagogic strategy for general readers. (As was Kant's position in the famous preface to *Critique of Pure Reason*.) Good examples made arguments more precise and more in touch with reality, and it also made arguments more compelling in esoteric scholarly communities. His assumption seems to have been: If a point of view can not be demonstrated to be valid for at least one good case, we should probably reject or forget it. It may be the case that Holberg instituted a specific tradition also here. My impression is that there is a certain difference in this respect between, for instance, social theorists from Scandinavia and Germany. At least it is worth noting the importance of examples and realistic cases in the work of Norwegian social theorists in different traditions, as represented by Jon Elster and Gunnar Skirbekk. Both of them have also reflected on this methodological approach (Elster 1989: 15 – 16, Skirbekk 1993: 29 – 34).

Religion and (ir)rationality: 'Children have to become Human Beings before they can become Christians'

In one of his best known essays Holberg distinguishes between three types of education and studies: necessary (theology, ethics), useful (such as history, mathematics and natural science) and harmful (e.g. because of irrelevant themes) (Holberg 1744: 35-45). In passing we may note that this typology reveals that Holberg also as a sociologist of science was a critical theorist, criticizing – positively and negatively – his object of study. The necessary studies have to do with the duty of human beings towards 'God and their neighbor'. He claims that in such matters, in 'most' societies – Christian, Muslim and Jewish – the fallacy of *hysteron proteron* is committed, starting with what should come last, i.e. starting with theology before morals. Holberg's claim is that the sequence should be reversed: 'Children have to become Human Beings before they can become Christians.' This fallacy in upbringing and education results in the construction of *veritate locali*, locally limited truths. People in such environments are characterized by closed minds, stubbornly defending the local truths internalized during their upbringing, and 'later not able to receive arguments. The habit established in childhood is not easy to leave later in life.' If instead the newborns first develop into 'reasonable creatures', learning morals in interaction with family and friends, it would result in a drastic and desirable reduction of the number of orthodox sects and their bitter conflicts.

In this first group of necessary studies – as practiced in upbringing, education and scholarly studies – Holberg also claims that one could locate 'history'. By 'history' he refers to reasonably interpreted examples from his own time or earlier times. These

have to be approached – with respect to their truth and reasonable interpretation – and received in the right way. Holberg insists on the importance of self-reference and wise internalization of ideas by the reader or listener. Reading many books is not a sufficient condition for becoming wise, it can even make students and professors stupid. It is comical to know everything about world history and not know about what is happening in one's own house, he claims. (In essays like this one, it is easy to identify one of the leitmotifs in Søren Kierkegaard's oeuvre, as in his criticism of Hegelians for their self-referential inconsistencies.)

In another essay, he insists that each individual has a right and duty to scrutinize his or her own religious beliefs (Holberg 1744: 193 – 202). He is critical of Catholicism, its centralization of interpretive authority in the 'infallible Church', downplaying the importance of the single individual. Luther and Protestantism meant progress, introducing to everyone 'Christian Freedom to scrutinize /the Bible/ before one believes'. It is only possible to find true insights by listening to *pro* and *contra* arguments, and heterodox books should therefore also be allowed. Holberg was – however – critical of later developments in Protestantism, which had actually created several new 'popes' and 'infallible' sects. They then tend to create more hypocrites than before, stimulating self-referential inconsistencies between what is preached and practiced, such as sects demanding tolerance for themselves and denying it to others.

Scientific institutions:

Ideal typical publics and four academic bundles

The new sciences emerging during the scientific revolution were essential elements in the processes of cultural modernization. The new sciences were closer than other social fora to pure types of publics, primarily regulated by the force of better arguments (Kalleberg 2007a: 146). The archetype of the new institutions was *The Royal Society*, established in London in 1662. The emergence of science is a classic example of paradoxical developments in early modernity. Many factors interacted, including unintended consequences of intentional social action and aggregation effects of individual actions. The development of new social roles as scientists and new types of institutions were not only stimulated by internal factors and external interests like economic and military ones. It was also culturally stimulated, such as by connections between Protestantism and the emergence of modern science. The new scientists were believing Christians, wanting also to read the second book that God had written, the Book of Nature (Merton 1938/2001, Merton 1968: part IV, Cohen, ed. 1990, Enebakk 2007).

Holberg was not only interested in the new scientific methods, knowledge and technological improvements that emerged. He was also an interested and interesting sociologist of science, identifying and analyzing the institutional and cultural conditions for the new scientific communities, the new forces of communication set in motion by the scientific revolution. In several essays, he pointed to the effectiveness of the new academies as compared with the old Catholic universities. He insisted that they were 'societies' – publics - where peers communicated in an open space, so that everyone who

participated could observe experiments, control documentation and follow the logic of arguments. Tradition, revelation, power or money should not govern in such settings, only public documentation and argumentation (e.g. Holberg 1744: 277 – 281). Holberg had a clear understanding of the importance of basic scientific norms, such as universalism. In this respect he is more insightful than several contributors to contemporary science studies, often also being victims of the fallacy of the latest word (Kalleberg 2007a: 151 – 152, Kalleberg 2007b: 133).

Holberg had a keen understanding of the importance of bundles of activities, such as the bundling of research and teaching (on bundles in academic work see Kalleberg 2000, 2005). He argued against too much specialization in universities, and was critical of the new academies because they were too specialized, only focused on research. The older universities should therefore not be abolished, but transformed by learning from academies how to integrate research as a regular activity (Holberg 1744: 279). Universities in that sense – with both research and teaching – are indispensable for national progress, he claimed.

We associate the four academic ‘unities’ (*Einheiten*) with Wilhelm von Humboldt and his contemporaries, responsible for the university reform in Berlin in 1810 (Habermas 1989, Kalleberg 2000: 229 – 237). They consist of the unity of a) research and teaching, b) of the scientific and scholarly disciplines, c) of scholarship and general education, and d) of science and enlightenment. Such bundling of activities – as practices and ambitions – emerged during a long period in several universities in the north-western corner of Europe. It is not difficult to identify the four unities in Professor Holberg’s reflections and recommendations two generations before the Berlin-reformers. We have already seen his insistence on having research and teaching in the same institution. We have also noted his insistence on the importance of creating a learning environment where scientific knowledge is integrated with self-knowledge in order to stimulate balanced personal development among students (and professors). In his productive interdisciplinarity – including his passionate interest in useful natural science – he practiced the unity of the sciences. The reformers in Berlin had excessive expectations to philosophy as a synthesizing discipline. Holberg was perhaps more realistic, practicing interdisciplinarity more humbly, being open for learning between different fields without privileging any one.

But Professor Holberg’s most important activity and legacy has to do with the fourth unity, the bundling of scientific scholarship and public enlightenment (on this role, see Kalleberg 2000: 237 - 240). His main passion was to publish for a broader public in order to disseminate useful knowledge and stimulate self-referential consistency and socio-cultural improvements. In one of his late epistles (no. 179), about music and comedies in Copenhagen, he proudly looked back at his life’s work and claimed that his plays have recast (remoulded; *omstøbt*) the Danish-Norwegian population into a new mould. ‘They have learnt to reason about virtues and vices; of which many before had few and unclear ideas.’ It is difficult to corroborate such a claim, but I believe there is much truth in that self-evaluation. His unusual, masterful combination of enlightenment and entertainment was essential for his success in this academic role.

Academics as public intellectuals: With Holberg and Habermas into the fourth century of the Scandinavian Enlightenment Project

The Scandinavian countries belong to that small group of societies, located in Western Europe and North-America, that were the first to be drawn into the vortexes of modernization processes. If we say that the 18th century was the first in world history to witness such processes, these societies have now started on their fourth century.

The early processes of cultural modernization – such as in science, the arts and higher education – took place in city centers, in Amsterdam and London, in Paris and Philadelphia, in Glasgow and Copenhagen. In regions like Scotland and Scandinavia, universities were important institutions in these processes of enlightenment. Holberg was an inventive and influential disseminator of interesting and useful scholarly knowledge to a larger public. He practiced and developed the role of the academic as disseminator and public intellectual in an unusually successful way. He clarified and institutionalized the role through his own practice and became the single most influential role model for later generations of Norwegian academic disseminators and public intellectuals.

The sub-role in the academic role-set of being a public intellectual is widely practiced in the Norwegian university system, historically and today (Kalleberg 2000, Slagstad 2004). There are three recent surveys – based on questionnaires to all persons in scientific positions at the universities in Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø – documenting this academic role. In the 3-year period 1998 – 2000 half of these academics had at least once contributed with a popular article, one third with a written contribution to public discourse. 60% of all academics had at least published one popular article or one to public discourse. The most productive scientists were also the most productive popularizers and participants in public discourse. The social scientists at these universities had published on average 7.9 scientific articles and 4.6 articles as public intellectuals (Kyvik 2005: 299 – 306). These studies document that this kind of academic activity is widespread in the Norwegian system. Norway is the only OECD-country up to now that has such representative surveys documenting this role. In other countries, there are only case studies or coverage of smaller parts of the research system. It would not be surprising if future comparisons show that Norwegian academics are among the most productive with regard to this task. Due to Holberg's strong influence, it seems reasonable to claim that the strong institutionalization of this academic role in today's Norwegian universities also reflects his enduring impact on institutions, cultures and role-requirements.

Individual and institutional challenges in this area of enlightened public discourse are among the most important ones now facing Scandinavians, as other liberal democracies. In order to ensure sustainable cultural and political reproduction in deliberative democracies, an infrastructure of public fora has to exist to ensure

enlightened public understanding and counterbalance the institutional pressures from business enterprises, state regulations, lobby groups, PR and the entertainment industry.⁶

A recent change in the Norwegian constitution concerning freedom of expression, is of special interest in our context. In 1996 a commission was given the task of making 'a thorough consideration of the status of freedom of speech in our society' and propose a revised text for the relevant article in the Norwegian constitution (§ 100). The commission argued for the importance of rational deliberation in democracy and insisted that an 'enlightened and active critical public is the cornerstone of democracy'. On the basis of a report, extensive hearings and public debate, the Norwegian parliament (the *Storting*) in 2004 accepted a new, revised article on the freedom of expression. (See NOU 1999/2005, Sejersted 2005.)

There are several interesting elements in the 6 paragraphs of the new article on freedom of expression, here I only mention the one on maintenance and development of an adequate institutional infrastructure: 'The State authorities shall create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse'. The commission claims that this clearly states the responsibility of the state for ensuring that individuals and groups are actually given opportunities to express their opinions. State support for mass media, public funding of schools and universities, public support of the arts, non-governmental organizations, of Norwegian and minority languages, are mentioned as examples. The chairman of the commission, the historian Francis Sejersted, notes that this element is unusual, because 'the state is often viewed as a threat to freedom of expression....However, in modern society, the state must be able to assume many, possibly conflicting, responsibilities' (2005: 10). Olsen (1988: 239 – 240) articulates the same point of view when he differentiates between four models of state governance. In one model the state is 'viewed as a political and moral order'. Governmental agencies are 'cultural systems and carriers of missions, values, and identities'. The state shall guarantee autonomous spheres for economic, social and cultural activity', such as independent courts. Habermas identifies the same dimension with his concept of constitutional patriotism (see for instance Habermas 1998b).

There is – and should be – a close connection between individual and institutional autonomy in a liberal, deliberative democracy, 'citizens should always be able to understand themselves also as authors of the law to which they are subject as addressees' (Habermas 1996: 449). Consequently, democracies also have to take responsibility for the institutional infrastructure enabling the formation of enlightened public understanding on public issues.

6 On the general challenges as conceptualized by Habermas, see Habermas 1987: 326-331, 351-356, 396-403; 1989; 1996a: Ch 8; 2005b; 2006. – Thinking about inter-institutional (im)balances and institutional imperialism is an essential element in much contemporary social theory. Some examples are political-economic theory à la Dahl (1989, 2006), Lindblom (2001) and Lane (2004); the new institutionalism of March and Olsen (1995); Bell's (1979) analysis of capitalism; organization theory à la Mintzberg (1983, 1996); and structural sociology à la Merton (1968, 1975).

The constitutional revision in focus here primarily explicates and develops Norwegian traditions (cf Sejersted 2000: 55 – 110). But in our context it is interesting to note that essential Habermasian insights about deliberative democracy influenced the revision. This influence reflects the broad reception of Habermas's works in the Norwegian academic community, to a large degree due to the early translation into Norwegian (in 1971) of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) and the broad influence of the philosopher and public intellectual Hans Skjervheim (Sørbø 2002). Sejersted and one of the other members of the commission, the philosopher Gunnar Skirbekk, had integrated Habermasian insights into their theorizing already from the 1960s and 1970s.

The most pressing challenges Norwegians are now facing in this area of public discourse, are not individual, but institutional. In order to master such challenges, it can be enlightening to look back to those generations and individuals – such as Holberg – that started to build the first institutional infrastructure of this kind in world history. Our challenge is not to create publics for the first time, but a similar creativity is required today to avoid deformation and marginalization of publics, in order to achieve viable balances between the institutional orders of society. We have no metaphysical guarantee that public fora will survive and thrive on a scale necessary for desirable democratic and cultural sustainability.

The revision of the article on freedom of expression can open the way for new initiatives from the institutions of the public sphere, counteracting the institutional imperialism of markets and instrumental state regulations. The market economy is (also) a breeding ground for a culture of commercialism that has to be counterbalanced and influenced by cultures of civil society and democratic deliberation. The institutions for science and higher education are important ones in this perspective. Today there are strong tendencies in Norway and other European nations of the institutional-imperialist kind, perverting the task of public intellectual to a responsibility for contributions to economic growth and efficient administration (Kalleberg 2006b, Olsen 2007). At the same time recent changes in the law regulating Norwegian universities and colleges, underlining the importance of dissemination and public discourse as a basic institutional task, may stimulate initiatives of the desirable kind, revitalizing these institutions as contributors to the unfinished project of enlightenment.⁷

7 Perhaps also changes – based on extensive public hearings – in national guidelines for research ethics will stimulate developments in the same direction. See NESH 2006 and the guidelines (number 42 - 47) aimed at strengthening the individual and institutional task of Norwegian academics as public intellectuals.

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