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Special Issue:
Reconceiving Religion in the Postsecular Public Sphere

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Reconceiving Religion in the Postsecular Public Sphere

Introduction:

Challenges of a Postsecular Public Sphere

Hans-Herbert Kögler

The essays collected in this special issue are all, despite their differences in outlook and method, driven by a shared conviction: that philosophical and social-scientific reflections are able to point towards a reconciliation of religious thought and experience with the complex normative and cognitive demands of a democratic public sphere. The diverse approaches all culminate in a reassessment, a reconceptualization of religion in ways that make it compatible, even productive and perhaps indispensable for a secular, or now perhaps postsecular, public sphere. This provocative claim is borne out through careful reconstructions of the current discourse and status concerning religion in contemporary societies, backed by innovative claims and proposals as to how religious claims and convictions can be reconciled with a pluralistic and egalitarian public sphere characteristic of contemporary democracy.

The idea of democracy presupposed here is deliberate or discursive democracy, according to which the citizens determine their own fate via public deliberation and subsequent decision-making via voting.[1] This Rousseauian idea of a deliberative republic assumes that all citizens have equal rights to participate in and be represented by their *collective will*. The collective will is conceived as the outcome of egalitarian processes that assure that 'the people' will have articulated their own will, i.e. that the political process is one of *self-determination*. The normative bond that accrues through this process is determined by the mutual recognition of citizens that engage each other as free and equal. In a proceduralist reading of this collective will, its content is (ideally) determined via a process

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1   For a representative overview, see James Bohman/ William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005).

of will-formation and decision-making in a public sphere (Habermas)[2] determined by a commitment to public reason (Rawls).[3] For the longest time, this conception of deliberative democracy has been identified with a *secular* self-understanding of its grounds--meaning, roughly, that religious foundations (as in political theology), religious language (as openly endorsed in public dialogue), and religious justifications for norms and values (as in confessional traditions) are to be excluded from the public realm.

Yet—and this is what we today may perceive as the multiple sources of our contemporary challenge—the confidence in such an unmitigated 'laicist' secularism is fading. One reason is that the accompanied assumption of an ongoing secularization of society has not been borne out: religions persist.[4] This perception is, second, enforced by the turn to globalization in social and political theory which brought less secularized societies and the global force of continued religious practices to the fore.[5] Third, social and political theorists increasingly reject the 'privatist' conception of religion by highlighting the essential 'public' role of religion in social and political struggles, and public life generally, thus reckoning with religion as a powerful force in allegedly 'secular' constitutional regimes.[6] Fourth, religiously inclined theorists (of quite different stripes) aim to enhance the public influence of religious views in order to

2	Jürgen Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure (1988)," in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 463-490.

3	John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. 247 f.

4	Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

5	Richard Madsen, "What is Religion? Categorical Reconfigurations in a Global Horizon," in Philip S. Gorski et al (eds.), *The Post-Secular in Question. Religion in Contemporary Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 23-42.

6	Judith Butler/Jürgen Habermas-Charles Taylor/Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, Eduardo Mendieta/Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); see also the early suggestions in Rawls (1993).

reinvigorate, via their spiritual or religious sources, the opportunities for meaningful rich existences; in this vein, thinkers like Charles Taylor and Maeve Cooke, for instance, aim to reestablish religious worldviews as valid and important public voices or social options, and to dismantle rigid and exclusionary atheistic conceptions of 'secularism.'[7] And fifth, there is a view like Jürgen Habermas', who figures prominently in these debates[8] as well as in our volume. Habermas acknowledges many factors of the previous views; and while maintaining an unabashed commitment to the non-religious and 'post-conventional' normative foundations of democratic politics, he is specifically invested in retaining religion as a unique form of potential ethical and moral insight, as a mode of 'objective spirit' harboring 'semantic potentials' still awaiting secular translation.[9] Religious practices, traditions, and public articulations thus need to be recognized, integrated, and dialogically engaged.

Now the challenge of reconciling religion and democracy—or of the role and function of religious thought and practice within a public sphere defined by an unmitigated commitment to an egalitarian, pluralistic, and inclusive deliberation—has in large part to do with the (perceived) nature and scope of *religious convictions and practices*. Whereas public deliberation is self-sustained via the constructive creation of rationally justified and accepted norms and values, religious discourse seems bound by "the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truths."[10]

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7   Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Maeve Cooke, "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy," in Greg Calhoun et al (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 249-274.

8   See Graig Calhoun/Eduardo Mendietta/Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

9   Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' in Religious and Secular Citizens," in *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 114 – 147. Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Band 1: Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen*; *Band 2*: *Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019).

10 Habermas (2008), 129.

These pre- or trans-discursive truths are furthermore embedded in the exclusive belonging to particular religious communities. Their dogmatic core, combined with the *vertical* orientation towards a higher authority, seems *prima facie* incompatible with the *horizontal* and intersubjectivist conception of public life within a democracy.[11]

And yet, since democracy *must* treat all citizens equally, it is crucial that religious citizens are not unproportionally burdened with cognitive and social demands for integration. Only if democratic agents can rely on the fact that their religious beliefs are respected and protected may they assume to be fully recognized as citizens within a shared political order. We thus have to understand how exactly religious beliefs and experiences can play a role in public deliberation, how their experiential and ethical potential may become productive for the flourishing of a political order, and how religious beliefs, convictions, and practices generally relate to, or even support, a therefore newly conceivable *postsecular public sphere*. How is it possible to do justice *both* to the mode of religious world-disclosure and to democratic deliberation? How can *Offenbarungsreligion* (religion based on revelation) be mediated with the fallible, open-minded, and egalitarian understanding of a mutually engaging and respectful public dialogue as a source of truth and commitment? How can a religious self-understanding, which constitutes for many an indispensable cultural horizon and meaning-constitutive self-identity, be reconciled with a commitment to a public sphere in which a plurality of conceptions of the good life compete and co-exist with one another?

In order to address these and related questions, the authors in this volume introduce a set of largely untapped viewpoints in order to facilitate our understanding how a reconciliation of religion and democracy ought to be possible. Their aim is to expand the current horizon of the related debates by means of a set of diverse conceptual and methodological approaches, including Hegelian, social-scientific, ethnographic, and hermeneutic perspectives. While the classic site of this discourse con-

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11   Hans-Herbert Kögler, "The Religious Face of Evil," *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT)*, Vol. 1, n. 2, 2017, 21-46.

cerning religion and the public sphere is arguably exemplified by the work of Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, and Charles Taylor (all of which figure prominently in this volume's essays either as analytical targets or as presupposed background), the decisive focus is on expanding our conceptual resources, of introducing novel and challenging angles from which to reconceptualize both religion and the public sphere.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In this vein, **Andrew Buchwalter**'s "Religion in the Public Sphere: Habermas, His Critics, and Hegelian Challenges" makes for a great stage-setting of the volume. In a penetrating and succinct discussion, he reconstructs the basic points of Habermas' influential claim that our current attitude towards religion in public life ought to be radically reconceived so as to make room for a more egalitarian, productive, and ultimately democratic inclusion. Buchwalter expresses sympathy with Habermas' intuitions as well as with points raised by critics; yet his real goal is to tap the resources that a Hegelian approach can provide. He expands the discourse on religion and democracy such that "Hegel's postmetaphysical conceptions of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and philosophical reason" can be made fruitful for what he terms "a uniquely 'dialectical' understanding of the relationship of religion and politics." Responding to the almost naturally occurring charge of Eurocentrism against Hegel, he concludes by showing how we can, 'with Hegel against Hegel,' even derive conceptual guidance from Hegel for a pluralistic recognition of diverse worldviews and conceptions of the good life in a global setting.

Since our reflections are supposed to be applicable to the real current context, **Rick Philipps** provides us with a much needed social-scientific account of the status of religion in contemporary social life. His "The Prospects of Postsecular Religion: A Sociological Perspective" carefully sets the stage with Auguste Comte's classic formulation of the secularization thesis, before outlining several crisis phenomena that more recently beset religious institutions in the US. While for Comte religion will be overthrown by the scientific age, which follows an intermediary second metaphysical one, Philipps is interested in looking more closely how sec-

ularism may be empirically detected, defined, and eventually attenuated so as to make room for persisting religious needs. By reconstructing the crisis of authority, membership, and (existential) utility of religion in current US-society, he is able to discern that "beliefs indicating that unmet demand for revitalized religious institutions are widespread in the citizenry." While crisis phenomena afflict the traditional religious denominations, also exemplified by the high numbers of self-ascribed religious believers without affiliation (so-called 'Nones'), Philipps aims to show how one may "ameliorate these crises and outline the parameters of a postsecular religious ethos that could recenter religion and religious institutions in public life."

How central religious convictions and practices may actually be for sustaining a democratic and shared public life is demonstrated by **Joseph Hellweg**'s "Religion in – and as – the Public Sphere: A West Africa-based Critique of Critical Theory of Democracy." Hellweg expands the horizon of the somewhat Western-centric discourse of 'religion in the public sphere' by ethnographically introducing the *dozos'* (hunter-healers) cultural practices as mediators between tradition and democracy, showing how "their ritual practices [allow them] to integrate themselves into Ivorian public life." Hellweg challenges a set of assumptions in critical theory's discourse on religion and the public sphere, including its almost exclusive focus on worldreligions, its one-sided focus on normative ideals versus actual practices and institutions, as well as the rigid distinction between a trans-religious 'secular' public sphere and religious or metaphysical worldviews. Yet his analysis also supports the general normative orientation towards the constructive and important resources that religious practices—so-called 'tribal' religions included!—can provide for a shared democratic public sphere. *Dozos* are such an amazing and exemplary case to be reckoned with since "their ritual practices have long mediated their devotion to both Islam and their professed encounters with spirits and other invisible forces in the forest, [so that] *dozos'* so-called 'religion' contains within it dialogical elements that have contributed to broadening the political public sphere on Cote D'Ivoire."

The religious resources to engage in an open, egalitarian, and democratic dialogue in order to productively participate in a normatively defined public sphere are also the topic of the final essay, **Hans-Herbert Kögler**'s "Tradition, Transcendence, and the Public Sphere: A Hermeneutic Critique of Religion." Kögler´s systematic interest consists in reconstructing the hermeneutic grounds of religious thought and experience such that the possibility of their compatibility with a postmetaphysical and egalitarian constitution of democratic life becomes visible.[12] Going back to the axial age innovations of religious and metaphysical thought, including the emergence of today's most influential worldreligions, allows Kögler to both outline their innovative socio-cognitive potential as well as their metaphysical impediments: Moral universalism and reflexivity remain couched in dogmatic and exclusivist worldviews. However, by analyzing the inescapably interpretive grounds of religious traditions, the "normative entailments of hermeneutic dialogue can be shown to be compatible with the socio-cognitive demands imposed upon both religious and secular self-understandings within an egalitarian and pluralistic public sphere." The often-invoked discursive flexibility and adaptability of religious thought is thus put on robust hermeneutic feet so as to sustain the reconciliation of religion and democracy.

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There can be no doubt about the considerable differences between the approaches and viewpoints presented here. The disciplines involved include political philosophy, sociology of religion, anthropology and religious studies, critical theory and hermeneutics, which are naturally reflected in diverse methodological approaches, including normative, empirical-analytical, ethnographic, and transcendental-hermeneutic analyses. Yet despite all this, the essays do find common ground vis-à-vis the issue of religious recognition and expression in a pluralistically defined society. Specifically, the essays collected in this volume arrive at some 'overlapping consensus' in three aspects.

First, all authors do emphasize *the constructive and productive role that religion is to play in a truly pluralistic and egalitarian public*. Buchwalter reconstructs with Hegel the 'religious underpinnings' of our constitutional, rights-granting state—a direction in which Habermas in his latest *magnum opus* moves himself. The universal recognition of each individual as equal and unique has strong Protestant roots.[13] Philipps foregrounds the motivational and engaging potential of a new religious ethos oriented towards pressing issues like social justice and climate change. Hellweg makes a compelling case how the groundedness in ritual practices combined with an openness towards one's cultural and symbolic worlds enables social groups to both integrate themselves into a shared public sphere and enhance public life in its egalitarian and dialogical functioning. Kögler in turn allows us to see how a hermeneutically enlightened religious self-understanding could well draw on and become a paradigm case how a strong transcendent orientation may be both maintained in one's own view as truth, as a privileged view-towards-transcendence,

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13   Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019); see my review „A Genealogy of Faith and Freedom," in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, special section 'Habermas at 90: Reflections on Philosophy and the Present Condition,' Rainer Winter (ed.), (TCS 37 (7-8), London: SAGE 2020) which highlights how Habermas reconstructs the historically constitutive function of religious thought regarding essential categories through which we appropriate our practical freedom; the special issue also includes a recent interview with Habermas and another review by Hans Joas.

and yet also be understood as part of a culture in which such transcendence is disclosed and appreciated in multiple and diverse ways.

Yet it is, second, crucial that such a reconciliation between religion and a pluralistically open public sphere is enabled by *the reflexive self-understanding of the religious citizens*. In their emphasis on the reflexive, mediating, or hermeneutic powers of religious thought and practice, all authors in this volume agree. Buchwalter highlights that the strength of the Hegelian conception consists precisely (to use philosophical jargon) in its fusion of Kantian with Aristotelian moments: the substance of the egalitarian and freedom-guaranteeing state is, for Buchwalter's Hegel, only established insofar as the citizens *recognize themselves* as free and equal in such a state as objective spirit. They thus become, as they have to after Rousseau and Kant, both authors and addresses, both lawgivers and the subjects of law of their own making. This *autonomous* self-constitution is presupposed as a background in Philipps' analysis when he reconceives religion in terms of a new *postsecular ethos* which the *subjects themselves* create in response to modern challenges and predicaments. They would thus reflexively and creatively transform their religious sentiments into some new ethical and collective self-orientation. Hellweg invests the bulk of his essay in unfolding the *active ritualistic mediation* of the mythic worldview of *dozoya* with Islam, the state, the public sphere, etc. *Dozos* are thus engaged in an ongoing and constant process of reinterpretation, a renegotiation, redefinition, and recreation of the meaning of 'religion' and its practices. Kögler in turn establishes that the very concept of tradition itself, if conceptually unfolded in its full meaning, entails the idea and practice of reflexive cultural appropriation. If religious thought and experience would come to realize its cultural reality in this light, it would be able to fully appreciate its constitutive reflexive powers, and do so without any detriment to the complementary self-understanding of 'being created' or defined by grace, the cosmos, or transcendence.

Finally, the authors also all understand that the truly egalitarian transformation of the public sphere needs to entail *a redefinition of, and a transformed approach to, science as well*. Only if religious practices and scientific knowledges are adequately thematized and positioned *vis-à-vis*

one another, can a postsecular world recognizing religion come into being. Buchwalter supports this view by alerting us to Habermas' warning that an un-constrained naturalism may destroy the very practical and normative resources on the basis of which we can ethically define ourselves as free and equal. Philipps highlights the tension between religion and science vis-à-vis some shared claims of 'explanation' but reminds us that certain phenomena, foremost those related to intentional, cognitive, and normative dimensions of our existence, resist access and definition in natural-scientistic terms. He comes close to suggest something like a 'cognitive division of labor' according to which empirical phenomena fall under science, whereas more spiritual or cognitive phenomena harbor (albeit not exclusively) ongoing potentials for religion. Hellweg shows how even a mythic background can serve as a productive meaning-giving resource, thus pointing towards ways in which non-scientific vocabularies remain immensely enriching and significant in a lifeworld within which scientific evidence may also be consulted if appropriate. And Kögler suggests that the untranslatability of the languages of the humanities and interpretive social sciences—just as much as the languages of art, morality, and religion— into a natural-scientific terminology shows that their respective realms of human experience defy conceptually the reduction to a natural-scientific worldview. While the sciences have an immense contribution to make when it comes to the articulation of our empirical natural and social environments, the advancement of their conceptual and methodological perspectives into an overarching 'ontological framework' in order to understand ourselves as such must always fail. It is here that religion, if adequately framed in its own right, will serve as a reminder of *something else* - perhaps even as the placeholder of a utopian and ideal state of being to which a reasonably free and egalitarian society stands as a promise and forerunner alike.

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Religion in the Public Sphere
Habermas, His Critics, and Hegelian Challenges

Andrew Buchwalter[1]

Abstract: This paper examines Jürgen Habermas' conception of the place of religion in the public sphere together with the notion of postsecularity underwriting that conception. The paper is divided into four main parts. Part 1 sketches core elements of Habermas' position, relating it to the kindred position of John Rawls, while contrasting it with that of philosophical theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff. Part 2 reviews important challenges to Habermas' position by sympathetic critics, notably Maeve Cooke and Charles Taylor. Part 3 considers challenges to Habermas' position from a Hegelian perspective. Four issues in particular are considered: (i) the religious underpinnings of an account of modern state neutrality, (ii) the religious underpinnings of a modern notion of constitutionalism and what Habermas fashions as a constitutional patriotism, (iii) the religious underpinnings of what may be termed, *pace* Habermas, Hegel's "postmetaphysical" conceptions of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and philosophical reason, and (iv) the manner in which Hegel's account of secularity articulates, in opposition to Habermas and Taylor alike, a uniquely "dialectical" understanding of the relationship of religion and politics. Part 4 channels a trope often employed by Habermas himself and asks how we might think "with Hegel against Hegel," focusing on how Hegelian resources may be deployed to counteract his Eurocentrism and the special role he assigns to Protestant Christianity.

In the past twenty years or so Jürgen Habermas has devoted considerable attention to issues involving faith and religion, especially those pertaining to the place of religion in society. This effort has culminated most auspiciously in the 2019 publication of what has been deemed

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1 Andrew Buchwalter is Presidential Professor at the University of North Florida. He is the author of *Dialectics, Politics, and the Contemporary Value of Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Routledge) and the edited volumes *Hegel and Global Justice* (Springer), *Hegel and Capitalism* (SUNY Press), and *Culture and Democracy: Social and Ethical Issues in Public Support for the Arts and Humanities* (Westview Press). He translated and introduced Jürgen Habermas' *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives* (MIT Press). He also contributed entries to *The Cambridge Habermas Lexicon*.

yet another magnum opus to emerge from the career of this extraordinarily productive and insightful philosopher and social theorist: *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*.[2] As this book amply demonstrates, Habermas' preoccupation with religion is wide-ranging, addressing *inter alia* the relationship of faith and knowledge, the nature of communicative rationality, the concept and genealogy of postmetaphysical reason, the foundations of modern political theory, the idea of rational freedom, and the breadth of human history itself. One particularly influential element in Habermas' recent work is its attention to the place of religion in the public sphere. Drawing on a conception of *postsecularity*, Habermas' attention in this regard represents an effort to better accommodate the interests and perspectives of individuals of faith within the framework of liberal-democratic societies.

In what follows I examine Habermas' conception of postsecularity as it bears on his understanding of a modern democratic political order. My discussion is divided into four main parts. In Part 1, I first sketch core elements of Habermas' position, relating it to the kindred position of political philosopher John Rawls, while contrasting it with that of philosophical theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff. In Part 2, I review important challenges to Habermas' position as raised by generally sympathetic critics, notably Maeve Cooke and Charles Taylor. In Part 3, I present challenges to Habermas' position from a Hegelian perspective. This part is divided into four sections: (i) the religious underpinnings of an account of modern state neutrality, (ii) the religious underpinnings of a modern notion of constitutionalism and what Habermas fashions as constitutional patriotism, (iii) the religious underpinnings of what may be termed, *pace* Habermas, Hegel's "postmetaphysical" conceptions of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and philosophical reason, and (iv) the manner in which Hegel's account of secularity, in opposition to both Habermas and Taylor, articulates a uniquely dialectical understanding of the relationship of

2   Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie, vol. 1: Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen; vol. 2: Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019).

religion and politics. In Part 4, I consider, channeling a trope often employed by Habermas himself, how we might think "with Hegel against Hegel," focusing on how Hegelian resources may be deployed to counteract Hegel's Eurocentrism and the special role he assigns to Protestant Christianity. Overall, I seek to (i) integrate into the discourse on the topic of religion in the public sphere a thinker whose possible contribution has been largely, and undeservedly, ignored, (ii) demonstrate the richness and distinctiveness of Hegel's contribution; and (iii) show that on certain points Habermas' affinities to Hegel are greater than he allows.[3]

1. Elements of Habermas' Postsecular Vision

In recent years Habermas has turned his attention to the role of religion in public life,[4] a development some have found curious given earlier neo-Marxist tendencies to dismiss religion as epiphenomenal and ideological. That he has taken up this theme now is attributable in part to perceived challenges to the traditional secularization thesis associated with thinkers like Max Weber. According to that thesis, occidental and even global rationalization processes entail a growing disenchantment of the world and therewith an increasing diminution of the role of religion in social and political life. Against this view, Habermas points to a myriad of phenomena attesting not only to the persistence but even the resurgence of religion in modern societies. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that "Max Weber's 'Occidental Rationalism' now appears to be an actual deviation."[5] However, he does not address this development first and foremost as a social scientist but as a social and political philosopher, focusing on how

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3   Compare my "G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831)," in Amy Allen & Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *The Cambridge Habermas Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 556-61.

4   The most developed statement of Habermas' position is the seminal essay "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' by Religious and Secular Citizens," in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 114-147.

5   Habermas (2008), 116.

these developments clarify assumptions about the nature of public life in liberal-democratic-pluralist societies.

One conventional such assumption is a commitment to the separation of church and state and the idea that religion and religious belief should play a limited role in the public life of modern societies. Habermas does not dispute core elements of this view; for him as well, the state should maintain an attitude of agnostic neutrality as regards religion and religious belief. However, he also claims that commitment to a strict separation of religion and public life is inadequate to the ideals of a democratic society, for at least two reasons. First, we do a disservice to the principles of democratic inclusion, not to mention expectations for social cohesion, if some members of society – in this case, people of faith – are denied the opportunities to participate in public life that are enjoyed by their secular counterparts. Second, by barring some citizens from actively participating in public life, we do a disservice to the idea of democracy itself, which for Habermas consists not just in aggregating private preferences but in forging a consensus on political ends achieved through public deliberation and the exchange of shareable reasons and arguments.

Thus, in fashioning a conception of the postsecular, Habermas' goal is not to jettison traditional strictures on the role of religion in public life. His aim instead is to relax those restrictions so as to better accommodate for modern pluralistic societies the goals of democratic inclusion and deliberation. His position can be clarified by briefly considering its relation to that of John Rawls, whose account of political liberalism serves as both a foundation and a foil.

Rawls is likewise committed to an account of modern public life that allows greater room for people of faith.[6] Rawls, to be sure, rejects any direct or unfiltered involvement of religion in the public sphere. Instead, religion – his focus is on religious argument – can legitimately be included in public discourse only when subject to a secular translation "proviso."[7] Reformulat-

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6   See John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1999), 131-80.

7   Ibid., especially § 4, 152-56.

ing the distinction between the religious and the secular as one between the private and the public, Rawls maintains that religious argument can play a role in political life only if presented as a form of *public reason*. Arguments cannot be adduced simply as articulations of a particular or private belief system. Instead, they must be restated in ways that conform to the requirements of public rationality, which means that they must speak to the ends of society as a whole and in ways addressed to members of society as a whole.

Habermas accepts the general framework provided by Rawls: he too wants to find a way to include more effectively people of faith in the public sphere while still subjecting that inclusion to certain restrictions. Yet his account of that inclusion is more capacious than Rawls', in two respects. First, he softens Rawls' translation proviso, restricting it to what he calls the institutional sphere; indeed, he calls it an "institutional translation proviso."[8] With Rawls, he affirms that any argumentation and participation in the formal public sphere – that of the explicit legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government – must adhere to norms that meet the sharable requirements of public reason, with language equally accessible to all citizens. However, in the wider informal public sphere – that comprising social media, blogs, radio talk shows, television discussions, as well as social movements – such expectations do not apply in the same way. In what Habermas calls the "wild" public sphere of civil society,[9] citizens should be allowed to express their views in an unfiltered way, and in explicitly religious terms as well. "The secularization of the state is not the same as the secularization of society."[10]

Habermas' second major disagreement with Rawls centers on his claims that the burdens of public reasoning should not be restricted just to people of faith, whose participation in the formal public sphere is, as just noted, subject to a translation proviso. A more inclusive and more

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8   Habermas (2008), 130.

9   Ibid., 131.

10   Jürgen Habermas, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Van-Antwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 23.

symmetrical arrangement would impose burdens on non-believers as well. Thus, the latter should be expected not just to tolerate but to actively engage and solicit the views of believers. "Whereas citizens of faith may make public contributions in their own language only subject to the translation proviso, . . . secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and enter into dialogues from which religious reasons might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments."[11]

Nor is Habermas' point simply that such complementarity denotes a fairer and more democratic state of affairs. He maintains as well that non-believers have potentially much to learn from people of faith. For instance, the theological notion that man is made in the image of God can empower the general "idea of equal and unconditional dignity of all human beings."[12] The resources of religious traditions can assist in counteracting the radical naturalism evidenced in scientific advances (e.g., biogenetics, brain research, and robotics) that place "our practical self-understanding as responsible acting persons in question."[13] Religious notions of good and evil can provide tools to deal with human calamities like the Holocaust in ways that conventional ethical notions of right and wrong cannot.[14] The eschatological impulse of political theology can remind people of the temporal dimension in which they raise normative claims, fostering thereby appreciation of the notion that democratic governance is a learning process and that "[a]ny democratic constitution is and remains a *project*."[15] All these features speak to how a robustly reciprocal account of the relationship of believers and non-believers, one directed to mutual learning, can enhance the public life of modern societies.

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11 Habermas (2008), 132.

12 Ibid., 110.

13 Ibid., 141.

14 Jürgen Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge," in *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 110f.

15 Habermas (2011), 28.

Thus, in both respects – the move from a general translation proviso to the narrower institutional proviso and the imposition of cognitive translation burdens on secular as well as religious citizens – Habermas presents an account of religion in the public sphere that is more capacious than Rawls'. Yet some have questioned just how much more capacious Habermas' position really is. Such questioning is central to the view of philosophical theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff,[16] whose position Habermas engages in "Religion in the Public Sphere."[17] From Wolterstorff's perspective, a position like Habermas' still imposes unacceptable burdens on religious individuals. For the devout, religion performs an integral and all-encompassing role in life. Thus, the notion that full-fledged citizenship in modern societies requires that such individuals should or even can suspend their belief system and restate core views in what may be an alien medium is an unreasonable, unfair and even disrespectful expectation. Accordingly, a proper correction to Rawls' position would consist, not in weakening the translation proviso, but in eliminating it altogether. If we are to avoid political self-censorship and societal schizophrenia, we must grant to religious argument a place in society no different than that afforded its secular counterpart. On Wolterstorff's view there is no warrant for excluding the devout from participating in any dimension of public life – the formal institutional sphere included.

Wolterstorff's place in the debate is instructive not least because it helps clarify Habermas' own position. Underlying the latter is a highly disjunctive view of the relationship of religious and secular modes of argumentation. Habermas' central claim is that at root religious belief rests on a dogmatic core impervious to rational argument and assess-

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16 Nicholas Wolterstorff, "An Engagement with Jürgen Habermas on Postmetaphysical Philosophy, Religion, and Political Dialogue," in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 92-111. Wolterstorff's core position is detailed in his "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues," in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds*.), Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 67–120.

17 Habermas (2008), 130-35.

ment – "the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truths."[18] In addition, religious claims to validity "are tied to the thick experience of membership in a religious community and remain particularistic even in the case of proselytizing creeds that aspire to worldwide inclusion."[19] In both respects, religious argumentation, rooted in the infallible truths of faith, is incapable of contributing to fallibilistic modes of public reasoning devoted to specifying what is generally valid for all. Given its indefeasibly dogmatic core, unfiltered religious belief is inappropriate to processes of public deliberation that, consonant with the Kantian conception of enlightenment espoused by Habermas as well, accords respect "only to what has been able to withstand reason's free and open examination."[20]

Participation in institutional political life for Habermas thus requires that people of faith display what he calls a *modern religious consciousness*.[21] Such consciousness is comprised of (i) a commitment to societal pluralism, (ii) an acceptance of the authority of science and its hold on the societal monopoly of secular knowledge, and (iii) an affirmation of the premises of a constitutional state grounded in a profane morality. In all, it expects from believers "the epistemic ability to consider one's own religious convictions reflexively from the outside and to connect them with secular views."[22] Nor, Habermas asserts, is such consciousness alien to the mentality of modern believers, whose appreciation of religious pluralism and whose wider membership in secular societies have facilitated adoption of a reflexive attitude vis-à-vis their own belief systems. Affirmed or not, however, the idea of a modern religious consciousness is predicated on the view that people of faith, if they are to participate in

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18 Habermas (2008), 129.

19 Jürgen Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 374.

20 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis IA: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 8n.

21 Habermas (2008), 136ff.

22 Ibid., 130.

political life at the *formal* level, must be willing to bracket fundamentalist convictions, rooted as they are in a dogmatic core not amenable to the unrestricted critical scrutiny such participation requires.

2. Challenges to Habermas' Conception of the Postsecular

Habermas' vision of a postsecular society has prompted a range of questions. One concerns whether he has adequately represented the nature of religious belief itself. This concern has been raised *inter alios* by Maeve Cooke in a series of essays.[23] Cooke's position is especially instructive as she is otherwise sympathetic to Habermas's position and his effort to secure a wider place for religious belief in the public discourse of liberal-democratic societies. With Habermas, Cooke also asserts, against any rigid separation of church and state, that modern societies must more systematically integrate into that discourse the concerns and perspectives of religious believers. With Habermas (and against Wolterstorff), she also rejects construing that discourse on the model of a *modus vivendi*, an arrangement simply allowing conflicting parties to coexist peacefully. With Habermas, she sees public discourse, including that between believers and non-believers, as a social learning process in which participants can mutually instruct one another on matters of common concern. And with Habermas, she is mindful of how religious discourse can readily assume a form resistant to critical reflection.

It is in regard to this last point, however, that Cooke also differs from Habermas. For him, a dogmatism is intrinsic to the nature of religious claims themselves, rooted as they are in a revelatory truth incompatible with the norms of public reason. By contrast, Cooke claims that the dogmatic nature of religious claims "is not a *necessary* ingredient of reli-

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23 For instance: Maeve Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion," *Constellations*, Vol. 4, 2 (2007), 224-38 and "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy," in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 249-74.

gious faith."[24] Although it is certainly the case, she allows, that religious utterances can and do take dogmatic and/or authoritarian form, there is nothing intrinsic to the nature of such utterances that they must do so. It is not "an essential feature of religious belief that religious instruction to live one's life in a certain way must be accepted as valid, irrespective of the reasoning powers of those to whom they are addressed."[25] On the contrary, religious beliefs are in all respects as amenable as are their secular counterparts to critical public scrutiny.

In advancing this position, Cooke invokes Habermas himself, whose idea of a reflexive religiosity should however apply, she says, not just to the attitudes and practices of modern believers but "to the fundaments of religious belief itself."[26] Even if some religious claims may proceed from dogmatically held core convictions, nothing says that those convictions cannot also change and undergo re-articulation as they are confronted with new experiences and countervailing perspectives. Cooke's point may be illustrated by the history of American Catholicism, which in the 19th century demonstrated a capacity to assimilate democratic norms in ways that had been presumed impossible.[27] Similarly, one may assume that a devout Catholic can be open to reimagining core beliefs as they may be engaged in reference to policy matters such as contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage. In his own critique of Habermas' position, Wolterstorff asserts: "rarely does one hear someone say, 'God told me, so it's true; and that's the end of the discussion.'"[28] Cooke would likely endorse this view, even if she may differ on what counts as discussion. Religious beliefs can and do express dogmatic or authoritarian attitudes and assumptions, but that is the case with secular claims as well, and in the same way that the latter can be exposed and adjusted in the critical

24   Cooke (2013), 255.

25   Ibid.

26   Ibid.

27   Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 36.

28   Wolterstorff (2013), 108.

scrutiny accompanying the public exchange of reasons, so too can the claims of believers. On this view, it is unclear why we must accept what remains central to Habermas' insistence on the necessity of (institutional) translation: the clear-cut and qualitative demarcation of religious from secular truth claims.

As noted, the restrictions Habermas places on religious discourse stem from an endorsement of the Kantian standard as to what counts as legitimate argumentation in the (formal) public sphere: that it must be "able to withstand reason's free and open examination." Yet one can ask, as Cooke and others do, whether even secular argumentation unequivocally meets that standard. For instance, core principles of public reason, like freedom and equality, are presumably part of the underlying background culture of modern societies, and as such do not easily lend themselves to the type of rational scrutiny the Kantian requirement demands.[29] In his debate with Habermas on these issues, Charles Taylor has raised this point with regard to core conceptions of secular morality.[30] Kantian ethics depends for its meaning and validity on certain indefeasibly core beliefs without which Kantianism would be unintelligible, like the idea that humans are rationally autonomous agents. Similarly, utilitarianism depends on certain indefeasible beliefs, like the view of humans as committed to maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. If we are to say that religious arguments are imbued with core assumptions resistant to unrestricted critical scrutiny, it is not clear that the same cannot be said for secular arguments as well.

Taylor's differences with Habermas may be further specified by noting that for him the task of integrating religion into the public life of modern societies is best completed, not by appealing to an idea of the postsecular, but by better, and more accurately, conceiving secularism itself. On his view, secularism should be understood, not as an effort to safeguard

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29 See Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," in Craig Calhoun, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Mark Juergensmeyer (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82.

30 Taylor (2011), 37.

the public sphere from encroachments by religion, but as an endeavor to provide a framework for accommodating the wide-ranging diversity in modern societies of all beliefs, religious and non-religious alike. Toward that end focus should be less on certain institutional solutions, like separating church and state, than on the underlying principles and overarching goals that inform of a proper account of secularism.[31] For Taylor these are basically fourfold: (i) freedom of religion or basic belief; (ii) equality between people of different faiths or belief systems; (iii) the ability of all belief systems to participate equally in defining the goals of society, and (iv) commitment to ensuring that relations among supporters of different religions and worldviews are as harmonious and amicable as possible. Informing all these principles and goals is a determination to accommodate the general "polysemy" of modern democratic societies.[32] In advancing this "radical redefinition of secularism," Taylor's aim is not to jettison the principle of state neutrality central to conventional notions of secularism. But for an account of secularism truly supportive of the diversity present in contemporary societies, such neutrality must pertain to all belief systems, and not just those associated with religion. "The state can be neither Christian nor Muslim nor Jewish, but, by the same token, it should also be neither Marxist, nor Kantian, nor utilitarian."[33]

Habermas' response to the arguments of Cooke and Taylor is clear. On his view the validity of religious truth claims is tied to membership in a particular religious community. In that capacity, however, such claims cannot be included in the public dialogue of modern secular societies, at least at the formal political level. Central to such dialogue is precisely a commitment to reasons that are accessible to all and open to unrestricted assessment by all. It is precisely this expectation that reasons are expressed in a generally and publicly sharable language that distinguishes secular reasons from those specific to a particular religious community, rooted as

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31   Taylor (2011), 34f.

32   Ibid., 56.

33   Ibid., 50.

they are in a revelatory core meaningful only to members of that particular group. In defending this view, Habermas recalls that, historically, notions of state neutrality and the secularization of political authority were fashioned in part just to address the conflicts between diverse religious groups whose core beliefs were rooted in a dogmatic and publicly inaccessible core. With the acceptance of principles of human rights and democracy, the various religious groups were able to assent to a common language able to bridge religious differences. Characteristic of that language, however, was a "transgression" beyond the boundaries of their particular creeds. In effectuating this transgression, religious groups did demonstrate a capacity to translate the semantic content of their belief systems into a publicly sharable idiom. But central to that capacity was a willingness on the part of believers to bracket or "decenter" the core truths of their particular faiths and to restate them so that their content was accessible to and by all. It is this expectation that religious groups test the truth of their assertions independently of the role they play within a particular religious congregation that "is the point of the translation proviso."[34]

Yet questions can still be raised about Habermas' position. In what follows I leave aside further consideration of contributions by contemporary critics and turn instead to perspectives that draw on the work of Hegel, whose position has been relatively unrepresented in current discussions. Overall, I claim that Hegel espouses an account of the place of religion in the public sphere that is more robust than Habermas' even as he shares the latter's commitment to basic principles of modern secular reason. Hegel's more robust account is reflected, however, not in a conception of the postsecular but in a more nuanced and variegated understanding of modern secularity itself. In this respect, his position exhibits greater affinity to Taylor's, and yet differences are notable here as well, especially as regards the role played by dialectics in Hegel's redefinition of secularity.[35]

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34 Habermas (2013), 375f.

35 The following discussion draws on my previous work, notably "Political Theology and Modern Republicanism: Hegel's Conception of the State as an 'Earthly Divinity,'" in *Dialectics, Politics and the Contemporary Value of Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), 181-97 and

As noted at the outset, my discussion in the next part of this paper is comprised of four components: (i) the religious underpinnings of an account of state neutrality, (ii) the religious underpinnings of a modern notion of constitutionalism and what Habermas fashions as constitutional patriotism, (iii) the religious underpinnings of what may be termed Hegel's "postmetaphysical" conceptions of ethical life and philosophical reason, and (iv) the manner in which Hegel's account of secularity articulates a *dialectical* understanding of the relationship of religion and politics.

3. Hegelian Perspectives

3.1 The Religious Underpinnings of the Idea of State Neutrality

As just noted, Habermas understands the nature of modern political authority against the backdrop of the modern wars of religion, where appeal to a neutral state was conceived as a means of maintaining public peace among conflicting belief systems. Yet it is questionable if this association in apt for an account of religion in the modern public sphere. As formulated in the 17th century, state neutrality was conceived as a device by which to adjudicate between warring religious creeds. In the present case, by contrast, the envisioned conflict is between religious belief and secular reason itself. Given that state neutrality represents the institutional embodiment of secular reason, it is thus itself a participant in that very conflict, a state of affairs that renders problematic simultaneous claims to impartiality. Habermas is not unaware of what he himself acknowledges is a "residual imbalance," but it is unclear how that imbalance does not in some way also question, as he claims it does not, the principle of state neutrality.[36]

"Elements of Hegel's Political Theology: Civic Republicanism, Social Justice, Constitutionalism, and Universal Human Rights," in *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy/Revue canadienne de philosophie continentale*, Vol. 21, 2 (2017), 138-161. In these essays I employ the concept of "political theology" differently than Habermas, who regards it, if I understand him correctly, as itself a "questionable inheritance." See Habermas (2011).

36   Habermas (2008), 309f.

Charles Taylor has voiced concerns such as these,[37] but they have also been enunciated by Hegel, who likewise questions whether there is anything truly neutral about the modern idea of state neutrality. In his 1802-03 *Natural Law*, for instance, he notes how the very idea of a state whose function is to adjudicate between conflicting claims is itself both the product and source of an early modern culture supportive of atomistic individualism.[38] On this view the liberal state, far from possessing an impartial status, is inextricably intertwined with a set of substantive values that it both presupposes and promotes.

In a more positive vein, Hegel maintains that even if one affirms the idea of state neutrality, as he himself did in the 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, that itself is not possible without appeal to an underlying culture. Here Hegel claims that principles of state neutrality and those generally associated with liberal state authority are not self-regulating. Instead, they depend on an enabling social ethos or political culture – he calls this ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) – characterized by a recognition of and support for the principles informing liberal political institutions, e. g., individual rights, fairness, mutual respect, public deliberation, and the idea of publicly accountable political authority. Only when so anchored can modern societies repel threats emanating from the autonomizing of its own principles – either individual liberty operating against the public structures that that liberty presupposes or the institutional structures detached from the individual interests they are designed to serve. For Hegel, a liberal political order cannot be properly sustained unless its members are communally disposed to affirm the principles and values upon which it is based and to which it is committed.

For present purposes Hegel's position is especially noteworthy because he understands that underlying ethos in religious terms. Religion is generally the cultural phenomenon whose function is precisely to mediate subjective sentiment on the one hand and objective norms and val-

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37   Taylor (2011), 48-51.

38   G.W.F. Hegel, *Natural Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975) [hereafter 1975b].

ues on the other. Focused on "an *inwardly revealed* eternal verity,"[39] it is the mechanism whereby received values and duties are apprehended as subjectively meaningful *and* ordinary beliefs and attitudes evince support for and embrace of norms that are objectively binding. Religion for Hegel is at once the everyday concretization of publicly binding principles and the subjective commitment to them on the part of community members. Like Durkheim after him, Hegel discerns in religious communities practices of obligation that simultaneously bind and motivate its members. Such communities instantiate an ethos that itself serves as the core of a polity defined in the interpenetration of objective institutions and subjective sentiment. They crystallize Hegel's claim "that religion is the very substance of ethical life and of the state."[40]

Religion, however, connotes more than a defining feature of the social ethos undergirding a genuine polity; it is also the source of a polity's stability and cohesion. In its explicit commitment to the interrelationship of universal and particular, religion nurtures the dispositions and cultural sensibilities needed to maintain a political order under modern conditions and circumstances. Not only does it foster sensitivity to how developed social relations and public institutions condition the modes of individual freedom central to modern societies; it demonstrates how the modes of mutual dependence constitutive of modern societies cannot be properly sustained unless individuals explicitly commit themselves to upholding public institutions and the structures that mediate public and private life. And inasmuch as a polity consists *a limine* in the conjunction of objective structure and subjective sentiment, religion helps constitute the very reality of a genuine political order. A source of civic education and engagement, religion sustains a political order, upholding its institutions and informing its basic structures. "[R]eligion is that moment which integrates the state at the deepest level of the sentiment of citizens."[41]

39　G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 487.

40　G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind, Part Three of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), § 552.

41　G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), § 270A.

In championing an ethico-religious culture as a condition for a liberal polity, Hegel is not simply making a theoretical claim; he is also participating practically in the public life of his time. As he does in his university lectures, so here as well he seeks to foster in his compatriots an appreciation of their civic responsibilities. Consistent with his general claims about embodied ethicality, he holds that that goal is best achieved by appealing to existing values and assumptions. By engaging such beliefs, even if in ways that may depart from their conventional understanding, he invokes values already accepted by his fellow citizens, thus eschewing the impotent moralizing against which he often polemicizes. For Hegel, those values were intertwined with the "Protestant cultural context"[42] of his age. In this regard, appeal to Protestantism is not an explicit endorsement of a particular creed but rather part of a practical-political effort designed to cultivate in compatriots the dispositions needed to affirm and maintain modern political institutions. One can certainly question whether institutions rooted in a *Protestant* system of values can in fact evince the desired creedal neutrality. Still, Hegel's position is that such institutions lack stability without a motivationally committed citizenry, and such commitment depends on an enabling set of values operative in the everyday beliefs and practices of ordinary individuals.

3.2 The Religious Underpinnings of a Modern Constitution and Constitutional Patriotism

For his part, Habermas, even as he invokes principles of state neutrality, does not eschew appeal to the broader cultural considerations that may support those principles. Not unlike Hegel, he asserts that popular support for the norms and institutions of a liberal-democratic polity requires recourse to the everyday values and attitudes of a culture that might motivate that support. Yet he also disputes the contention that such recourse entails appeal to religious or other pre-political considerations.

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42 The phrase is Laurence Dickey's. See his *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially 1-32.

He claims instead that it can be fully accommodated by drawing on the resources of modern secular culture itself. In line with the declaration proclaimed in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (modernity "*has to create its normativity out of itself*"[43]), a modern constitutional state is able to "regenerate its normative infrastructure through its own resources" and does not "depend on autochthonous worldviews or religious – or at any rate collectively binding ethical – traditions."[44] The process of democratic will formation, inasmuch as it "*mobilizes* citizen participation in public debates over matters that concern them all," itself engenders and sustains the shared culture supportive of modern political institutions. Habermas famously characterizes this culture in terms of a *constitutional patriotism*, one rooted, not in the "prepolitical ethical convictions of religious or national communities," but in a self-reflexive commitment to democratic legal-political procedures themselves.[45] Recourse to prepolitical convictions might be understandable if one embraces, as did certain right-Hegelian theorists, a deficient or truncated view of a constitutional order, one linked to a strong state committed only to ensuring negative liberties, thereby supplying none of the resources that might empower members of a political community to attend to the conditions of their shared existence. Yet for a constitutional democracy that regards citizens not only as the addressees but also the authors of their freedom,[46] the culture – also termed by Habermas a "republican ethos"[47] – that might support a modern constitutional order is intrinsic to the operation of that very order. It is the case that "democratic practices generate their own political dynamism."[48]

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43 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press,1987), 7, emphasis in original.

44 Habermas (2008), 101.

45 Ibid., 104.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 106.

48 Ibid., 105.

Hegel might respond by noting that, even if one invokes the idea of constitutional patriotism to account for the ethos supportive of the norms and institutions of a modern polity, doing so does not preclude attention to religious considerations. Central to his idea of "the political" is a conception of constitutionalism that places special emphasis on the legislative branch and the accompanying political public sphere.[49] This is the last of the three such "powers" (*Gewalten*) in his conception (following the sovereign and the executive), and, consistent with his justificatory method, the most important. In a general sense, his conception of constitutionalism also articulates a notion of constitutional patriotism. This is part and parcel of his view that a constitution is rooted in an enabling political culture, a *Volksgeist*, expressive of "the living customs present in the nation."[50] Central to that political culture, however, is a robust view of constitutionalism, one understood as a process in which a people constitutes and reconstitutes its very identity.[51] It is in this regard that Hegel identifies a constitution with the *Volksgeist* itself.[52] Informing this view of constitutionalism, however, is an engagement with religious motifs. Hegel characterizes the process of legislative self-constitution as "something divine" (*ein Göttliches*),[53] linking it to the idea of self-causation connoted by Spinoza's concept of God.[54] Understood as "the world which spirit has created for itself"[55] or a "world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature,"[56] a properly constituted political community articulates an account of

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49 Hegel (1991), §§ 298-320.

50 Hegel (1975b), 116.

51 Ibid.

52 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), § 134.

53 Ibid.

54 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1983) III, 259.

55 Hegel (1991), § 272A.

56 Ibid., § 4.

humanity that, while "considered finite for itself, is at the same time the Image of God and a source of infinity in itself."[57]

None of this is to say that for Hegel legislative self-constitution takes the form of autarkic self-creation; at issue is no creation *ex nihilo*. Proceeding from a view of philosophy as its own time apprehended in thought, Hegel stresses that political self-constitution always occurs against the backdrop of received customs, traditions, and practices. Indeed, consistent with the concept of spirit itself, a political community constitutes itself only in the process of renewing and restating its identity in the face existing and often changing customs, traditions, and practices. If a political community is self-creative, it is by way of the historical process in which it reconstructively cultivates and thereby actualizes existing realities. At issue is "the self-developing principle of a people in history," wherein self-constitution denotes the process through which "a people makes itself in history through itself."[58]

Yet appreciation of the mundane historicity of human political practice in no way gainsays the emphatically "religious" dimension of Hegel's notion of political self-creation. Religion for Hegel is exemplified by Reformation Christianity. Central to his view of the Reformation is an account of the realization of spirit intertwined with a transformation of existing practices – indeed, the "*transformation (Durchbildung) of secular life by the principle of freedom*."[59] The task of the *Reformation* is thus itself reconstructive: to establish that "the laws, customs, constitutions and all that belongs to the actuality of spiritual consciousness should be rational."[60] Nor could it be otherwise. If the absolute is properly established, as Hegel claims it is, only locating itself in what is alien to itself, then infinite self-causation itself depends on processes by which finite

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57 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), 333.

58 Hegel (2012), § 134.

59 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) [hereafter 1975a], 54, emphasis added.

60 Hegel (1983) III, 22.

human beings reinterpret and redefine themselves in ongoing efforts to come to terms with the existing conditions of their existence.

Habermas' recent deliberations on the place of religion in public life have been motivated in part by an acknowledgement that "[r]eligious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, . . . [and] this potential makes religious speech into a serious vehicle for possible truth contents. . . ."[61] With regard to the idea of constitutional patriotism, however, he seems intent on fashioning a republican ethos that avoids appeal to religious traditions, claiming instead that a modern constitutional order is able to "regenerate its normative infrastructure through its own resources."[62] This is so even though he also acknowledges that "there is reason to doubt whether the Enlightenment tradition can still generate sufficient motivations and social movements for preserving the normative contents of modernity out of its own resources."[63] In this regard, Hegel's position is instructive. While he also advances a notion of constitutionalism together with a corresponding ethos directed to a modern conception of political agency, he does not bracket receptivity to the resources of religious traditions. Rather, his particular appropriation of the theological notion of self-causation only serves to illuminate the content of what may be termed his own conception of constitutional patriotism.[64]

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61   Habermas (2008), 131.

62   Ibid., 101.

63   Habermas (2011), 17. See Peter J. Verovšek, "Habermas' Politics of Rational Freedom: Navigating the History of Philosophy between Faith and Knowledge," *Analyse & Kritik*, Vol. 42, 1 (2020), 191-218.

64   For further consideration of the relationship between Hegel and Habermas on the concept of constitutionalism, see my "Law, Culture, and Constitutionalism: Remarks on Hegel and Habermas," in Buchwalter, *Dialectics, Politics, and the Contemporary Value of Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), 83-96.

3.3 The Postmetaphysical Dimension of Religiously
informed Notions of Reason and Ethicality

Despite the significance he himself assigns to Protestant Christianity, Habermas would likely dismiss the Hegelian solution on the grounds that it seemingly entails support for the type of substantive ethical values at odds with the pluralist realities of modern political life. Yet while support for such values may well characterize Charles Taylor's challenge to Habermas' position, it does not obviously characterize Hegel's own. Granted, the notion of a shared culture in the form of an account of ethical life is central to his account of a polity. Yet common assumptions to the contrary notwithstanding, ethical life for Hegel does not connote endorsement of a particular set of substantive values. Instead, it remains a decidedly reflective and reflexive category. As with the concept of *Geist* itself (i.e., the process of rendering substance subject to itself),[65] an "ethical" community subsists in and through the processes by which its members attend to the conditions of their own commonality. Nor is this "formal conception of ethical life," to employ Axel Honneth's locution,[66] at odds with religious considerations. Rather, Hegel's reflective – "knowing and thinking"[67] – conception of ethical life is distinctive precisely because of its religious – in particular, Protestant – underpinnings. Protestantism, for Hegel, is the "religion of freedom."[68] Committed to the priesthood of every believer, it is rooted in "*the self-sufficient and inherently infinite personality* of the individual, the principle of subjective freedom."[69] Central to Hegel's idea of Protestantism as a religion of freedom is its self-reflexivity, and in particular its capacity to reflect on its own conditions. On his (seemingly heterodox) understanding, Protestantism is "the spirit of reflection" (*der*

65　Hegel (1977), 10.

66　Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), 173.

67　Hegel (1991), § 254A.

68　Ibid., § 270A.

69　Ibid., § 185A.

Geist des Nachdenkens).[70] In the political context, this means that Protestantism endorses a political practice in which individuals attend, not to the presumed ends and values that already shape a community, but to collective processes by which they interpret and define themselves. In one instance Hegel defined religion as "the rendering conscious of ethicality" (*bewußtwerdende Sittlichkeit*).[71] From the perspective of his account of Protestantism, this is not a process of making explicit the values of an already existing ethos. Instead, it affirms a decidedly reflexive account of ethicality, one for which communal attention to the conditions of community is the community itself. If Habermas' postmetaphysical thinking eschews appeal to objectivistically presumed norms and values in favor of those generated and ratified in processes of the intersubjective exchange among socially situated individuals, then Hegel's religiously informed conception of ethicality is also a postmetaphysical conception.

A similar point can be made with regard to the conception of rational freedom (*vernünftige Freiheit*) basic to Habermas' recent project.[72] Central to that conception is a view of collective human self-legislation rooted in communicative rationality and the intersubjective exchange of reasons. Habermas locates sources for that conception in Protestantism and Luther's understanding of faith in terms of the intersubjective exchange between human beings and God.[73] In this regard, however, Habermas' position is of a piece with Hegel's. With its notions of the priesthood of the believer and thus the location of the divine "in the depths of man's inmost nature,"[74] Protestantism, for Hegel, exhibits an understanding of the "mutual dependence" of finite and the infinite central a conception of freedom understood as selfhood in otherness.[75] He thus also perceives in

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70   G.W.F. Hegel, "Letter to Niethammer," 3 November 1810, in *Hegel: The Letters* (Bloomington IN: Purdue University Press, 1984), 227.

71   Hegel (1971), § 552.

72   Habermas (2019) I, 13ff.

73   Habermas (2019) II, 14.

74   Hegel (1983) III, 149.

75   Hegel (1956), 422.

Protestantism an account of intersubjective freedom, one understood in terms of the relations of reciprocal recognition.

True, Hegel also understands the idea of selfhood in otherness as the articulation of a "speculative" conception of reason, one expressed in the notion of reason's autonomy and the idea that thought can grasp itself as its own object. This idea is also central to his concept of *Geist*, understood as a principle of freedom rooted in the mediation of substance and subjectivity.[76] Habermas of course deems objectionable such speculative thinking, asserting that here Hegel abandons an intersubjectively based conception of reason in favor of one committed to a notion of absolute subjectivity that autarkically posits itself. For Habermas, this is a state of affairs that not only eviscerates a notion of communicative rationality, but disempowers political agency even while quietistically conferring legitimacy on existing circumstances, notably those embodied in the personhood of a constitutional monarch.[77] Nor is it disputable that there are features of Hegel's thought that lend themselves to readings such as these. Yet his position allows other interpretations as well. Here we leave aside the question of whether his account of constitutionalism is properly articulated in monarchism. Instead, it may be noted that the concept of *Geist* itself empowers a notion of rationality akin to that of rational freedom. As the process of rendering substance as subjectivity – unending, owing to its recursivity – , spirit also gives expression to an account of rationality articulated in ongoing, open-ended, and transformative modes of self-reflexivity.[78] Granted, Hegel fashions this account through meditation on the principle of self-consciousness and thus from within the paradigm of subjectivity that Habermas jettisons. Yet if the self-re-

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76   Hegel (1971), § 382ff.

77   Jürgen Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel and Back again – The Move Towards Detranscendentalization," *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, 2 (1999), 129-157. See also "Hegels Assimilation von Glauben an Wissen: Die Erneuerung metaphysischen Denkens nach Kant," Habermas (2019) II, 468-504.

78   See my "The Metaphysic of Spirit and Hegel's Philosophy of Politics," in Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics* (New York/London: Routledge, 2018), 33-55.

flexivity that infuses the concept of spirit is also understood as core to a concept of ethical life denoting processes by which members of the humans community attend to the conditions of their shared existence, then here too Hegel's "subject-centered" conception may articulate elements of the postmetaphysical conception that Habermas contraposes to Hegel.

3.4 Secularity and the Dialectical Relationship of Religion and Politics

The debate between Habermas and Hegel reflects differing approaches to modernity and whether the limitations of such subject-centered reason can be cured, as Habermas claims they cannot, with the tools of subjectivity itself.[79] Yet this debate also bears on the relationship of religion and secularity. Anticipating Charles Taylor, Hegel rejects appeal to an idea of postsecularity in favor of a more variegated conception of secularity itself, one he distinguishes from "ordinary secularity."[80] In particular, he advances a conception of "secular" modernity constituted in the "dialectical" mediation of the secular and the religious, one detailing the way in which seeming contrarieties presuppose and entail one another.

Thus, on the one hand the secular domain for Hegel rests on and affirms the religious, at least to the extent that the latter is understood in terms of Protestant Christianity. As noted already, the idea of universal human rights draws on the principle of the priesthood of every believer and the Protestant view of "the *self-sufficient and inherently infinite personality* of the individual, the principle of subjective freedom."[81] The idea of social justice, for whose advocacy Hegel has been deemed a Christian socialist,[82] rests on the idea that human dignity is to be understood not simply with notions of formal equality but, with the aid of Christianity's

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79 As Habermas charges, Hegel "conceived the overcoming of subjectivity within the boundaries of the philosophy of the subject." Habermas (1987), 22.

80 Hegel (1991), § 360.

81 Ibid., § 185A.

82 H.S. Harris, "The Social Ideal of Hegel's Economic Theory," in Lawrence S. Stepelevich and David Lamb (eds.), *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 52.

location of the divine "in the depths of man's inmost nature,"[83] with reference to the infinite value of the "individual as particular."[84] The intersubjective freedom central to the "ethical universe"[85] that constitutes for Hegel a legitimate polity is derived from a notion of freedom based on the Protestant mediation of self and other. Similarly, with Protestantism, "the principle of freedom has forced its way into secular life," [86] engendering a notion of political legitimacy for which institutions such as "law, property, social morality, government, constitutions, etc., must conform to general principles, in order that they may accord with the idea of free will and be rational."[87] Or again republican duties on the part of citizens to forge connections between individual and community draw on the Protestant conviction that individuals must "accomplish the reconciliation in themselves."[88] Hegel would likely second Hans Blumenberg's affirmation of the legitimacy of the modern age, yet in a way for which any account of mundane self-empowerment simultaneously affirms a "civic Protestantism"[89] as well.[90]

On the other hand, if for Hegel the secular depends on the religious, so too the religious depends on the secular. This at least is the case with his account of Christianity. Christianity is predicated on the reconciliation of the finite and infinite. Such reconciliation cannot be properly achieved

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83   Hegel (1983) III, 149.

84   G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818-1831, Vol. 4*, Karl-Heinz Ilting (ed.) (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1973-4), § 255.

85   Hegel (1991), 21.

86   G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, *Volume III: The Consummate Religion* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 341f.

87   Hegel (1956), 417.

88   Hegel (1983) III, 3.

89   H.S. Harris, "Hegel's Intellectual Development to 1807," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Frederick C. Beiser (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 49n.

90   Hegel's position is thus akin to that of Habermas, who criticizes Blumenberg precisely for failing to recognize such "simultaneity." See Habermas (2013), 357-362.

if religiosity is confined to a sphere juxtaposed to mundane existence. Instead, "this reconciliation should also be accomplished in the worldly realm."[91] The principle of inward freedom articulated with Protestantism must acquire external expression as well. But this means not just that a spirituality must infuse everyday life, a feature for Hegel distinguishing Protestantism from Catholicism. It means as well that the spiritual must be coextensive with society as a whole. Inward subjective freedom must "develop into an objective phase – into legal, moral, religious, and not less into scientific actuality."[92] Further, Christianity requires realization in an ethical account of political community, expressing thereby not only the conjunction of the finite and infinite but that of individual and community as well. "The true reconciliation whereby the divine realizes itself . . . consists in the ethical and juridical life of the state."[93]

Central in this regard is the religious cultus (*Kultus*) or the community of the devout, the focus as well of Habermas' recent engagement with Hegel. Among other things, members of a cultus are "citizens of the kingdom of God,"[94] and their religiosity is manifest in a mutual love reflected in a commitment to their shared commonality.[95] As citizens of a kingdom of God, however, that commitment cannot be restricted simply to their own particular community, one demarcated from the institutions of the secular world. Instead, it must encompass commitment to the ethical life of society as a whole. "To that extent ethical life is the most genuine cultus."[96] Spirit's realization is achieved in the "fellowship (*Genossenschaft*) of the free" instantiating genuine political community.[97]

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91 Hegel (1985), 340.

92 Hegel (1971), § 482.

93 Hegel (1985), 342n.

94 Ibid., 331.

95 Ibid., 218.

96 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. I: Introduction and the Concept of Religion* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 446.

97 Hegel (1991), § 359, amended.

Hegel's position is exemplified in his association of religious communities with the corporations he elaborates in his doctrine of civil society – the work-related cooperatives devoted to the social and ethical well-being of its members. To ensure the conditions of mutuality, religious communities cannot restrict themselves to pious sentiments of brotherly love.[98] Instead, they must also be expressed in worldly forms of "fellowship"[99] like corporations, which address and seek to counteract the impoverishment and forms of disenfranchisement that Hegel associated with the untrammeled operation of modern market societies. Only in these worldly forms of fellowship can religious entities do justice to their own commitment to the spiritual well-being of their members and the ideals of spiritual community itself. Moreover, inasmuch as corporations serve to address the polarities and bifurcations (*Entzweiungen*) accompanying market operations, they represent a special arena for the realization of a notion of religion itself manifest and sustained in the experience of radical opposition.

These considerations permit further articulation of Hegel's stance on the issue of religion in the public sphere. In many respects Hegel espouses a view akin to conventional liberal understandings.[100] He rejects the idea of a state religion; he condemns religious interference in the affairs of state and political life generally; he acknowledges the plurality of religious confessions; he claims that the state must remain agnostic as regards any particular religious creed; he assigns to the state the task of protecting the right of conscience and the free expression of belief; and he refuses to grant ecclesiastical organizations exemption from state law.

In other respects, however, Hegel proposes an account of the relationship of religion and politics that diverges from standard liberal understandings. This is so not simply because he regards as folly efforts to erect firm walls of separation between religion and politics.[101] He claims

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98   Cf. Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 118.

99   Hegel (1991), § 251, amended.

100   For the most detailed articulation of Hegel's position, see ibid., § 270.

101   See Hegel (1971) § 552.

such separation is undesirable as well. Here we leave aside expectations that may reflect a specific cultural context, e.g., the view that all members of society embrace a particular religion.[102] Instead, it suffices to note his contention that in a modern polity religious and "secular" considerations alike play an integral role. Indeed, against any rigid opposition of the religious and the secular, Hegel reconceives secularity itself, trading an account conceived along the lines of French *laïcité* with one that furnishes equal place for the "sacred" and the "profane."

In this regard Hegel's position is close to that of Charles Taylor, who eschews Habermas' appeal to the postsecular in favor of a redefinition of secularity itself. Yet there are also differences between the two views. Taylor's position takes the form of a "revisionary polysemy"[103] directed to the equal recognition of all groups and belief systems, religious and non-religious alike. By contrast, Hegel, unsurprisingly, proffers a "dialectical" approach, wherein religious and non-religious perspectives entail and presuppose one another. At issue are "two contrapuntal aspects" of a shared reality.[104] The nature and authority of core "secular" considerations – e.g., human rights, social justice, political accountability, state neutrality, collective self-legislation, popular sovereignty – are empowered and fortified through appeal to resources drawn from religious traditions. Conversely, core elements of religious considerations – e.g. fellowship, service, universality, estrangement, reconciliation, redemption, the relationship of the finite and infinite, and the divine itself – are best realized with the aid of the (broadly considered) institutional resources of a properly realized political community.

Hegel's position is further construable with the resources of his account of reciprocal recognition, for which the self-identity of one perspective is achieved only in acknowledging and integrating the perspective of the other. With Taylor, we might fashion this relationship

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102 Hegel (1991), § 270R.

103 Taylor (2011), 56.

104 Hegel (1984), 459.

in terms of an "overlapping consensus."[105] Processes of reciprocal recognition engender modes of mutual adaption and adjustment that not only shape and enrich each individual perspective but also nurture the shared norms and values that might further facilitate the recognitive relationship itself. Yet Hegel's position is likely not well construed with the notion of the *fusion of horizons* employed by Taylor in conceptualizing an overlapping consensus.[106] For Hegel, relations of reciprocal recognition not only proceed from the identity of each individual perspective but are directed to the further enrichment and empowerment of those perspectives. In addition, any blending of perspectives proceeds isomorphically with ongoing conflicts and struggles, a state of affairs certainly illustrative of the relationship of belief systems in today's globally differentiated world society. In this regard, the Hegelian position might be aligned with the fallible processes of intersubjective exchange central to the Habermas' concept of rational freedom. It is best construed, however, through modes of reciprocal recognition, conceived simultaneously as phenomena of conciliation and contestation, consensus and dissensus. More so than translation, polysemy, or horizonal fusion, a differentiated concept of recognition is especially useful in articulating the "dialectical" forms of mediation connoted by a Hegelian conception of secularity.

4. With Hegel against Hegel

To be sure, Hegel's particular proposal is tied to Christianity and in particular reformed Christianity, which he construes as the "consummate" religion. In this respect, his position displays not only a religious parochialism but a Eurocentrism as well. Even here, however, that position is more commodious than it might seem. Indeed, the resources of Hegelian thought may permit and even mandate a more capacious reading. Such a reading is in any event entailed by his own account of

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105 Taylor (2011), 48.

106 See his "Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights," in Daniel Bell and Joanne R. Bauer (eds.), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 136.

philosophical historiography. On that account, the "truth value" of a philosophical doctrine is tied to its "living" quality, that reflected in its instantiation of the animating tendencies of its age. This means that access to the truth of a cultural expression is secured not through, say, strict fidelity to a purportedly original meaning, one whose animating context has in any event likely ceased to exist. Instead, such value is acquired through a rejuvenating appropriation that restates the content of a text in a way more adequate to the animating tendencies of the current age. In Hegel's words, a "legacy is at once its reception and use of an inheritance."[107] Thus, for instance, he ascribed the superiority of Christianity to a cosmopolitan universality: originating "where East and West have met in conflict," Christianity conjoined "the free universality of the East and the determinateness of Europe."[108] Drawing on his own account of philosophical historiography, his particular engagement for Christianity might itself be affirmed by way of its re-appropriation in the form of, say, a post-Christian intercultural religiosity,[109] something itself consistent with his recognitive account of rationality.

Certainly, it is also Hegel's position that a system of thought is crucially tied to its cultural milieu. "Philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*."[110] In this respect his thought is imbued with an inescapably Eurocentric dimension. But this does not mean that it is Eurocentric in an irremediably parochial way. For Hegel, any supersession of a system of thought must be generated from within the ambit of that system itself. This conviction is central to his account of immanent critique, one that avoids the impotence and inconsequentialism of an approach that confronts a state of affairs with alien norms and standards. On this account an effective and consequential supersession of the European tradition

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107 Hegel (1983) I, 3 amended.

108 Hegel (1983) II, 380.

109 See also Andrew Buchwalter, "Religion, Civil Society, and the System of an Ethical World: Hegel on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," in Angelica Nuzzo (ed*.), Hegel on Religion and Politics* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2013), 227f.

110 Hegel (1991), 21.

must draw on the latter's own resources and engage it on its own terms. Hegel did not himself effectuate that supersession in any comprehensive way, yet its elements seem clear.[111] He understood European modernity above all in terms of a principle of freedom conceived as selfhood in otherness. On this view, then, a proper account of a European or Western self-understanding would also entail not only an openness to other cultures and traditions but a willingness to integrate into one's own self-understanding the perspectives of other traditions, including those others' perspectives on it. Addressing the conditions for the autonomous identity formation of individuals, Hegel writes: "the concrete return of me into me in externality is that I, the infinite self-relation, . . . have the existence of my personality in the being of other persons, in my relation to them, and in my recognition of them, which is mutual."[112] This logic of mutuality can also be extended to a Hegelian account of intercultural relations. In characterizing the place of Western cultures in a multiculturally conceived global community, Anthony Giddens writes: "Although still dominated by Western power, globalization today can no longer be spoken of only as a matter of one-way imperialism.... A world where no one is 'outside' is one where pre-existing traditions cannot avoid contact not only with others but also with many alternative ways of life. By the same token, it is one where the 'other' cannot any longer be treated as inert. The point is not only that the other 'answers back,' but that mutual interrogation is possible."[113] Elements of this position arguably also articulate a *Hegelian* supersession of the European tradition.

One can of course question whether an internal critique of this nature represents a genuine confrontation with the European tradition or whether it simply extends its reach further. In the present context,

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111 See my "Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric?" in Buchwalter, *Dialectics, Politics, and the Contemporary Value of Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), 236-253.

112 Hegel (1971) § 490.

113 Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in Ulrich Beck et al. (eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 96f.

however, it is noteworthy that elements of this approach are also evident in Habermas' recent work. Refusing to "take up an imaginary *view from nowhere* by denying my own location,"[114] Habermas himself seeks to foster a receptivity to and of other traditions and culture even while acknowledging his own "Eurocentrically limited perspective."[115] His approach may be more compelling than Hegel's, as it proceeds from an account of modernity itself understood "as creating something like the arena in which *different civilizations* meet each other in the course of designing a more or less culturally specific shared infrastructure."[116] At the same time, however, in advancing his own immanent transcendence of the European tradition, Habermas evinces an affinity to a thinker whose concept of reason he is otherwise determined to surpass.

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114 Habermas (2019) I, 172. For this citation as well as its English translation, see Verovšek (2020), 202.

115 Ibid., 126. Citation and translation, Verovšek (2020), 202.

116 Ibid., 119. Citation and translation, Verovšek (2020), 202f.

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The Prospects of Postsecular Religion:
A Sociological Perspective

Rick Phillips[1]

Abstract: Secularization is a core concept in the sociology of religion. Using the United States as a case study, I demonstrate that one manifestation of secularization in the U.S. is rising disaffection from organized religion, particularly among the younger generation. Nevertheless, while religious denominations are losing members and influence, beliefs indicating that unmet demand for revitalized religious institutions are widespread among the citizenry. This paper describes how secularization in the United States has produced three crises afflicting contemporary organized religion. I then discuss how to ameliorate these crises and outline the parameters of a postsecular religious ethos that could recenter religion and religious institutions in public life.

What are the prospects for religion in a postsecular society? In what ways can religion contribute to a just and equitable public sphere in pluralistic, globally connected nations? In this essay I address these questions from the standpoint of the sociology of religion, using the contemporary United States as a case study. I outline the current state of secularization, assert that contemporary, secularized society cannot adequately meet human existential needs, and theorize about the parameters of a possible postsecular religious worldview that both addresses these needs, and preserves other gains in human flourishing that have occurred alongside secularization.

To understand the possibilities of postsecular religion, we must first outline how the process of secularization has circumscribed and compartmen-

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1   Rick Philips is Associate Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida. He has published widely in the sociology of religious movements, with papers appearing in such venues as *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Nova Religio*, and *Sociology of Religion*. His research centers on the construction and maintenance of religious identity, and on factors contributing to denominational growth and decline.

talized religion in the West generally, and in the contemporary United States in particular. Sociology is uniquely positioned to describe this process.

The Secularization Thesis

The secularization thesis is central to early theorizing in sociology. The thesis assumes that social structures and culture in primordial societies were suffused with religious significance. Religion permeated all aspects of social life, and native theologies and rituals were ineluctable and axiomatic.[2] Secularization is the process whereby social structures and cultural constructs lose their religious character, and religion becomes compartmentalized and separated from other parts of society.[3]

In classical sociological theory, this is generally conceived as an evolutionary process. Societies where religion is pervasive are considered more primitive, and secularized societies are more advanced. For example, Auguste Comte—the proto-sociologist who gave the discipline its name—argued that societies pass through three successive stages. Primordial societies are in the "theological" stage, the earliest of the three. This stage is characterized by superstition and credulity, since people have no scientific understanding of their environment, their bodies, or their minds. Comte believed that the theological stage is orderly but lacks progress. Religion provides order by lessening existential anxieties, legitimizing leaders, and supplying myths that explain the natural world. All of life's vital questions have uncontested answers, but these answers—particularly those addressing features of the natural world—are wrong, and hence progress is thwarted.[4]

The "metaphysical" stage is the second stage. In this transitional stage, impersonal forces like "nature" replace concrete, corporeal deities, and

2   Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001).

3   Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

4   Gertrud Lenzer, ed., *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

reason supplants revelation as the means for explaining reality.[5] Comte believed that discarding naïve superstition constitutes progress, but since theological certainty is a traditional bulwark of society, the metaphysical stage is beset with disorder. This disorder is furthered by an obsession with individual rights, and the sublimation of social obligations to individual sovereignty.[6]

In Comte's final evolutionary phase—the "positivist" stage—scientific societies will have both order *and* progress.[7] Progress will arise from the discovery of scientific laws that govern human sociality, and order will be reestablished because the chaos of "egoism" pervading the metaphysical stage will be curtailed by the application of these laws.

Thus, a founding idea that pervades sociology is the notion that religion will retreat from public life because it is primitive and false, and advanced societies maintain robust social solidarity without gods. Sociology is still steeped in disregard for religion, and sociologists are among the most irreligious members of the academy.[8]

The Religious Landscape in the Contemporary United States

The secularization thesis has been revised many times since Comte, but the premise that religion will become increasingly irrelevant in human affairs as societies modernize is still a component of some theories in the sociology of religion.[9] Sociologists promoting these theories point to

5   Stefanos Geroulanos, "Les ar-z et les sciences: Aesthetic Theory and Aesthetic Politics in Comte's Late Work," in *The Anthem Companion to Auguste Comte* ed. Andrew Wernick (London: Anthem Press, 2017), pp. 143-157.

6   Jean Terrier, "The Social and the Political in the Work of Auguste Comte," in *The Anthem Companion to Auguste Comte* ed. Andrew Wernick (London: Anthem Press, 2017), pp. 65-89.

7   Auguste Comte [Bridges, J. H. tr.], *A General View of Positivism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

8   Christian Smith, *The Sacred Project of American Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

9   Charles Turner, *Secularization: Key Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 2019). Phil

recent declines in religious affiliation in the contemporary United States as evidence for secularization.[10]

Social scientists have been tracking trends in church membership since the advent of survey research methods. Beginning in the 1990s the percentage of people who told researchers they had no religious affiliation began to rise. Throughout the last decade of the 20th century and into the 21st, these "Nones" have burgeoned, and are now the nation's largest "religious" group, supplanting Catholics in 2015.[11] The prevalence of Nones in the United States varies by generation. In 2016 a major survey found that 40% of adults age 18-29 were None. For those over 65 the figure was just 13%.[12] This suggests a secularizing trend whereby each successive generation is less interested in organized religion than the one before.[13]

However, this retreat from organized religion is not accompanied by a similar decline in religious belief. About half the Nones say they believe in God, and more than half believe in an afterlife.[14] Abandoning the churches while preserving belief may mean that the Nones are not thoroughly secularized, but rather dissatisfied with religious institutions. "Believing" without "belonging" among the Nones suggests that while

Zuckerman, *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

10 Kelley D. Strawn, "What's Behind the "Nones-sense"? Change Over Time in Factors Predicting Likelihood of Religious Nonaffiliation in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58.3 (2019): 707-724.

11 Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," accessed August 25, 2020, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

12 Public Religion Research Institute, "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back," accessed August 25, 2020, https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PRRI-RNS-Unaffiliated-Report.pdf.

13 Simon Brauer, "The Surprising Predictable Decline of Religion in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57.4 (2018): 654-675.

14 Aaron Gullickson, "The Diverging Beliefs and Practices of the Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated in the United States," *Sociological Science* 5.1 (2018): 361-379.

churches in their present configuration are less useful, supernatural beliefs continue to provide benefits.[15]

What are the problems with religious institutions that have led so many—particularly the young—to forsake them? I identify three intersecting secularization "crises" that contribute to the waning influence of churches in public life, and to the wave of apostasy rippling through the populace. They are: a crisis of authority, a crisis of membership, and a crisis of utility. The contours of these crises have been described by sociologists, and their parameters provide clues for how each crisis can be ameliorated. These ameliorations constitute a strategy for establishing a postsecular religious ethos that can infuse institutions and reclaim space in the public square. I outline each of these crises and ways to address them below.

Crisis of Authority

The first crisis is the crisis of authority. Sociologists have argued that secularization can be defined as the declining scope of religious authority.[16] Since the founding of the nation, religious professionals have opined with authority on matters of public morality, and religious institutions have been central to civic life.[17] However, in recent decades the citizenry has begun to question the legitimacy of religious professionals, and the involvement of religious institutions in the public sphere has become controversial and politicized.[18] This has limited the scope of their authority.

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15 Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, *None of the Above: Nonreligious Identity in the US and Canada*, (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

16 Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72.3 (1994): 749-774.

17 Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). James M. Patterson, *Religion in the Public Square: Sheen, King, Falwell* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

18 Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

Religious Professionals

Religious professionals were once able to speak to people across the political continuum. But surveys show the status and prestige of the clergy has declined in recent decades,[19] and the ability of priests and pastors to influence public opinion or mobilize citizens outside their core constituency is circumscribed.[20]

The authority of the clergy has been eroded by modern information technologies.[21] These technologies have uncovered and broadcast instances of hypocrisy and malfeasance within the ministry that was previously concealed.[22] While there is no evidence that clergy are more hypocritical or malfeasant than the average citizen, corruption and opportunism within their ranks—regardless of its prevalence—has affected public opinion.[23] When people who are placed on a pedestal are found to be subject to all common human failings, the reputation of their profession itself is damaged.[24]

To be clear, tainted clergy and their disreputable deeds are not new. The sociologist Herbert Spencer—himself an explicator of secularization—wrote: "Volumes may be written upon the impiety of the pious."[25]

19 Art Swift, "Honesty and Ethics Rating of Clergy Slides to New Low," accessed August 25, 2020, https://news.gallup.com/poll/166298/honesty-ethics-rating-clergy-slides-new-low.aspx.

20 Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

21 Paul K. McClure, "Tinkering with Technology and Religion in the Digital Age: The Effects of Internet Use on Religious Belief, Behavior, and Belonging," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56.3 (2017): 481-497.

22 Anson Shupe, *Spoils of the Kingdom: Clergy Misconduct and Religious Community* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

23 Megan Brenan, "Nurses Again Outpace Other Professions for Honesty, Ethics," accessed August 25, 2020, https://news.gallup.com/poll/245597/nurses-again-outpace-professions-honesty-ethics.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_content=morelink&utm_campaign=syndication.

24 Anson Shupe, *Rogue Clerics: The Social Problem of Clergy Deviance* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

25 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862), 110.

But information technology and the cultural climate it fosters makes it much more likely these deeds will come to light, shaking the pedestal upon which the clergy are perched.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church covered up sexual abuse perpetrated by priests for decades. Offenders were shuffled from parish to parish, and victims were often left without recourse and their accusations were dismissed. But eventually these crimes were unearthed. The density and scope of modern media outlets brought them to light. A report commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops found over 10,000 credible allegations of sexual abuse involving over 4000 Catholic priests—over 4 percent of the nation's priesthood.[26] This scandal has damaged the Roman Catholic Church's credibility.[27]

Religious Institutions

The declining power and reach of religious institutions is a more intractable problem than the slumping approval ratings of ministers. The influence of churches in the United States began to wane shortly after the nation was founded, and this decline has accelerated in the 21st century.[28]

The sociologist Peter Berger has argued that in pre-modern societies religion functions as a "sacred canopy" that integrates and undergirds all aspects of social life. In these settings, the authority of doctrine and the legitimacy of ritual is unchallenged.[29] Charles Taylor has argued that in early medieval Europe it was impossible for the average person to doubt

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26 John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950-2002," accessed August 25, 2020, http://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2004_02_27_JohnJay_revised/2004_02_27_John_Jay_Main_Report_Optimized.pdf.

27 Megan Brenan, "US Catholics' Faith in Clergy is Shaken," accessed August 25, 2020, https://news.gallup.com/poll/245858/catholics-faith-clergy-shaken.aspx.

28 Steve Bruce, "Late Secularization and Religion as Alien," *Open Theology* 1.1 (2014): 13-23.

29 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

the teachings of the church, because there was no alternative world-view.[30] Christianity was almost as unassailable in the American colonies. Throughout the colonial and revolutionary era Biblical morality—as interpreted by clergy—was public morality. There was little distinction between what was a crime and what was a sin.[31] However, shortly after the convulsions of the American Revolution and the tumultuous founding of the nation, the sacred canopy began to crack. Nascent market economies connected villages and towns, chipping away at the power of local ministers to define morality and enforce compliance with religious strictures in non-church settings.[32] Rising religious pluralism—fostered by an increasingly mobile population—turned doctrines and interpretations of scripture from something uncontested into matters of debate. This led to a period of religious ferment and cacophony, as various denominations vied with one another for adherents.[33] According to Berger, religious pluralism and competition between faiths fractures the sacred canopy, because competing claims to exclusive truth cancel each other out.[34]

The power of religion to shape public life was attenuated. Some argue that the scope of religious authority has been in retreat ever since. For example, in the contemporary United States most citizens have views on women's rights and sexuality that are out of step with a literal reading of the Bible. Many institutions that started with religious sponsorship have seen that connection muted or eliminated.[35]

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30 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2018).

31 Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

32 Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

33 Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). John Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992).

34 Alastair D. Hay, "An Investigation in the Swiftness and Intensity of Recent Secularization in Canada: Was Berger Right?" *Sociology of Religion* 75.1 (2013): 136-162.

35 Davis Brown, "Measuring Long-Term Patterns of Political Secularization and Desecularization: Did They Happen or Not?" *Journal for the Scientific*

As modern morality has drifted away from a literal interpretation of the Bible, many powerful religious organizations in the United States have attempted to reestablish their authority through the ballot box and the courts. The New Christian Right—assembled in the 1980s—was a coalition of religious conservatives attempting to forge a link between fundamentalist Christian morality, public norms, and the law. These Christian activists became associated with the Republican party.[36] Throughout their struggle, they have spent political capital, and the denominations in the movement have seen their public approval ratings drop, along with their ability to attract or retain members.[37]

Studies show that the merger of politics and Christianity is a factor in young peoples' apostasy.[38] As Evangelical Christianity and its moral prescriptions have become more associated with the Republican party, the Nones have become less likely to be Republicans.[39]

Given the dissatisfaction with the merger of Evangelical Christianity and conservative politics, an obvious solution would be a Christian Left that serves as a counterweight. But studies show that apostasy from liberal denominations is widespread.[40] Churches that have accommodated mainstream culture by doing things like ordaining women and performing same-sex marriages have declined even faster than their conserva-

Study of Religion 58.3 (2019): 570-590.

36 Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

37 Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

38 Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

39 Philip Schwadel, "The Politics of Religious Nones," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59.1 (2020): 180-189. Michael Hout and Claude D. Fischer, "Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987-2012" *Sociological Science* 1.1 (2014): 423-447.

40 Jeremy N. Thomas and Daniel V. A. Olson, "Testing the Strictness Thesis and Competing Theories of Congregational Growth," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49.4 (2010): 619-639.

tive counterparts.[41] The Episcopal church exemplifies this. Beginning in the 1970s the church began to lose members and attendance at worship services dwindled.[42] Scholars have theorized that because the Episcopal church and others like it have accommodated to mainstream society, they offer little that is distinctive from the larger culture in terms of morality and norms. Hence, there are fewer compelling reasons for people to join or remain.[43]

In sum, the mainline churches offer a product that is not distinctive, while the conservative churches offer a distinctive product that younger generations don't want.[44] I have outlined this dynamic within the context of Christianity, but the same process is at work within Judaism in the United States. Orthodox Judaism struggles with the defection of younger members, while Reform Judaism struggles generally.[45]

Revitalized Authority

So how can religion regain its authoritative voice? I have argued that bad behavior on the part of the clergy and the inability of religious organizations to adapt to generational shifts in spiritual needs is both a cause and consequence of secularization. Conflict theorists in sociology assert that some of the anachronistic aspects of United States religion persist because the status quo is good for religious elites, who preserve their privilege by convincing others that challenges to their authority are sin-

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41 Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

42 Jason Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

43 Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches are Strong," *Social Forces* 99.5 (1994): 1180-1121.

44 Michael McBride, "A Rational Choice Theory of Religious Authority," *Rationality and Society* 28.4 (2016): 410-438.

45 Jack Wertheimer, *The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). Hella Winston, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006).

ful. At worst, this leads to corruption within religious hierarchies. At best it threatens the relevance of religious organizations.[46]

Religious hierarchy and stodgy institutions must yield to an organic, native theology that emerges from the grassroots. Authority must derive from the bottom up, rather than through imposition or usurpation by elites. Moreover, the religious goods that emerge from this enterprise must speak to the needs of younger citizens. Polling of young people reveals what they desire. Concern for the environment, severing the link between religion and nationalism, equality and inclusion, and the elimination of poverty are all important religious issues for young people in the United States.[47] New permutations of religion that speak to their religious needs can have a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu flavor, but the list of values I've outlined for a postsecular, engaged religious ethos transcends denomination and creed.

Crisis of Membership

The second crisis is the crisis of membership. Religious affiliation is a mechanism that bolsters solidarity and inculcates identity. In the early Republic, denominations used a parish system which consolidated congregation and neighborhood. In smaller towns and farming communities, parish and civic life were intertwined. No one could partake of one without the other, and there was no discernible boundary between them. Church membership was the keystone of society, providing an immanent, palpable sense of "us."[48]

The solidarity and identity fostered by denominational affiliation was more pervasive in the 19th century than it is today. For example, the dif-

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46 Hector Garcia, *Alpha God: The Psychology of Religious Violence and Oppression*, (New York: Prometheus Press, 2015).

47 Christian Smith, *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

48 John G. West, *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

ferences in theology, polity, and ritual between the Methodists and the Presbyterians were the subject of frequent, acrimonious debate in the period following the Revolutionary War. Preachers in each denomination denounced members of the other as heretics.[49]

This is not the case today. In the 21st century rank-and-file Methodists and Presbyterians would struggle to identify a single significant theological difference between the denominations. In the late 20th century, the ecumenical movement sought to homogenize theology, polity, and ritual so that members of the various mainline churches could share sacraments and switch between them. This made church membership portable and removed impediments to things like interfaith marriage.[50] But the cost of ecumenism was a weaker sense of belonging, and a less salient religious identity. Sociologists have argued that ecumenism weakens denominations.[51]

Rising religious pluralism has separated church and civic life in the United States. Protestant denominations no longer use a parish system, and congregational boundaries are defined by social behavior, rather than geography. Even the Catholic parish system is evaporating, and U.S. Catholics now "parish hop" to find a church that fits their politics or liturgical style, rather than faithfully attending a neighborhood church.[52]

Church membership is no longer a marker of status in the community, so people have less stake in joining or staying than in previous decades. Not surprisingly, rates of defection are rising. Wollschleger and Beach assert:

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49   Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

50   Harold C. Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

51   Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also: Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

52   Office of Pastoral Resources and Research, Archdiocese of Detroit, "Number of Catholic Families Living within their Parish Boundaries," *Review of Religious Research* 59.2 (2005): 308–309.

the gradual weakening of social disincentives against non-religiously affiliated individuals may be leading to a historical situation which provides those who belong but do not believe with the opportunity to finally express their true preferences without penalty. The growth of the religious "nones" could potentially be understood as a result of the waning influence of religion on social institutions (macro-secularization if you will) which, in turn, has revealed the actual underlying preference structure of wider society.[53]

The decline of religious institutions is mirrored by a similar falloff in public participation generally. Involvement in clubs and civic organizations in the United States has declined, and social solidarity and collective identity have diminished in concert.[54]

Emile Durkheim called this crisis of membership a state of "anomie." Anomie is a harbinger of social pathologies and dysfunctions. Famously, Durkheim connected anomie to suicide.[55] Is it coincidence then, that as the younger generation has forsaken the bonds of religious community and the existential comfort it provides that suicide rates among them have risen?[56]

Institutions that provide a buffer between individuals and governments are vital for societal health. Many of the ills of 21st century U.S. society have been attributed to a moribund public square.[57] Religious in-

53   Jason Wollschleger and Lindsey R. Beach, "Religious Chameleons: Exploring the Social Context for Belonging Without Believing," *Rationality and Society* 25.2 (2013): 192.

54   Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). Seymore Martin Lipset and William Scneider, "The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions," *Political Science Quarterly* 98.3 (1983): 379-402.

55   Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1951).

56   Johan Bilsen, "Suicide and Youth: Risk Factors," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9.1 (2018): 1-5. Donna Ruch, *et.al*. "Trends in Suicide Among Youth Aged 10 to 19 Years in the United States, 1975 to 2016," *JAMA Network Open* 2.5 (2019): 1-9.

57   Gary Lafree, *Lost Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

stitutions have always been essential to civic life, but secularizing trends have weakened their ability to provide a sense of belonging and identity. And those that are still able to foster a strong feeling of "us" tend to be those with political and social views that young people find noxious.[58] A postsecular solution is the emergence of vibrant, exclusive religious organizations that are focused on the issues that are important to the next generation: environment, social justice, and equality.

Crisis of Utility

The third crisis is the crisis of utility. Religion is among the oldest human institutions. As such, early religions met needs that are now addressed by other institutions in modern societies: the political system, the legal system, the education system, etc.[59] The shaman's role as healer has been supplanted by physicians. Punishing antisocial behavior is the province of judges rather than clerics. In the modern world, there are fewer things for religion to do.

Existential Concerns

According to Marx, an important function of religion is to salve the misery of existence and offer the prospect of contentment in an afterlife to offset the pain of this one.[60] Methods to cope with insecurity, loss, illness, and death are core components of most religions.[61] In the ancient world, things like the capriciousness of the elements and the unpredictability of the harvest heightened anxiety over basic subsistence. With no treatment for many common diseases and injuries, half of all children never

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58 Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Voodoo Economics? Reviewing the Rational Choice Approach to Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34.1 (1995): 76-89.

59 Gregory Wightman, *The Origins of Religion in the Paleolithic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

60 John Raines (ed.), *Marx on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

61 Anderson J. Thomson and Clare Aukofer, *Why We Believe in Gods: A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith* (Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing 2011).

reached adulthood. Many who did survive were stricken with disabilities reducing their quality of life. Religion made sense of these hardships.[62] For example, the Hebrew Bible is replete with rules for supplication and fealty to God that will ward off drought and famine. There are also rituals and rules for dealing with illness, and myths and theodicies to make sense of calamity.[63]

Although the existential concerns that consumed ancient people are still widespread in some parts of the world, they have been subdued by increasing prosperity in many nations, including Western nations. Social scientists have argued that when governments are able to reduce insecurity and suffering in the present, people are less inclined to importune the gods or focus on the afterlife.[64] Cross national studies of religiosity show that as indices of prosperity rise, the percentage of citizens within a given country reporting that religion is important to them falls.[65] This holds within the United States as well. The poorest states are generally the most religious, while the richest are the least.[66] Thus, rising living standards and longer lifespans have eroded the utility of religions that have previously functioned as Marxian "opiates."

The Challenge of Science

The most important challenge to the utility of religion comes from science. Religion has always provided answers to questions about the natural world. The Hebrew Bible contains many explanations for observable

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62 Fuller E. Torrey, *Evolving Brains, Emerging Gods: Early Humans and the Origins of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

63 Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

64 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

65 Gregory S. Paul, "Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies," *Journal of Religion and Society* 7.1 (2005): 1-17.

66 Georges R. Delamontagne, "High Religiosity and Societal Dysfunction in the United States During the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century," *Evolutionary Psychology* (2010): 617-657.

phenomena that would have been inscrutable to people in a prescientific age. Among other things, the Hebrew Bible explains why snakes don't have legs, why there are so many different languages, and why we see rainbows after a storm.[67] These explanations are wrapped in myths and provide pat answers to questions the ancient Hebrews had about the world around them.[68] These myths were subsequently canonized in one of Western civilization's founding texts. The problem, of course, is that many of these explanations—which have been taken quite literally throughout history—are inconsistent with the weight of the evidence.

From its inception science has undercut the empirical claims made in the Bible. Galileo delivered the *coup de grace* to the geocentric cosmology of the ancient Hebrews. James Hutton demonstrated that the earth was much older than a literal reading of Genesis allows. Charles Darwin explained the diversity of lifeforms without appealing to a creator. Their work relies on independently verifiable observations and replicable methods.[69]

Social scientists have argued that science and religion are engaged in a zero-sum struggle to explain the natural world. As science advances, religion retreats. The "god of the gaps" argument asserts that religious explanations for natural phenomena only persist when they posit explanations for things that science doesn't yet understand, like the nature of consciousness and the mind-body problem.[70] For example, in the ancient world, tomorrow's weather was discerned through divination. Now it is predicted by reading instruments that measure atmospheric conditions. These instruments have proven to be more accurate than soothsayers and have therefore supplanted them. The anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace writes: "[t]he evolutionary future of religion is extinction. … Belief

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67 On the morphology of snakes see Genesis 3:1-15. On the origin of languages see Genesis 11: 1-9. On rainbows see Genesis 9:12-17.

68 Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

69 Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

70 Jonathan Westphal, *The Mind-Body Problem* (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).

in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as the result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge."[71]

But other social scientists and philosophers disagree. Wallace's prediction fails to account for other vital functions of religion. The biologist Stephen J. Gould famously described science and religion as "non-overlapping magisteria," arguing that while science is well suited to explain the natural world, its contribution to metaphysics is limited.[72] Science cannot say what is morally correct, or what is beautiful. It cannot opine on the persistence of consciousness beyond the grave. Grappling with these things is as important for humanity—both then and now—as is understanding the properties of material reality. Certainly many empirical scientific claims have superseded religious claims, but explaining the characteristics of the natural world is neither foundational to religion nor essential for it to flourish.[73] Moreover, even with respect to explaining the natural world the "god of the gaps" argument might be short-sighted and hasty. Some argue that as science has advanced, the gaps in our knowledge have gotten *larger*.[74] The more we know, the more we realize how much we don't know.

Nevertheless, religion in the United States is still tainted by its association with denominations that intransigently and dogmatically insist on advancing a literal interpretation of Biblical claims about the natural world. A successful postsecular religion will be one that yields to evidence, and emphasizes ethics, morality and solving existential problems—something science cannot provide, and something humans will always need.

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71 Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View*, New York: Random House, 1966), 265.

72 Steven J. Gould, "Non-Overlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* 106.1 (1997): 16-22.

73 Amerigo Barzaghi and Josep Corco, "Stephen J. Gould and Karl Popper on Science and Religion," *Scientia et Fides* 4.2 (2012): 417-436.

74 Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Conclusion

Ongoing secularization in the United States prompts some social scientists to assert that secularizing trends in society are likely to endure or even intensify.[75] However, this prediction ignores persistent religious impulses in the citizenry. For example, while religious institutions may be losing their influence, belief in supernatural powers and the afterlife remains robust.[76] This implies that secularization is a self-limiting process and can be reversed.

As we have seen, Auguste Comte believed that the fruits of science could meet the existential needs of humanity. But it appears that religion has no substitute, and its functions can't be outsourced to ordinary institutions. Perhaps Auguste Comte's error was in pining for positivist utopia rather than theorizing about how the order of the theological stage can be merged with the progress of the metaphysical stage to construct a religious ethos that is compatible with modernity and science.

The persistence of religious belief implies the existence of unmet demand for modern religious institutions that can meet the needs of adherents without the problems that vex denominations today.[77] In this essay, I have argued that postsecular religious institutions can regain their footing in the public square by addressing the present crises of authority, membership, and utility that are a consequence of secularization.

75 David Voas and Mark Chaves, "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?" *American Journal of Sociology* 121.5 (2016): 1517–1556. David Voas and Mark Chaves, "Even Intense Religiosity is Declining in the United States," *Sociological Science* 5.1 (2018): 694-710.

76 Volkan Ertit, "Secularization: The Decline of the Supernatural Realm," *Religions* 9.4 (2018): 1-18.

77 Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations*, (New York: Ashgate, 2008).

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Religion in – and as – the Public Sphere: A West African-Based Critique of Critical Theory of Democracy

Joseph Hellweg[1]

Abstract: This essay is an ethnographic response to Habermas's estimation of the place of religion in the political public sphere. It examines a network of initiated hunter-healers, called *dozo*s, in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa. Since the 1990s, they have drawn on their ritual practices to integrate themselves into Ivoirian public life, often to controversial effect. Their success in this regard, mitigated as it has been, has seen them transform into semi-official security agents and, subsequently, rebel soldiers. These developments follow a history of participation in a precolonial, West African public sphere that oriented *dozo*s toward difference, an openness that continues to infuse their rituals. Because *dozo*s drew on ritual practice to define their security-related and military roles, they introduced religion into the Ivoirian public sphere in unexpected and innovative ways. But because their ritual practices have long mediated their devotion to both Islam and their professed encounters with spirits and other invisible forces in the forest, *dozo*s' so-called "religion" contains within it dialogical elements that have contributed to broadening the political public sphere in Côte d'Ivoire. Their activities ultimately inspire an alternative definition of religion that concedes the possibility of the public sphere's encompassment within religion as much as religion's potential integration into the public sphere.

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1   Joseph Hellweg is cultural anthropologist and associate professor of religion at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. He has also been Fulbright Professor of Sociology at the University of Kankan, Guinea (2008-09) and Whichard Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at East Carolina University (2017-18). His first book, *Hunting the Ethical State: The Benkadi Movement of Côte d'Ivoire* (2011) documents the growth of a hunters' security movement. His second, *Anthropologie, les premiers pas* (2011), is an overview of ethnographic methods for francophone readers. He is currently preparing books on Côte d'Ivoire's civil wars, *dozo* ritual songs, and the N'ko script of Guinea and Mali. He has published articles in *Africa*, *Africa Today*, the *African Studies Review*, *Afrique contemporaine*, the *Journal of Africana Religions*, and the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, among others.

Introduction: Locating Religion in the Public Sphere
– and the Public Sphere in Religion

This essay explores an ethnographic case of a ritual movement whose proponents entered the political public sphere in Côte d'Ivoire,[2] West Africa in the 1990s. They did so after the Ivoirian state had failed to guarantee the security of its citizens regardless of their religious, regional, linguistic, or cultural identities. The movement, led by initiated hunter-healers, affirms the potential of religious practitioners to participate in the political public sphere and to defend some of the public sphere's preconditions when the state undermines them. Because the movement's ritual practices bridge both Islamic and distinctly African ritual logics, the movement's history highlights how practitioners of indigenous religions can contribute to democratic discourse. The movement's flexibility therefore suggests an alternative outlook on religion that locates the public sphere within religion as much as it locates religion within the public sphere. Yet the movement's participants also violated many of the democratic norms of public discourse, often resorting to violence. That said, few if any forms of the political public sphere operate under ideal conditions,[3] lending further impetus to consider how ethnography can contribute to critical theory. Philosophy can usefully take empirical social conditions into account to nuance its theoretical claims.

I begin my analysis by examining Jürgen Habermas's comprehension of the place of religion within the political public sphere.[4] I outline the challenges that his approach poses for understanding religion, both in light of social theory and, in particular, religious studies. I then offer a working definition of religion to account for these discrepancies. Next I turn to the ritual movement in question, of initiated hunter-healers who

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2   Côte d'Ivoire is the official name of the Ivory Coast in all languages.

3   Hans-Herbert Kögler, "The Religious Face of Evil. Ethics and the Critique of Religion," *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory*, 1:2 (2017), 30 n. 14.

4   Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1 (2006).

transformed themselves into unofficial police and then rebels in response to their ritual ethos of public responsibility. I examine their ritual engagements with hunting, public security, and Côte d'Ivoire's 2002-2011 civil wars. With insights borrowed from Hans-Herbert Kögler,[5] I argue that *dozo*s' ritual practices have given them a critical, dialogical distance on their political circumstances that has, at times, permitted them to enhance Côte d'Ivoire's political public sphere. They have done so despite their inability to sustain a "mindset" consistently compatible with an "openminded, pluralistic, democratic" disposition.[6] I conclude by re-examining the questions that Habermas's work raises about religion and secularism, especially in relation to state power.

Reading Habermas – in Reverse

Habermas encourages us to abandon definitions of modernity centered on a political public sphere divorced from religion. Religion is too present in democratic political debates to ignore its vitality, which endures especially in the "beliefs" of "world religions."[7] Habermas posits such "faith" as a potential source of shared values, persisting, as it has, in the face of challenges to it: "pluralism, the emergence of modern science, and the spread of both positive law and profane morality."[8] Religious persons may, like other participants in democratic societies, justify the public policies that they promote, but they must, like everyone else, Habermas contends, do so in terms accessible to *non*-religious persons. Religionists may appear, as a result, to face an undue burden of translation. Yet secular persons also face the task of listening to their religious peers for ethical resources that may contribute to the good of all:

> Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of com-

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5   Kögler (2017).

6   The quoted phrasing comes from Hans-Herbert Kögler, personal communication.

7   Habermas (2006), 1, 3, 6, 8-14, 16-19.

8   Ibid., 13.

> munal life. In the event of the corresponding political debates,
> this potential makes religious speech a serious candidate to
> transporting possible truth contents, which can then be trans-
> lated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community
> into a generally accessible language.[9]

Secular citizens must, in response, avoid a *narrow* secularism, which
amounts to scientism, a "radical form of naturalism [that] devalues all
categories of statements that cannot be reduced to controlled observa-
tions, nomological propositions or causal explanations."[10] If religionists
face the challenge of translation, then secularists face that of interpreta-
tion; each requires effort.

Habermas offers a brilliantly pragmatic and satisfying answer to the
question of how to integrate religious discourse into the political pub-
lic sphere. His work also raises other questions: Are world religions the
only religions relevant to democratic politics? Might differences between
religion and secularism be less substantial than he presumes? What if
religion and secularism each propose, describe, and mobilize particu-
lar relations between persons and the cosmos? And what if religionists
and secularists differ primarily in how they determine the relevance of
cosmic forces for making political decisions rather than over *whether* or
not such forces should shape policy? And, as Kögler asks, what if reli-
gious discourse forestalls dialogue through uncompromising claims to
"trans-discursive truth," leading to possible conflict?[11]

In order to assess Habermas's grasp of religion (I return later to
Kögler's concerns), I take the near sanctification of private property in
the US Constitution's Fourth Amendment – and, by extension, of the in-
dividuals who own property and their capacity to acquire it in a liberal
market – as a starting point. The amendment's scripture-like pronounce-
ment defines the nature of a secular world of cosmic possibilities, justify-

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9   Ibid., 10.

10   Ibid., 16.

11   Kögler (2017), 32, 41.

ing particular kinds of moral conduct.[12] Much as anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued for religion, the Constitution's secular framers synthesized, through the ritualized practices of the state, a vision of the cosmos, or "worldview," with a way, or "ethos," of acting in that world.[13] For liberal democracies, ritual practice includes capitalist exchange, in which commodities attain, as Marx noted, a kind of agency, as when a commodity seems independently to appreciate in value, for instance. This agency resembles that of religious objects allegedly imbued with spiritual power. Marx therefore referred to the "fetishism" of commodities. Alternatively, when one commodity, exchanged for money, enables the exchanger to purchase another commodity of a different sort, the initial commodity transforms its appearance while retaining at least something of the same value-substance. Marx therefore referred to the "transubstantiation" of "one use-value" into another.[14] He implicitly analyzed capitalism as a religion, one that allows for such miracles. Religious concepts gave him invaluable insights into capitalist production, indicating underlying similarities between capitalism and religion.

More pointedly, Weber traced the motivation for capitalist accumulation to anxiety over predestination among Calvinists.[15] In Calvinism, God already knows each person's eternal fate, but Calvinists wondered how they might catch a glimpse of it. They reasoned that if they prospered in the world, then it was a sign of God's favor. This conclusion gave American Puritans, among others, cause to accumulate money for its own sake, rationalizing capitalist accumulation in the process and giving the market an aura more sacred than the reach of "an invisible hand,"

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12   I follow Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 96:1 (1967), 1-21, and Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), in comparing religion and secularism.

13   Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System'," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125.

14   Karl Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 1, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 125-128, 163-165, 197.

15   Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin, 1930), 95-129.

which, according to Smith, and not unlike predestination, led each capitalist "to promote an end" – the "public good" – "which was no part of his intention."[16]

Such cosmological orientations, according to Asad, arise from more than the human impulse for meaning; hegemony and coercion can produce the same results.[17] Capital is no deity, but within liberal democracies, it demands reverence. Citizens have little choice but to propitiate it. It provides the primary measure of all social goods, including dignity, equality, and justice. Political opponents differ mostly over how the state should apportion it to realize these values in social life. Payments to injured persons may resolve wrongs through court cases. Wronged parties may seek reparations for historical injustices. And corporations may pay fines for damages they inflict. Already . . .

> . . . by the time of Adam Smith, every person's permanent misery – that is, scarcity and need – had become the premise of economic wisdom and the source of national welfare . . . What for Augustine was slavery, the human bondage to bodily desires, was in the bourgeois view the essential human freedom. Man became the pleasure-pain machine invented by Hobbes and favored by the Enlightenment *philosophes*: a creature that moves to those things that do him his own good, and away from things that do him evil – motions to-wards and fromwards that were supposed to comprehend the entire universe of human behavior.[18]

Hence capitalism inverted the Judeo-Christian cosmos, reorienting bodies defined by sin and virtue within a cosmos of suffering and pleasure measured by more earthy but equally salvific signs.

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16   Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 485.

17   Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* (New Series), 18:2 (1982), 237-259.

18   Marshall Sahlins, "Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of the 'World System'," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXXIV (1988), 1-51.

In the United States, where acquisitiveness is next to godliness, capital has become a matter of such "ultimate concern," in Tillich's words,[19] that those who attain a disproportionate amount of capital – like President Trump and the corporate forces that support him – have destabilized democracy itself. Democracy in fact never needed religion to menace it. The exaggerated accumulation of capital as the *summum bonum* already did, grounded in a capitalist worldview as inimical to democratic values as theocracy. Inevitably, then, religion and secularism are both cosmologies; each perpetrates a "religion."[20]

Religion "as Usual?" — A Definition

I have taken a historical detour in order to justify defining religion less as a thing in itself than as a *relation*: all inquiries into or conclusions about "how persons and the cosmos intersect" or interrelate, "regardless of the kind of personhood or cosmos involved," have religious dimensions.[21] What is *religious* is the nature of defining persons and the cosmos in relation to one another, whether that relationship involves the existence of supernatural beings or forces or metaphysical doctrines or not. As a consequence, religious thought and practice always involve a reflective distanciation from the world, a stepping back to engage. This need seems intrinsic to the human condition: human beings necessarily perceive themselves as both part of and distinct from the world.[22] Religious proj-

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19   Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

20   Cf. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Whereas Asad aims to undermine clear distinctions between religion and secularism, I want to encompass secularism *within* religion, redefining the latter in turn.

21   Joseph Hellweg and Dianna Bell, "Person, Cosmos, and Power in the Anthropology of Religions in Africa: A Critical, Holistic Approach to Theory and Ethnography," in *The Oxford Handbook to the Anthropology of Religion*, edited by Simon Coleman and Joel Robbins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

22   Jan van Baal and Wouter van Beek, *Symbols for Communication: An Introduction to the Anthropological Study of Religion* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985).

ects articulate, investigate, and try to settle this predicament.

For most clergy, lay people, and scholars, however, "religion" is a *sui generis* phenomenon divorced from the "secular." It transcends normal existence in mysterious ways, allowing people to have "faith" with no need of verification. Religion is also something that anyone may or may not "have." Some people are religious; others are not. Some places and times are religious; others are not. From this point of view, religion's attenuation or disappearance is a marker of modernity. Religion's *presence*, by contrast, indicates the survival of "tradition" in the present,[23] a retreat from modernity, even for Habermas, who characterizes world religions "as the only remaining element of the distant cultures of the Old Empires."[24] His understanding of religion is both historically new and theoretically dubious.

Until the sixteenth century, "religion" denoted the "ritual obligations" of nuns and monks, a concept expanded by conquistadores and missionaries analogously to include what Amerindian ritual experts in Central and South America did in their rituals. Only with the Protestant Reformation did the term assume the general meaning that it has today, particularly through the idiom of "belief," as something that anyone, not just nuns and monks, can cultivate.[25] Scholars then drew more systematic if equally faulty analogies between Christianity and other cosmologies, effectively inventing Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, among others, in comparison to Christianity as world "faiths," each endowed – like Christianity – with its own prophet, scripture, and ritual practices.[26] By the time that the constitutional regimes of North America and Western Europe instituted an avowed separation of church and state, the mold

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23   Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871).

24   Habermas (2006), 17.

25   Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 180-182.

26   Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

was set: religion was "faith," and faiths were those of world religions, sustained by empires and recorded in writing – in contrast to "indigenous" religions, allegedly "tribal" in origin and orally transmitted. As a result, Habermas conceptualizes religion in too restricted a way to allow for a thorough critique of the relationship between religion and the political public sphere. I therefore next explore an example of a "religious" movement that problematizes the relationship that Habermas presumes between religion and secularism and between world and indigenous religions. This movement contained, *within* its ritual practices, an original conception of the public sphere.

Describing Dozoya:
A Ritual Constitution of Public Engagement[27]

From 1994 to 1997, I lived in Côte d'Ivoire's northwestern region, commonly known as "Odienné," after the name of its regional capital and the pre-colonial polity once located there. Its Manding-speaking population is almost entirely Muslim. I did research there among members of a network of initiated hunter-healers who call themselves *dozo*s. The word appears to derive from the Manding verb phrase, *ka don so*, 'to enter home' or 'enter the village'. *Dozo*s, then, are more than men and boys who kill game: *sogofagala*, 'animal-killers'. They also safeguard the threshold between their villages, towns, or cities and the adjacent fields and forests from which they return with meat and medicinal plants (*fla*, 'leaves').

As hunters, *dozo*s kill game with the same tools available to other hunters, but they also use sorcery (*suya*) to do so. Such sorcery involves incantations and power objects that help *dozo*s kill game. An incantation may permit a *dozo* to blend into the forest's foliage, for example, in order to elude detection by game that he can then easily track and kill. Power objects include belts and armbands that protect *dozo*s from the friendly fire of other hunters. Other objects, like one comprised of half an ungulate's

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27   Most uncited information in this article comes from, or is referenced in, Joseph Hellweg, *Hunting the Ethical State: The Benkadi Movement of Côte d'Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

hoof, filled with plant material and sealed with a wax-like substance, are reputed to make an animal return on its tracks to the point where the *dozo* placed the object so he can ambush it. *Dozo*s also use medicinal plants and incantations to repel a noxious force called *nyama*, which, they aver, inhabits certain game animals and which can make those who come into contact with it ill, even the unborn child of a woman who eats the tainted meat. *Dozo*s thus supply others with meat and healing plants, about which they learn from other *dozo*s or, they say, from animals who speak to exchange plant knowledge for their lives. Powerful *dozo*s even claim to battle *jina*, forest powers named after the Arabic word for the spirits mentioned in the Qur'an (*djinn*). *Dozo*s say that *jina* herd wild game like livestock and that *jina* can harm or kill humans. *Dozo*s claim as well to assail shape-shifting sorcerers (*sogoyɛrɛma*) who transform themselves into dangerous animals (*sogo jugu*) to work mischief. All of these tasks comprise *dozoya*, 'what *dozo*s do': the work of protecting and providing for their communities.

Such work involves ethical commitments. To become *dozo*s, boys and men vow never to commit adultery with other *dozo*s' wives or to deceive or rob other *dozo*s. Senior *dozo*s then present gifts of a red chicken and ten red kola nuts on an initiate's behalf to the spirit of the first *dozo*, Manimory. In exchange, Manimory grants the initiate his protection from forest hazards. Such initiations create a collegial if competitive network of powerful men. *Dozo*s make further offerings in the dry season, when hunting intensifies, to ensure Manimory's protection from snake bites, attacks by large game, and injury by gunfire or the dry-season conflagrations that *dozo*s and other hunters light in order to ease hunting by clearing the dried grass that grows tall in the forests in the rains. In these ways too, *dozo*s preserve their communities and themselves from harm. They sustain a holistic vigilance over non-*dozo*s which they derive from ritual practice. They ground their cosmos in Islam as well, making their religion inherently "dialogical," relating it only indirectly, through Manimory, to "the transcendent" God, thereby reconciling tensions between Islam and indigenous rituals.[28]

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28   Kögler (2017), 41, 42.

Hunting Religion: "Pagan" Dozos in an Islamic Cosmos

Dramane Coulibaly, my host in the Odienné region, epitomized such consilience. He is a *dozo* musician who formerly sang at *dozo* funerals (*yaladon* and *kozi*) throughout Côte d'Ivoire and in neighboring Guinea and Mali. Music is central to these events. Since most *dozo*s are Muslim, their families bury them within twenty-four hours of their deaths. In theory, the dead man's soul (*ni*) then lies in the ground with his body until the final judgement. Yet people in Odienné insist that his 'shadow' or *ya* – a spirit-double independent of the soul – remains on earth until a nighttime *dozo* funeral occurs. Each *dozo*'s body reflects this doubled relationship between Islam and *dozoya*: Islam manages the soul, and *dozoya,* the shadow-double. Religion here encompasses the multiple ways that human beings situate their senses of self within the cosmos across contrasting domains, including hunting, prayer, the forest, and Islam.

Wherever Dramane sang at a *dozo*'s funeral, at least one of his apprentices accompanied him on the *dozo ngɔnun*, a six-stringed bridge-harp. To get a sense of the instrument, imagine a West African *kora* with six strings. The resonating chamber is a topless calabash with a hole cut into the side to project sound. A hide covers the gourd's open top; small bamboo pegs pierce the skin and gourd to hold the skin in place over the opening. Two smaller holes appear on opposite sides of the calabash to support the instrument's wooden arm which runs through them. Six strands of thick fishing line (originally antelope gut) are anchored at the short end of the arm and run over the calabash through a small, flat, wooden plaque perched perpendicularly atop the hide and supported there by bamboo struts. The plaque's shape resembles that of the wooden writing board (*wala*) on which children copy Qur'anic verses in Islamic schools (*madersa*). The strings pass in two parallel rows of three pairs – one pair above the other – through the plaque and up the arm's length until they reach its top. There players can tune them by moving, upward or downward, the small nooses that hold the strings in place. *Dozo*s play the instrument holding it to the left or right like a banjo or out in front of their bodies like a *kora*.

Dramane curiously called the *ngɔnun*, "the Qur'an," telling me that he put "his hand in the Qur'an" (*n bolo bla ali Kurana*) when he played and sang.[29] The metaphor is intriguing. Dramane neither reads, writes, nor speaks Arabic – or French for that matter. In the eyes of most scholars, he participates in a local, traditional, oral culture and in an indigenous religion. Yet, in Islam, the Qur'an is "*the* book" (*al-Kitab*) or the "book of God" (*kitabullah*). How can an instrument intended to accompany *dozo*s with music and song at a *dozo* funeral resemble Islamic scripture? Reformist Muslims would call the comparison blasphemous.[30]

But Dramane was well aware of Islamic literacy. He wore leather-covered amulets sewn onto the surface of the protective shirt that he donned before singing. Islamic experts (*mori* in Manding, *marabouts* in French) concoct such amulets, which contain Qur'anic verses or numerical references to them. Dramane also said that his words, like those of the Qur'an, were about prophets – *dozo* prophets, including Manimory. He and other dozos told me that Manimory descended from Abraham (Ibrahima in Manding), the first person to recognize God as God, then through Ishmael (Smaïla), Abraham's son, and Esau (Inzu), Abraham's grandson: the hunter of the Book of Genesis. Dramane also lauded the exploits of dead *dozo*s in song at *dozo* funerals to rouse living *dozo*s by example to hunt game that same night to present to the dead man's family. Such gifts speed the dead *dozo*'s shadow-double to the afterlife. Gifts of meat reassure the dead man that his living peers respect him and that his family will be fed; he can then leave in peace. If the deceased goes unappeased, then his double will linger among the living, making his family's livestock ill, ruining their crops, and spoiling the hunt for hunters, *dozo* and non-*dozo* alike.

*Dozo*s call such gifts of game meat, *saraka*, from the Arabic, *zadakat*, which denotes alms freely given, or other optional, virtuous acts. Such

29 Joseph Hellweg, "Songs from the Hunters' Qur'an: *Dozo* Music, Textuality, and Islam in Northwestern Côte d'Ivoire, from the Repertoire of Dramane Coulibaly," *African Studies Review*, 62:1 (2019), 120-147.

30 Ivoirians often call such Salafi Muslims "Wahhabis," after Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century Arabian Islamic reformer who spawned the reforms that reformists implement.

gifts contrast with *zakat,* one of Islam's five pillars: the obligatory tax of 2.5% on personal wealth that Muslims distribute to persons in need. Both *zakat* and *zadakat* bring Muslims closer to God. Muslims in Odienné, for example, call the ram or goat that they kill and share with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers on the feast of Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), *saraka,* as well. *Dozo*s therefore compare something purportedly non-Islamic – ritual reverence for a dead *dozo* – with Islam and its focus on a transcendent divinity. For reformist Muslims – whose claims to transcendent truths would trouble Kögler[31] – such gifts amount to *shirk* or 'idolatry', the substitution, in this case, of a dead man in God's place of honor.

That was not Dramane's intent. He compared living *dozo*s to dead ones who had been great hunters. He did so to provoke *dozo*s to hunt during *dozo* funerals. In the lyrics below, he recited a litany of renowned *dozo*s of the past in which he thrice mentions the names of their villages of origin, or of their village populations (with the suffix, *-kay*), before saying their personal names, followed by the Manding verb, 'to end' (*ka ban*), conjugated in the past tense (*banin*):

> A cε, Kanyanadugu Blama[32] wulen banin
>> Blama wulen dozo bankun makε
> Seydugukay ya Jonmagan banin
>> Sama bi kɔnɔntɔn ni kɔnɔntɔn Jonmagan ka o kε
>> Jonmagan bri masuma lakira
>> A tε yankan fɔ fo hali kiyamakan
> E cε, Gbelebankay ya Kwase Janin banin
>> Kwase Janin dozo bankun makε

In English:

> Oh, man, Red Bram[33] from Kanyanadougu has died
>> The dozo, Red Bram, should not have died
> Jonmagan, the dozo from Seydougu has died
>> Jonmagan killed ninety-nine elephants

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31   Kögler (2017), 22.

32   Short for Ibrahima.

33   Short for Abraham.

> Jonmagan is at peace in the beyond
> He no longer speaks the tongue of the here below but of the afterlife
> Hey, man, Kwase Janin from Gbéléban has died
> The dozo Kwase Janin should not have died[34]

Dramane's purpose was incitement, as if to say, "If you're a real *dozo* (*dozo yɛrɛ*), then you'll leave the funeral and kill game – maybe an elephant – as *great dozo*s once did. You'll return with the meat by dawn, or you're no better than a dead man."

Dramane rightly sang that he antagonized *dozo*s wherever he performed:

> Cɛ ni nɔ dola Tagbana na
> Ni nɔ dozo tɔrɔla
> Ni nɔ dola Yanfolila
> Ni nɔ dozo tɔrɔla

In English,

> Man, I entered Tagbana[35]
> I disturbed the *dozo*s
> I entered Yanfolila
> I disturbed the *dozo*s[36]

His songs and the rites they accompanied were of more than "local," "indigenous," or "oral" significance. He regularly performed in transnational contexts, traveling to Mali, for instance, where Yanfolila is located. *Dozo*s and similar hunters, such as the *kamajor*s of Sierra Leone, live, hunt, and play semi-political roles there and in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, and Mali. And, given the alms-like Muslim goals of *dozo* funerals and the presence of Islamic texts in their amulets, *dozo*s' oral, indigenous concerns overlap seamlessly with those of a literate "world" religion. Their indigenous ritual practices, so interwoven with Islam, must then

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34 These lyrics were previously unpublished.

35 The Tagbana region is in Côte d'Ivoire, some three 185 miles southeast of Odienné.

36 Hellweg (2011), 185.

be as capable of informing the political public sphere as Habermas thinks that those of world religions are. *Dozo*s thought so.

A Legal and Political Brief – on Precolonial Dozoya

Given the breadth of *dozo* practices, their oversight of the boundaries between daily life and forces that threaten it, and their mediation between local rites and Islam, *dozo*s have long been heroic figures (*ngana*). The epic of Sunjata Keita, for example – the core narrative of Manding-speaking West Africa – centers on the eponymous first ruler of the polity of Mali.[37] Sunjata was a *dozo* whose birth two *dozo*s foretold while traveling through his father's realm. After Sunjata's victory over rival ruler, Soumaoro Kanté, at Kirina, c. 1235, Sunjata proclaimed a charter for a new society.[38] At Kurukan Fuga, a granite plain near the town of Kangaba in Mali, he divided the clans of the Mandé world into four categories: (1) soldiers (*tontajon*), whose equivalent today would be those with title to land (*hɔrɔn*); (2) Islamic experts (*mori* or *marabouts*); (3) members of occupational status groups (*nyamakala*), such as iron smiths and potters (*numu*), Islamic bards (*fune*), leather workers (*garankɛ*), performers (*jeli*), and wood workers (*kule*); and (4) enslaved persons (*jɔn*).[39] Even today, Manding-speakers know from their respective clan names which families descended from which groups, and members of many occupational status groups still observe clan endogamy.

Sunjata's charter punished murder with death, stigmatized laziness to encourage work, forbade adultery, established protections for women, the enslaved, and foreigners, and mandated that women be consulted

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37 Many versions exist. The following two appear in the original verse and subsequent prose forms, respectively: John William Johnson and Fa-Digi Sisòkò, *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1965).

38 Centre d'études linguistiques et historiques par la tradition orale (CELH-TO), *La Charte de Kurukan Fuga : Aux sources d'une pensée politique en Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

39 David C. Conrad and Barbara E. Frank, *Status and Identity in West Africa: Nyamakalaw of Mande* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

in all areas of life. The charter regulated marriage, property, war, and the exploitation of natural resources, and it affirmed primogeniture.[40] Although some scholarship has contested the extent to which the orally transmitted charter as written today resembles the one declared by Sunjata,[41] there is little doubt that law and peace characterized Old Mali within its boundaries roughly a century later when Moroccan traveler and chronicler Ibn Battuta visited. He testified that "neither traveler there nor dweller has anything to fear from thief or usurper."[42] Clearly, a historical association between *dozoya*, on one hand, and law, statecraft, and Islam, on the other, explains *dozo*s' place in recent Ivoirian history as much as their hunting roles. Before the Ivoirian state existed, *dozo*s played determining parts in a West African public sphere. Although this sphere was far from democratic, its engineers are less than stereotypically hierarchical.

*Dozo*s' relationship to the prevailing social order is paradoxical. Although many inherit their father's *dozo* status at his death, a boy or man from *any* linguistic, national, religious, or other background may become a *dozo* – in contrast to the mostly ascribed identities listed above. This relatively egalitarian ethos stands at some remove from the social order that a *dozo* himself, Sunjata Keita, established.[43] Perhaps this is why, in the colonial era, *dozo*s helped resist French incursion as soldiers in the armies of Samori Touré and the polity of Ségou. Their unique structural positions have made them capable of adapting to moments and spaces of difference and crisis, sometimes through violence, but always through an assimilation to otherness, whether to the forest as hunters, to Islam as *dozo*s, or to the secular state as Muslim security agents and rebels. They

40 CELHTO (2008), 39-57.

41 Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 238-241.

42 Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 300.

43 Youssouf Tata Cissé, *Les confréries des chasseurs malinké et bambara : Mythes, rites et récits initiatiques* (Ivry, France: Editions nouvelles du Sud, 1994).

can distanciate themselves from their own standpoint and society and take the side of others in consequential ways. They have never limited their "religious self-understanding" to "defining [themselves exclusively] as [members] of a particular community" but rather by mediating relations among multiple communities.[44] As apparent outsiders to the political public sphere in Côte d'Ivoire, they have made claims within it on behalf of "vulnerable forms of communal life" and in terms generally comprehensible to the public.[45] To this extent, they have attempted, and at times succeeded, in widening the "openminded, pluralistic, democratic organization of political life" in Côte d'Ivoire.[46]

Security & Insurgency: Dozo Police & Rebels under a Felonious State[47]

In the early 1990s, *dozo*s became unofficial security agents when national police and gendarmes were earning reputations as greedy, inept, and unethical. *Dozo*s knew that bandits were robbing northern farmers of harvests sent southward in vehicles along rural highways that state security agents could do little to protect. *Dozo*s were also hearing tales of neighbors being robbed at gunpoint and of police failing or refusing to act. When *dozo*s began to respond, secular authorities in northern Côte d'Ivoire recognized the resources that *dozo*s could bring to public security: these were armed men, bound together by an ethical code and the close bonds that their ritual initiations had forged among them. The time was ripe for collaboration. Dozos religionists and state secularists perceived the public good that cooperation could bring.

Benkadi remains the oldest and arguably most widespread Ivoirian *dozo* security network in Côte d'Ivoire. Its name means, 'agreement' or

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44   See Kögler (2017), 33.

45   Habermas (2006), 10.

46   I quote Kögler's personal communication with me.

47   I borrow the phrase, "felonious state," from Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

'mutual understanding' (*bɛn*) 'is sweet' or 'desirable' (*ka di*). Benkadi originated north of the city of Odienné near the Malian border, following communications by Ivoirian *dozo*s with their Malian counterparts, who had apparently already initiated security patrols in certain Malian areas. When local and regional Ivoirian officials in the Odienné region became aware of Benkadi, they approved *dozo*s' plans to supplement the work of state security agents with security patrols and roadblocks of their own. At least one official then supplied *dozo*s with identification cards, for a price, to indicate his approval. Such is statecraft under conditions of scarcity.

Soon *dozo*s were printing their own cards as well, charging membership fees, and attracting interested *dozo*s and men seeking *dozo* initiations so they could take part. *Dozo*s then formed other security associations across the country, creating a lattice of overlapping networks. Many *dozo*s belonged to more than one such association. They appointed literate, French-speaking presidents and treasurers to oversee their work, following the bureaucratic principles that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the state already used. *Dozo*s were eager and patient enough to translate their associational idioms into those acceptable to the secular public sphere. They aimed to avoid conflict with the state while pursuing their security goals in tandem with state officials. They made their approach public by codifying a list of fines for a range of infractions which they recited at every inauguration of a new hub of their movement. These inaugurations sometimes included offerings of chickens and/or kola nuts to Manimory to initiate new *dozo*s. In these contexts, however, such initiations served mostly to recruit men for *dozo* security work. *Dozo*s also began to deploy power objects, similar to those used while hunting, against potential criminals – such as an object placed on the path of criminal suspects for the purpose of preventing them from evading capture, much as the hunting object mentioned earlier made it easier for *dozo*s to ambush game.

Parallel to Benkadi's expansion, an inspector of diplomatic posts for the Ivoirian foreign ministry, Inza Fanny (pronounced fah-NEE), originally from the Odienné region, created and led a nationally certified NGO

called Afrique Environnementale. The organization's literature depicted it as a means of mobilizing *dozo*s to participate in animal and forest-conservation efforts. However, Fanny intended above all to recruit *dozo*s to a national, for-profit, private security agency with NGO status under his leadership. Once state officials discerned his intentions, they forced him to cancel a national *dozo* meeting that he had organized for security purposes. *Dozo*s then disavowed Fanny and left Afrique Environnementale. But Fanny's organizational achievement, with *dozo* support, confirmed *dozo*s' enthusiasm to meet the communicative conditions of the political public sphere, despite Fanny's self-interest, and theirs, in doing so.

More than acquisitiveness motivated *dozo*s, though; so did a thirst for justice. At the time, state authorities were undermining the public sphere's integrity at every turn. Police were routinely charging crime victims the "price if gasoline" (*prix du carburant*) to investigate the crimes in question; police noted the lack of state funding required to fill their tanks to drive to crime scenes. Whether their request amounted to attempted bribery or to a confession of financial hardship matters little. The result was the same: police neglected the poor, rural, and working-class urban communities where *dozo*s lived. In the meantime, state security forces were routinely mistreating northern-descended Ivoirians, including Manding-speakers, as non-citizens, especially when they traveled cross-country. Police, gendarmes, customs agents, and forest rangers (*agents des Eaux et Forêts*) stopped buses and vans (*dynas*) to extort cash from passengers at roadblocks along highways. In doing so, security agents were enforcing the reigning political ideology of the time, that of *ivoirité* or 'Ivoirianness'.

Ivoirité's proponents characterized southern Ivoirian linguistic groups and Christians as more authentically Ivoirian and modern than northern linguistic groups and Muslims, collapsing the latter two congeries of identities into a single one and considering it less Ivoirian and more traditional than the former two.[48] Granted, Muslims had historically lived in

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48   See Sasha Newell, *The Modernity Bluff: Crime, Consumption, and Citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

northern Côte d'Ivoire, and their majority Manding and Senufo languages were the same as those spoken in adjacent Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso; but many of these northerners were Ivoirian citizens too, *dozo*s among them. Mooré-speaking Mossi immigrants from Burkina Faso and their Ivoirian resident or citizen descendants experienced the same mistrust. State security forces often demanded payment from such persons for bearing a name on their identification papers with a supposedly "northern" and/or "Muslim" resonance. Sometimes agents destroyed these documents, effectively leaving victims stateless. Yet these populations had begun settling in southern Côte d'Ivoire during the colonial era. Encounters like these contributed to the tensions that led to the civil wars of 2002 to 2011,[49] in which many *dozo*s participated as rebels backing the Muslim, northern-descended politician and US-educated economist, Alassane Ouattara, who became president in 2011.[50]

*Dozo*s have thrived as police and rebels where – and, in part, *because* – the state has circumscribed participation in the political public sphere. *Dozo*s resisted the Islamophobic and xenophobic regimes of presidents Bédié (1994 – 1999), Guéï (1999 – 2000), and Gbagbo (2000 – 2011). All three presidents tried to outlaw *dozo* security work, succeeding only in the southern half of the county. Even President Ouattara has distanced himself from those *dozo*s who fought for him in the rebellion.[51] *Dozo*s represent an anomaly in the Ivoirian public sphere that the state perceives as a threat: they are ritual practitioners who have challenged the secular state by example to fulfill its duty to ensure the well-being of all Ivoirians, especially the most "vulnerable,"[52] which included *dozo*s' own families and communities.

49   See Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

50   Joseph Hellweg, Nancy Palus, and Drissa Koné, "Questa non è una milizia': I Dozo, la Guerra e lo Stato in Costa d'Avorio (1993-2014)," *Antropologia*, 2:1 (2015), 85-111.

51   Joseph Hellweg, "Zakaria Koné et les transformations des chasseurs *dozos* en Côte d'Ivoire : de la société civile comme stratégie politique," translated by Nicolas Médevielle, *Afrique contemporaine*, 3-4:263-264 (2017), 41-58.

52   Habermas (2006), 10.

In their security roles, however, *dozo*s have often behaved no better or worse than secular state agents whose violations of human rights are well documented. *Dozo*s have extorted funds from communities for security work whether those communities had requested that work or not. They have raped women and found and returned wives to marriages that these women had tried to flee. They have tortured and murdered criminal suspects, and some have likely committed war crimes. Many observers have, for instance, accused *dozo*s of having perpetrated massacres against Guéré-speakers in western Côte d'Ivoire in 2011.[53] Although most *dozo*s did not engage in such violence, non-*dozo* rebels appear to have so widely used *dozo* or *dozo*-like accoutrements – such as amulets and power objects – for protection that it became unclear at points the extent to which *dozo*s were participating as a collective force in such events.[54] One thing is certain: *dozo*s defy easy categorization.

Conclusions: Dozo Modernity and Democratic Tradition

In Côte d'Ivoire, national *dozo* networks have applied *dozoya* to circumstances that most observers would alternately classify as sacred *or* secular, traditional *or* modern, oral *or* literate, and related to hunting *or* security. But *dozo*s have translated across these domains through ritual practice, acclimating first and foremost to forests, in which prey speak, *jina* herd wild animals, predators can be sorcerers in disguise, and where *dozo*s blend into foliage through sorcery to hunt. *Dozo*s have applied this same adaptive strategy to Islam, policing, and insurrection, relating their ritual practices and sorcery to these realms to participate in the secular public sphere when the state has failed to maintain it. For all of these reasons, Benkadi's history can help enlarge Habermas's reconciliation of religion and democracy. *Dozo*s afford a viewpoint, in line with social theory and religious studies, that perceives religion as more than a *sui generis* phenomenon, more than a world religion alone, and more than the opposite of secularism.

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53   Hellweg, Palus, and Koné (2015).

54   Ibid.

This essay has therefore explored *dozoya* as an indigenous ritual complex, a Muslim orientation, and a transformative socio-political force in the contexts of national security and civil war. The key finding, in Kögler's terms, is that, at the core of *dozoya* exists "an intersubjectively defined symbolic and practical process in which [*dozo*s] adopt certain stances (or 'roles') and learn to participate in social settings such that [they] can see [themselves] from the perspective of the other, or the social group as such."[55] *Dozo* authority is for this reason discursive rather than pre-discursively fixed in a "transcendent source of meaning,"[56] despite, or rather due to, its particular religiosity. *Dozo*s take for granted the agency of invisible, disembodied forces, like *nyama*, *djinn*, the shadow-double (*ya*), and Manimory along with the efficacy of ritual and sorcery, but they have also reconciled these powers with Islam and, at least at times, with the demands of the secular public sphere. Hence they approach truth as a matter of "mutual perspective-taking." They practice Islam and *dozoya* simultaneously, to the consternation of certain Muslims. They create readier access for marginalized populations to the fruits of an aspirationally democratic state; and they demonstrate a "radical openness towards the claims made by the other" – be it a forest denizen, Islamic reformist, or state official – "who is seen as fully able to challenge [the interlocutor's] core beliefs and assumptions."[57] *Dozo*s have patiently adapted to the state's requirements and the public sphere's expectations in pursuing their security work, just as they have adapted to the forest and Islam.

In contrast, Ivoirian political elites from 1994 to 2011 tried to exclude Muslims, other northern-descended populations, and *dozo*s from the public sphere altogether. Many *dozo*s participated in the country's two civil wars because they wanted to respond to the insecurity and injustices their communities faced and that state agents ignored. Subsequently, even the regime of President Ouattara, which *dozo*s helped bring to power, denounced them. While *dozo*s still maintain a security presence

55 Kögler (2017), 39.

56 Ibid., 21.

57 Ibid., 30-31, 41.

in the north, they are, even there, less present than in Benkadi's heyday in the 1990s. *Dozo*s have adapted once more to shifts in public opinion.

Although *dozo*s never achieved a fully democratic disposition, especially when resorting to violence, the secular state disappointed democratic confidence too, giving *dozo*s a pretext for acting. This situation alone justifies the need to examine ethnographically the standards of Ivoirian public discourse – or of public discourse anywhere for that matter. Otherwise, secular ideals and those of the state may too easily seem superior to "religious" ones, especially to those of indigenous religions. By becoming quasi-state agents, *dozo*s exposed, even in their failures, how secular Ivoirian politics hindered democracy in Côte d'Ivoire as much as, or more, than religion could.

I have proposed an alternative understanding of religion precisely to (1) account for the qualities that make secularism akin to religion, namely via "ideological abuse through symbolic modes of self-assertion"[58] – in the way that the state favored some cultural, linguistic, and religious identities over others. I also recast the category of religion to (2) highlight the potential transformation of an outwardly democratic state into a "radically anti-modern, anti-Enlightenment force,"[59] leaving the political public sphere in great need of repair. And I did so to (3) elucidate the capacity of ritual formations to contain within themselves alternative constitutions of the public sphere, even when these are incomplete. From this standpoint, religion, as conventionally understood – whether of the indigenous or world sort – can establish equilibrium between diverse persons and disparate worlds, especially when the state neglects to do its job in this respect.

We must therefore be as open to finding the public sphere within religion as Habermas is to integrating religion within the public sphere. In such circumstances where this possibility prevails, we might best analyze "religion" and secularism as alternate configurations of the same kinds of cosmic relations that assure the security of persons within their worlds.

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58   Ibid., 21.

59   Ibid., 22.

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Tradition, Transcendence, and the Public Sphere: A Hermeneutic Critique of Religion

Hans-Herbert Kögler[1]

Abstract. This essay aims to show that a hermeneutic critique of the conditions of appropriating cultural traditions holds the key for mediating a democratic, egalitarian and pluralistic public sphere with the potentially dogmatic, exclusive, and authoritarian claims and perspectives of religious traditions. I begin with the tension between the collective and deliberative self-constitution of modern democracy and metaphysically based claims about religion and transcendence. The historical recourse to the axial age highlights the dialectical challenge of integrating the legacies of major worldreligions and metaphysical systems into the secular public sphere. While the axial turn in cultural evolution (Jaspers, Bellah, Assmann) enables a new reflexivity vis-à-vis tradition, a universalist orientation in morality, and the distinction between normative justification and empirical power, these cognitive achievements are couched in terms of authoritarian, exclusive, and absolute worldviews. The hermeneutic turn (with Vattimo and Gadamer) allows us to reconstruct how even our relation towards *transcendence* is necessarily situated and mediated by *tradition*; this in turn reveals within hermeneutic appropriation the normative orientations of the dialogical recognition of the other, universal openness, and a language-internal truth-orientation. These normative entailments of hermeneutic dialogue can then be shown to be compatible with the socio-cognitive demands imposed upon both *religious* and *secular* self-understandings within an egalitarian and pluralistic public sphere (Rawls and Habermas). The path to a truly postsecular public sphere thus leads through a generalized hermeneutic self-understanding of the relative scope and grounds associated with religious convictions and scientific knowledges within public dialogue.

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1   Hans-Herbert Kögler is Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, and regular guest professor at Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt, Austria. Major publications include *The Power of Dialogue*: *Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (1999); *Michel Foucault* (2nd ed., 2004); the co-edited volumes *Empathy and Agency. The Problem of Understanding in the Human Sciences* (2000; 2018) and *Enigma Agency* (2018). Essays in critical hermeneutics, philosophy of culture, poststructuralism and social and political theory.

1. Introduction: The Challenge of Religion for a Democratic (and Global) Public Sphere

The idea of a modern democracy stands or falls with its recognition of all citizens as free and equal. Equality and freedom are actualized in the citizens' mutual recognition. They have equal standing as free subjects. As such, they together constitute the 'will of the people' which they exercise, in the influential perspective of deliberate democracy, as engaging in public deliberation.[2] Their standing as free and equal contributors to the public sphere constitutes their political autonomy. The Kantian concept of self-determination, according to which a subject is rational insofar as it conducts itself via freely chosen principles, is transferred to the collective realm. Subjects together determine the principles, norms, and values according to which they govern themselves. Mutual recognition and full reciprocity vis-à-vis the reasons and arguments for or against a principle or norm are subject to a coerce-less evaluation in which all with equal standing and affected by the principle or norm are to be included. This procedural dimension also suggests a self-binding of the subjects to the results of such a deliberation; while the input into practical discourses derives, naturally, from the experiential and social lifeworlds of the subjects, their free endorsement grants the collectively and rationally accepted rules their ultimate legitimacy.

Religious convictions and beliefs are naturally a challenge to this procedure. In the self-understanding of the believer, the epistemic source of religious beliefs does not derive from deliberation with the other or collective sources; it is provided through unique deliberation-external experiences, paradigmatically revelation or mystic involvement.[3] The

2   James Bohman/ William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2005).

3   Maeve Cooke, "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy," in Graig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2013), 249 - 274; Hans-Herbert Kögler , "The Religious Face of Evil," *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT)*, Vol. 1, n. 2, (2017),

normative binding force and authority is not seen in an act of self-determination; rather, it is constituted through an act of grace, God's will, eternal fate, or any equivalent of a transsubjective source of being. Instead of being *horizontally* related to an egalitarian intersubjectivity, the subject finds herself *vertically* recognized by an authority that transcends its own reach. At the same time, this religious identity-formation is world-constituting, it discloses how the subject relates to and understands her own contributions to the social and political world.[4] Since it derives from a holistic world-disclosing event, it encompasses truth, goodness, and existential significance, and naturally leads to an orientation towards the Other that, if universally open, grants the Other access to one's source of salvation, invites and cares for the Other to be equally 'erleuchtet' and saved. Yet obviously such a stance does not, at least not initially, suggest a deep and sincere commitment to the self-determining modern and democratic mode of intersubjective self-constitution. As its source of epistemic grounding is *external* to human intersubjectivity, the commitment to and engagement with this trans-religious context of collective self-determination must *prima facie* have a different meaning and significance for the religious person.[5]

It is not the least for this reason that the emergence of the modern state via social contract theory came about. The need for a trans-religious grounding of social cooperation was necessitated by the religious authoritarianism and exclusivism by which modern Europe was initially defined. Yet what was considered the inevitable, non-convertible, and linear progress towards a fully secular society and state has recently come into doubt.[6] We are currently finding ourselves in a context where

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21-46.

4   Cooke (2013); Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' in Religious and Secular Citizens," in *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 114-147.

5   Habermas (2008), 124 f.

6   Jose Casanova, "Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of "the Secular" and Their Possible Transcendence," in Graig Calhoun et al. (eds.) *Habermas*

leading political thinkers rethink their stance towards religion. The idea of secularism as the normative justification of the state has come under a wide variety of attacks. While it would be premature to believe that the process of secularization has not structured and succeeded in crucial aspects, the persistence of religious sentiments and attitudes together with an increased perception of the deficiency of a one-sided, scientifically defined secularism (that ultimately deprives social situated agents with important motivational and ethical resources) has raised the interest in a refined, newly defined, perhaps 'postsecular' conception of the democratic public sphere. In this vein, John Rawls supplements his free-standing (yet moral!) idea of public reason with a 'wide conception' which allows, within limits, for religious reasons and contributions.[7] While public reason must be couched and conducted in a language accessible to all, thus excluding supporting grounds that are based on the privileged access to 'comprehensive doctrines' (such as religious, metaphysical, or substantive moral worldviews), religious visions are recognized as crucial, for instance, in the abolition struggle of overcoming slavery as well as during the civil rights movement. What amounts to a normative cooperation here, religious perspectives are seen as indispensable in progressive contexts which still lack the universal secular lingo to express moral attitudes like equality and inclusion as such. Charles Taylor grants that we exist in a 'secular age,' yet he questions whether a too narrow conception of secularism did not needlessly come at the price of a scientistically reduced vision that created the 'immanent frame' of 'closed world structures' incapable of realizing that religious and spiritual perspectives are absolutely compatible and probably *needed* for a fully satisfying human existence.[8] Perhaps Jürgen Habermas goes farthest in this by not only demanding that within informal public spheres, religious

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and Religion*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 27-48.

7   John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. 247 f.

8   Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 539-593.

arguments and perspectives be fully allowed and integrated in the deliberative process of finding the right norms and principles; he also suggests that a deep-reaching *attitude change* be required that re-balances the intersubjective recognition of 'free and equal subjects' vis-à-vis religion within modern democratic life. One core idea is that basic concepts of our communicative identities, such as the universal orientation at moral norms and the recognition of the infinite value of each finite human individual, would be inconceivable without their religious roots.[9] While he demands that religious insights eventually have to be 'translated' into secular terms, he conceives of religious experience as a domain that harbors potentially unretrieved ethical and existential resources. The intertwinement of an orientation towards transcendence with a religious community defined by shared rituals provides a source of existential solidarity and togetherness that is lacking in fully secularized modes of moral and democratic life.

Yet it is also true, as we outlined before, that religious experience is defined by an *orientation towards transcendence* that somewhat diminishes, or at least de-privileges, the radical secular intersubjectivism that seems indispensable for our egalitarian democratic self-understanding. Thus we are faced with the question *how religion can be reconciled with deliberative democracy*, i.e. with a radical commitment to learn from, engage, and co-define our social existence with the Other within our *self-determined* communities. And this issue today is both brought about and inconceivable without the global context of cultural and religious self-understandings. We have to find a grounding of religion that overcomes any cultural and historical parochialism by recognizing our inevitable cultural and religious pluralism. It is in this spirit that the following reflections analyze the cultural evolution of religious and metaphysical attitudes from the perspective of hermeneutic thought in order to reconceptualize the

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9   Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie, vol. 1: Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wisse*n; vol. 2: *Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019); Habermas (2008).

challenge of religion for a democratic and global public sphere.

In a first step, we engage in a historical self-reflection concerning the collective cognitive shifts that created the symbolic perspectives of religion and metaphysics; it is here that we reconstruct the axial age discourse as first envisioned by Karl Jaspers. While the axial age develops basic categories like the reflexivity vis-à-vis one's tradition, moral universalism, and normative justification, their metaphysical grounding proves highly problematic (2). I therefore suggest a hermeneutic critique of the axial breakthrough in cultural evolution in order to provide us with a contemporary, situated and contextual, 'postmetaphysical' self-understanding of religious thought. By engaging in a hermeneutic reconstruction of our situated yet reflexive appropriation of *tradition* via a discussion of Gianno Vattimo and a meta-critique of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, we acquire a conceptual framework which allows us to reconcile religious experience with the current pluralistic and egalitarian demands of the democratic public sphere (3). By taking up the problematization of religion in the public sphere as developed by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, we are then able to flesh out how a hermeneutic critique resituates religion within democracy. Backed by the hermeneutic self-understanding of how to approach religious transcendence, we begin to see how religious perspectives may not be opposed to secular regimes but provide productive and enriching perspectives towards a more fully egalitarian democratic politics (4). By equally limiting the over-generalization of scientific thinking via a critique of *scientism as a worldview*, we shall arrive at a socio-political self-understanding in which religious contributions are fully established as potentially productive and enriching, without excluding the so-called 'religious' orientations towards transcendence as primitive, un-enlightened, or simply in need of further secularization (5).

2. Socio-Cognitive Promises and Metaphysical Predicaments of the Axial Age

The aim of this section is to introduce the conceptual profile of the axial age discourse in order to prepare its meta-critique by hermeneutic

thought. What is ultimately at stake is a hermeneutic critique of the metaphysical implications of this major cultural breakthrough that happened about 2500 years ago in different cultural locations such as China, India, Ancient Greece, Egypt and Israel. This turning point in cultural evolution brought us, according to Karl Jaspers, the decisive categories and distinctions we still rely on today. The socio-cognitive breakthrough of the axial age includes a never before seen reflexivity vis-à-vis one's own tradition, which is rejected in terms of the new theo-metaphysical worldviews. These views allow for the establishment of the distinction between a normative-transcendent justification and empirical-political power, which has lasting consequences for collective cultural and political thought. These cognitive achievements are in turn grounded in a new metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality, thus distinguishing an immanent worldly ephemeral experience from a transcendent, ideal, and eternal truth.

My interest in the axial age discourse is defined by its capacity to allow us to reconstruct culturally diverse and yet shared resources of understanding. The very idea of an 'axial age,' a radical turning point in human history between 800 – 200 BC in which basic *cognitive* options co-emerged at *different* cultural locations, dates back to the 18th century.[10] Yet it was Karl Jaspers who, under the impression of the devastating results of German fascism, invoked this concept as a new start for a truly universal human self-understanding. Instead of constructing history as the inevitable Western unfolding of spirit (Hegel), as the developmental path towards one type of higher civilization, the *plurality and diversity of higher cultural traditions* is emphasized. And yet, in the plurality of its expressions, certain shared features, defining a whole new stance towards being, come into existence:

"What is new about this age… is that man becomes conscious of Be-

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10   Robert Bellah, *Religion and Human Evolution. From the Paleolithic to the Axial* Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert Bellah/Hans Joas (eds.), *The Axial Age and Its Consequences,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jan Assmann, *Achsenzeit. Eine Archäologue der Moderne* (München: C.H. Beck, 2018).

ing as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions.
Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By
consciously recognizing his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He
experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and the lucidity of
transcendence."[11]

Jaspers terms this radically new stance a "spiritualization" of humanity, in which Greek, Indian, and Chinese philosophers, as well as the
prophets, overcome the mythical age and introduce modes of thought
and metaphysical/religious distinctions that continue to define our
thought today: " In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of world religions, by
which human beings still live, were created. The step into universality
was taken in every sense."[12] The legacy of axial age categories and distinctions is of crucial importance for contemporary debates concerning
religion since they opened up an immense *cognitive potential*—but they
also created the symbolico-social sources for *cultural dangers* related to
their metaphysical assumptions.

Hans Joas defines the axial breakthrough as the "*age of the emergence
of the idea of transcendence*."[13] The focus on 'transcending' existing conditions vis-à-vis a higher reality or being is certainly a core element, and
yet the full scope of the axial turn is best captured by building on Robert
Bellah's *Religion and Human Evolution* as well as the multiple modernities discussion.[14] The conceptual core of this cultural turn consists in the
fourfold scheme of cultural reflexivity (1), universal critique (2), normative justification (3), and the immanence/transcendence distinction (4).
My analysis will prepare a 'hermeneutic critique' of these assumptions

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11 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (Newhaven/London: Yale University Press, 1953), 2.

12 Japers (1953), 2

13 Hans Joas, "The Axial Age Discourse as Religious Discourse," in Bellah/Joas
    (eds.) *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, Cambridge: Harvard University
    Press 2013), 11.

14 Bellah (2011); see also Habermas (2019).

in their metaphysical form, and thereby the need to transcend them via a *postmetaphysical* reconstruction of their meaning. The core idea of this reconstruction is to allow for a reflexive continuation of the philosophical and religious (or theological) traditions on the basis of a hermeneutic reflexivity that meets the standards of current cultural and philosophical insights.[15]

(1) The cultural breakthrough is defined by its *reflexive relation* towards the existing tradition. It is decisively critical in rejecting the commonly and unreflectively endorsed beliefs, assumptions, and practices, and posits an alternative conception of Being. Björn Wittrock sees here "an increasing reflexivity of human beings and their ability to overcome the bounds of perceived inevitability of given conditions in temporal and social orderings."[16] This reflexive overcoming leaves behind the mythic stage of human evolution in which 'narrative' conceptions of being dominated the cultural self-understanding. The linguistic articulation of a shared myth undergirded thus an isomorphic relation between political kingdoms and Gods in the mythic culture. Bellah contrasts these 'archaic religions' to the new consciousness which involves a 'theoretic' turn, a concept he borrows from Merlin Donald's account of cultural evolution.[17] The decisive move involves the *distanciation* vis-à-vis the existing practices by means of totalizing theoretical disclosure of reality, an all-encompassing worldview.[18]

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15   I aim for a preserving translation of their basic insights into a mode of thought that accepts hermeneutic premises as constitutive of our global cultural self-understanding. The idea is to neither have to endorse or return to obsolete and potentially authoritarian dogmas nor to eject the substantive content of religious self-understanding with a radically postmodernist turn; for the latter, see my discussion of Vattimo in section 3. For a detailed critique of the dangers of authoritarian self-understandings, see Kögler (2017).

16   Joas (2012), 12.

17   Bellah (2011); see also Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind. Three Stages in the Evolution of culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

18   Habermas makes the construction of such a total worldview the decisive criterion for the metaphysical construction of reality, as against a practically defined intersubjectively constituted lifeworld. See Habermas (2019).

(2) Now individual thinkers and prophets appear. The individual agent thus becomes a concrete site of reflection, just as much as each self becomes an addressee of reflexive discourse or *revelation*: the discourse of revelation now understands itself to be addressed to *potentially everyone*. Arnason, Eisenstadt und Wittrock concur that "an epoch-making innovation … gave rise to enduring civilizational identities as well as *religious visions of universal community*."[19] Bellah shows how the 'axial religions' develop outside of the major centers of the archaic empires, reject or overcome the isomorphic equivalence between the worldly power and the symbolic disclosure, and express the *universalistic aspiration* to address all subjects vis-à-vis the revealed or discursively acquired truth. Habermas emphasizes the immense cultural push that this step towards *universalization* entailed. He sees it as part of the insurmountable monotheistic legacy of the Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) tradition, which thus introduces—to be sure first entirely on the symbolic or ideological level of religious thought—*the universal equality of all subjects*.[20]

(3) The reflexive distanciation from tradition and the universal claim of a newly acquired truth make possible the epoch-making distinction between *theological or metaphysical justifications* and *empirical-political power*. What emerges in this cultural evolution is the discovery of the *relative autonomy of the discursively (thus cognitively) mediated world-disclosure*, based on the cultural achievement of writing and a collectively shared culture in religious or metaphysical beliefs, assumptions, and practices (like ritual). The new step transcends the existing world towards an independently existing, other-worldly, i.e. *transcendent realm of Being*.

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19   Joas (2012), 19, my emphasis.

20   Bellah (2011); Habermas (2019). This universal aspiration will have to contend with the *cultural multiplicity of its articulation*, the recognition of which itself expresses the core tenet of the axial age hypothesis. The mediation of the proclaimed universality of respect via-a-vis the individual human agent, who experiences herself as the site and addressee of a universally shared truth, becomes a major driving challenge of the post-axial reconstructions of this insight.

(4) Accordingly, the critical challenge vis-à-vis the existing practices and traditions can be undertaken only if a major, previously inconceivable gap or distinction *within Being itself* is envisioned: the distinction between the immanent world and the transcendent world. This "age of transcendence," as Benjamin Schwartz calls the axial epoch,[21] relies on the division between the sphere of an inner-worldly, mundane or 'secular' world of practices, and an extra- or trans-worldly, divine, or religious (or metaphysical) world of truth or ultimate being. It is with regard to this basic separation of two worlds that Robert Bellah can point to remarkable conceptual coincidences between Ancient Greek philosophy, the Mosaic/Abrahamic monotheistic perspectives, and the Chinese and the Indian religio-metaphysical traditions.[22] In this axiological perspective, a 'blind' or unquestioned dependency on traditional (polytheistic) beliefs and practices is therefore overcome by critically opposing them with a trans-empirical and absolute sphere, whether this is conceived as God, being, or any transcendence beyond the merely appearing. The appearance/reality distinction thus plays a crucial role in being able to posit a *transcending sphere of being* (or meaning), according to which the apparent reality proves to be a world of shadows, illusions, deceptions, etc. The empirical, temporal, humanly defined and culturally shared reality is transcended in light of a *true reality*, a metaphysical world that grounds what seems otherwise 'real' and constitutive of experience.[23]

Yet it is this *transcendent grounding* which is also the source for four radical limitations of the classic axial turn. The theo-metaphysical divi-

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21   Joas (2012), 21.

22   To be sure, there are essential differences between the different approaches towards the other-worldly or transcendent sphere, which have generally given rise to the distinction between monism and dualism, materialism and idealism, monotheism and monistic ontology, among others. 'Transcendence' refers here to a trans-realm vis-à-vis the immanently existing realm, but not necessarily to an *absolute* ontological Otherness, a personal God, or pure 'spiritual' or conceptual being.

23   The ontological distinctions between a monotheistic God and a-personal matter, and the epistemic distinction between a revealed truth or a discursively—i.e. rationally—reconstructed truth, become somewhat irrelevant due to the fact that there is an absolute, pure, in itself defined reality that grounds all else.

sion between an absolute transcendence and an empirical finite imma-
nence puts four constraints on the full scope of reflexive self-understand-
ing when viewed from our later meta-reflexive position.

- First, with regard to truth, the theological or metaphysical concep-
  tions define an absolute, infallible, and non-negotiable ground of be-
  ing. There is no alternative; the only acceptable and even conceivable
  truth is given in the respective system. This is obvious in monotheism
  based on revelation, accepting no God besides the true one, yet it is
  also operative in more 'discursive' modes of rational reconstruction
  as in Platonism. The existence of alternative visions, worldviews, and
  accounts of reality is dismissed as heresy, illusion, deception, or sheer
  ignorance.[24] Accordingly, a reflexive relation to the reasonable pos-
  sibility that there are equally justified and productive perspectives
  onto ultimate reality or transcendence is metaphysically denied.

- Second, the epistemic path to this absolute truth is one of direct
  and immediate access. Moses received the commands directly from
  God, or God's word is conveyed immediately by scripture, or ra-
  tional or meditative methods allow for absolute foundations ('the
  light of reason'). Accordingly, the fact that one's epistemic access is

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24 According to Jan Assmann, *Moses The Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in West-
    ern Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), mono-
    theism's core mission is to radically oppose all other types of religious belief
    or faith to which it posits itself as the true and only answer: "Monotheism
    always appears as a counter-religion. There is no natural or evolutionary
    way leading from the error of idolatry to the truth of monotheism." (7) This
    opposition leads logically to the exclusion of all others types as "paganism"
    or "idolatry" due to its truth originating in a unique type of disclosure, an
    epistemic path beyond all discursive or cultural reconstruction: "This truth
    can only come from the outside, by way of revelation." (7) This *revelatory
    core* now prevents any challenge or contestation, any cultural translation or
    reinterpretation, according to Assmann, because it itself transcends any sym-
    bolic expression, is defined by reference to the purely transcendent: The first
    two commandments—Thou shalt have no other Gods before me; and: thou
    shalt not make unto thee any graven image—express and solidify this radical
    act of exclusion, since "images are automatically "other Gods," because the
    true God is invisible and cannot be iconically represented." (4) Habermas
    equally talks about the "inviolable core of infallible revealed truths" of the
    major religious traditions, see Habermas (2008), 129.

necessarily mediated by the concrete cultural, historical, and social situation of one's context does not yet reach the level of serious theoretical analysis, let alone conceptual acceptance as a starting point for religious or philosophical reflection.[25]

- Third, the individual path to existential fulfillment and achievement of truth is a clearly demarcated and defined one. It is paradigmatically expressed in *Stifterfiguren*, exemplary leading figures like Moses, Jesus, Mohamed, Buddha, Confucius. The good life is prescribed by a set of definite virtues, goods, or values that exemplify the model life. Particular ideals can, even much later, gain prominence in terms of specifically defined value-orientations such as a Protestant ethic. Accordingly, the pluralization of existential choices and life-projects has not yet reached the level of an endorsable value-orientation as such.[26]

- Fourth, while the immanence/transcendence distinction opens up the space of an ideal construction of legitimate power over against existing political rule, the holistic worldviews become themselves enmeshed in the political legitimation of existing regimes. Subservient to the normative orders of the day, political theology creates a power-based apology for the practices and structures of political hierarchies and institutions.[27] Rulers rule by divine command and thereby all the more effectively and untouchably.

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25 This position reflects the initial and dogmatic assertion vis-à-vis the true foundations of one's metaphysical or religious system. It does not deny or ignore the subsequent impressive history of reflexive and theoretical attempts to mediate and reconcile these metaphysical premises with competing or challenging evidence. For a reconstruction how the Western tradition was specifically challenged to mediate the Mosaic/Judeo/Christian tradition with the Greek metaphysical tradition, see Habermas (2019).

26 The proliferation of the existential pluralism of conceptions of the good life is of course a defining feature of 'modernity' and modernization. Durkheim is its sociological observer, Kierkegaard its existentialist spokesperson—despite the former's reservations and the latter's own fundamentalist Christian convictions.

27 It thus undercuts the universalist promise besides also creating subordinate subjects based on God's will, instead of autonomous subjects exercising their own political will.

The axiological turn thus provided us with a *metaphysical picture of reality* as based in an absolute, a-temporal, a-human, and a-cultural truth, from which our necessarily *mediated experience of reality and being* is conceptually and methodologically excluded. The *metaphysical episteme* does not allow for a reflexivity of its own situated and mediated point of origin. Yet it so happens that precisely this exclusion of a historical or hermeneutic meta-reflexivity enables the ideological functions of religious and metaphysical worldviews. Inasmuch as their projected vision of reality is absolutely detached from the traditional and interpretive context which gave rise to their development, their validity claims can immunize themselves against any challenge, critique, or reflexive deliberation. Insofar as they *maintain* their metaphysical nature, the religious viewpoints thus become incompatible with a democratic regime based on the discursive adjudication of the common good and truth. It is for this reason that we now have to turn to a hermeneutic critique of the metaphysical sources of religious experience.

3. Between Tradition and Transcendence: Towards a Hermeneutic Critique of the Metaphysics in Religion

In the axial, metaphysical critique of existing tradition, the distanciation against power became possible through the submission under a transcendent regime of meaning; this symbolico-metaphysical grounding could then become the ideological origin of a newly wielded power, an 'administration' through a new institution including a new class of experts, the church and priests.[28] The metaphysical version of 'social critique' thus established its own subjection to an absolute truth as legitimizing a hierarchical and authority-based conception of religious self-understanding. It thus ended up contradicting the potentially *historically* reflexive and universally open promise with which it began. If this is so, we now need to reconsider how the reflexive and universalizing potential of the axial age can be redeemed and reconstructed *without its metaphysical baggage*.

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28   See the critical discussion in Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

We shall turn to Gianni Vattimo's project to develop such a critique on strictly hermeneutic grounds, which will have to give way to a meta-critique of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in order to enable a critical hermeneutics which can do justice to the *situated experience of transcendence.*

Vattimo goes to the core of the problem of religious power and authority by aiming to redefine the Christian semantics as one radically opposed to the metaphysical project. He suggests that "the redemptive meaning of the Christian message makes it impact precisely by *dissolving the claims to objectivity* … the only truth revealed to us by Scripture, the one that can never be demythologized in the course of time—since it is not an experimental, logical, or metaphysical statement but a call to practice—is the truth of love, of charity."[29] Vattimo moves towards a radical hermeneutic grounding which is supposed to enable the rejection of power-induced modes of symbolic normalization and constraints that retain their 'validity' due to their alleged reference to objective truth. "As long as the church remains trapped in the web of its 'natural metaphysics' and its literalism (God is 'father,' and not mother, for example?), it will never be able to dialogue freely and fraternally, not just with the other Christian confessions but above all with other major world religions."[30] The *deconstruction* of any objective grounding liberates, as it were, interpretation onto itself. It disavows the metaphysical claims on the basis of which dogmatic and authoritarian views of reality assert their legitimacy. Both Vattimo and Rorty see the existing institutional practices of an oppressive and exclusivist Church (and possibly other institutions) as symbolically anchored in their authority in a transcendent metaphysical truth or reality. Nothing less than the *complete overcoming of metaphysics* is

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29 Vattimo (2007), 50, 51. Vattimo's hermeneutic rejection of metaphysics is similar to Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatist critique of metaphysical realism, which Rorty also supports within a hermeneutic turn. Vattimo does for Christian theology what Rorty aims to do for analytic metaphysics. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

30 Vattimo (2007), 49.

thus needed: "The only way to open the Church not to revert to being a tiny fundamentalist sect it necessarily was at the beginning of its history, but to develop its *universal vocation* [!] is to assume the *evangelical message* as the principle that dissolves all claims to objectivity."[31]

Vattimo aims to make good on this *postmetaphysical* project via an *ontological radicalization of hermeneutics*. Interpretation—the interpretive agency of situated historical agents—must now be seen as the self-referential and all-encompassing power of defining reality. The mediation of reality through the hermeneutic act now determines its truth, and not vice versa: "… we do not believe in the gospel because we know that Christ is risen, but rather, … we believe that Christ is risen because we have read it in the gospel."[32] We accept to be addressed, as it were, by this 'call to practice' through the *symbolic disclosure* we experience as such, displacing all need or concern for any other, so to speak *interpretation-external* grounding or truth. Hermeneutics comes fully into its own by rejecting any such external (or metaphysical) confirmation, wonderfully exemplified by Nietzsche's provocative claim that "there are no facts, only interpretations, *and this is an interpretation*."[33] Yet instead of now reconstructing at a meta-theoretical level how the process of interpretation has to be conceived experientially and ontologically, Vattimo aims to fulfill his promise by reinterpreting the *substantive content of the Christian tradition itself* in hermeneutic, i.e. postmetaphysical terms. Vattimo's decisive move consists here in designating the Christian message as the complete humanization of God, as the act of *kenosis*. That God became human, that Jesus appeared, designates the complete 'humanization' of religion; religious 'revelation' itself thus allows for the switch from metaphysical transcendence to pure historical immanence: "postmodern nihilism constitutes the actual truth of Christianity."[34]

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31 Ibid., my emphases.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, 52.

34 Vattimo (2007), 47. To be sure, the concept of *kenosis* in relation to sacrifice— God sacrificing his divine nature for humanity—may hold a rich promise

With regard to our project of overcoming the metaphysical troubles of axial age worldviews, Vattimo's postmodern overcoming of religious metaphysics is not sufficiently radical and reflexive. Instead of opening up a dialogical space in-between different ontological and cultural views, it ends up designating "Christianity as the historical message of salvation."[35] The Christian 'truth' is introduced in terms of an inescapably immanent historicism; there is thus no critical or history-transcendent orientation towards which we may, or need to, turn. Vattimo fully situates us in the aftermath of the becoming-human-of-God, with Jesus as the turning point in human history. The Christian revelation becomes the all-decisive world-disclosure, it has "cogency insofar as we recognize that without it *our* historical existence would not make sense."[36] Yet what exactly designates the "our" here may concern us in a global context, as this deeply ethnocentric statement reduces hermeneutic openness to a grounding *in one particular tradition*. Vattimo is himself aware that "one might object that this is still a specific belonging which forgets humanity in general and closes itself off from other religions and cultures."[37] Yet instead of providing a non-rhetorical answer that could show how a 'free and fraternal dialogue' between different confessions or even worldreligions may be possible, Vattimo merely remarks that such problematic consequences would be even more pronounced "if we take the Christian revelation to be tied to a natural metaphysics."[38]

However, to know that another position may be even worse speaks for a view only if there are no alternatives. Fortunately, it is not so. What escapes Vattimo's plea for an unmitigated immanence is the hermeneutic insight concerning the internal dialectic between disclosure and truth.

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for further articulating the relation between tradition and transcendence within the Christian context, but also beyond. I only became aware of the relevant work of Diego Bubbio after concluding this essay, see his *Sacrifice in the Post-Kantian Tradition* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

35   Ibid, 52.

36   Ibid, 53; my emphasis.

37   Ibid.

38   Ibid.

The polar tension between interpretation and subject-matter defies an un-dialectical opposition between pure immanence or pure transcendence. It is indeed an insurmountable hermeneutic premise that the disclosure of truth is historically situated, and yet any such intentional orientation towards a text is oriented *towards a subject matter* which cannot as such ontologically be identified with the interpretative perspective. The sub-ject matter is accessible only through one's interpretive horizon, and yet not identical with any particular interpretation. The disclosing function of language establishes, instead, an ever renewable and differing relation to the text and its subject which, however, "does not in the least relativize the claim to truth of every interpretation, as seen from the fact that all interpretation is verbal."[39] While the subject matter is maintained as an internal reference point of understanding, the *linguistic mediation* of in-terpretation allows for its expression about 'the thing itself:' "The verbal explicitness that understanding achieves through interpretation does not create a second sense apart from that which is understood and interpret-ed… It simply makes the understanding explicit."[40]

Accordingly, while any understanding of something as something re-quires linguistic expression, it must be *understood* as the articulation of the subject matter apart from which we have no access to it. This neces-sarily mediated access cannot lead us, as it did Vattimo, to an ontological conflation of interpretation and subject matter. The interpretive disclo-sure of *Scripture* discloses our relation to God, but it does not make the theological reference identical to its human expression or understanding. It falls short of total immanence. The hermeneutic difference between a historical reading and its ontological counter-part—say our relation to and understanding of God—is what allows for a truly 'dialogically and fraternal' communication between members of the same tradition as well as members of differing traditions and worldviews. The shared reference point of a transcendence defines one's own taken-to-be-true

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39 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1989), 398.

40 Gadamer (1989), 398.

disclosure, which also amounts to an *immanent experience* of (our) *transcendence*. It thus constitutes our truth as much as it situates it. It still defines the Christian experience in its concrete content, and yet would also allow for the possibility of perspectives that so far transgress the Christian self-understanding. Vattimo's total destruction of the immanence/transcendence distinction is thus no viable way to overcome the metaphysical violence inherent in absolutist, dogmatic, and authoritarian visions of reality, since his immanence throws us entirely back onto our traditional understanding without any reference *towards another option*. Indeed, in Vattimo, the destruction of this difference leads back to a *privileged* designation of a *particular* cultural history—that of Christian revelation—as the (however situated) *ultimate* meaning- and value-constituting framework of (our) existence.[41]

We have thus to turn to Gadamer's project of a philosophical hermeneutics and see how we can cull from its critical reinterpretation the needed guidelines for a hermeneutic appropriation of tradition that *overcomes metaphysics and preserves pluralism*. Gadamer's approach is rightly considered paradigmatic for philosophical hermeneutics.[42] With Gadamer, based on a Heideggerian background, hermeneutics liberates itself not only from a methodology of the human sciences, but also overcomes the limitations of both romantic and idealistic philosophy. It does so by unequivocally situating the *interpreting self* in tradition; the holistic, encompassing, and linguistically mediated *Überlieferung* provides the Background of every meaningful hermeneutic practice. This can be shown by phenomenologically reconstructing textual understanding and interpretation. When aiming to understand a text, what we aim for is the understanding of its meaning. But 'meaning' is what the text says about something, 'die Sache selbst.' Understanding is linguistically mediated,

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41 Precisely because there is no transcendent reference-point, we are inescapably imprisoned in our narrative and tradition.

42 Jeff Malpas/Santiago Zabala *(eds.) The Consequences of Hermeneutics. Fifty Years after Truth and Method* (*Evanston: Northwestern University Press,* 2011). See also Jean Grondin's widely used *Introduction to Philosophical* Hermeneutics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

and yet aims at the subject matter, the thing itself. This means that the interpretive access to the meaning of a text can only work against the *background* of my own understanding of what's at stake. I necessarily project some pre-understanding onto the subject-matter, and this projection is due to my embeddedness in and familiarity with the subject matter—which stems from my cultural and historical background, the tradition. This conception of pre-understanding thus displaces the idea of a transcendental subjectivity. The interpreting self is now fully situated and dependent on a background understanding which transcends its own conscious control: "Everything that makes possible and limits Dasein's projection ineluctably precedes it."[43] Yet the disclosure of meaning is nonetheless only possible if I *reflexively* orient myself towards the meaning, i.e. what the text is about. Gadamer here invokes the influential idea that interpretation is structured like a productive dialogue, that *the text* is approached with the aim to speak to me: I let myself "be *addressed* by tradition."[44]

What is decisive here is that the *interpreting self* is always already situated in a tradition, that she bases her self-understanding on a projection of the subject matter that is grounded in her background. Under conditions of the post-axial age, these *backgrounds are multiple*. Yet these backgrounds do not enclose the selves into prisons of meaning; they are rather the preconditions for opening oneself towards others, the world, God, Being. Transcendence is essentially mediated through the tradition but also addressed *as transcendence*. The situated openness of one's pre-understanding allows for a reconceptualization of religious truth

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43 Gadamer (1989), 264.

44 Gadamer (1989), 382; also 361. This orientation overcomes idealism because it situates the self in a substantive cultural tradition; it overcomes romanticism because what the text says is not about the psyche or inner self of the Other. Instead, the text makes a truth claim towards me, speaks about a subject matter according to which I reconstruct its meaning, thus creates a realm of shared possible truth and mutual reasoning, instead of aiming to leap into the inner depth of the Other. Hermeneutic interpretation is thus re-grounded in the historical and social world and yet defined as aiming at rational and truth-oriented meaning vis-à-vis the shared subject matter.

that safeguards its unique claim to be in dialogue with a radical Other, yet also reflexively understands itself be so from within a context, based on historical and cultural beliefs and assumptions. "Being that can be understood is language" captures that all understanding is about being in language; it is the situated dialogical disclosure of a subject that is both immanent and transcendent, more or less, depending on the specific issue at stake.[45] By reconstructing the structure of the hermeneutic Background and the dialogical disclosure of meaning, we are thus similarly analyzing the formal conditions that apply to the truth-oriented appropriation of diverse religious traditions from within their respective pre-understanding.

To be sure, in order to arrive at a viable grounding for this endeavor, we have to engage in a meta-critique of philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer's linguistic ontology fails to do justice to the true complexity and internal differentiation of the interpreter's Background and subsequently how dialogical interpretation may unfold. To begin with, there is a tendency in Gadamer to subordinate the subject to her all-encompassing background in linguistic meaning; interpretation is thus in danger to be conceived as a transsubjective process of which the interpreting self is but a receiver, a moment, an agent-less element drawn into a higher power.[46] Surely a true conversation is one we do not control, and the speculative structure of language binds the self to a holism that is beyond her conscious and agentive reach. And yet, it is the interpreting self that

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45 Gadamer himself drew an important analogy between legal and theological hermeneutics to liberate the methodology of the human sciences from a false objectivism. Just as the sermon actualizes the truth of scripture by applying it to our self-understanding, hermeneutic interpretation applies the truth of tradition to our contemporary context. We now draw on Gadamer's hermeneutics to reveal the contextual and mediated character of *practiced faith*. All actualization of the truth of God is an interpretation of its truth through exegesis and reason and as such a situated and mediated application to our context.

46 For the following criticisms, see Hans-Herbert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue. Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

becomes conscious of this very dynamic; the self is required to let this process come into itself *for itself*: this is why Gadamer also insists, by drawing on Aristotle, on a *reflexive phronesis* which expresses the always ongoing application of received and revealed truth to the interpreter's context. The self is thus *energeia*, reflexive agency, and yet dependent on *ergon*, the cultural-linguistic background, and exists within the productive and ever renewable tension between the two.

Second, Gadamer conceives of the successful interpretation as one in which a 'fusion of horizons' is achieved. The core idea consists in the inescapability of one's own horizon, one's pre-understanding: to even begin to understand, we have to relate or mediate whatever is understood to *our own context*. Now the other brings a horizon as well, and understanding needs to do justice to the other, what she says about the subject matter—so the mediation is between one's own substantive pre-understanding and the other's understanding. In order to not assimilate, we need to reconstruct *the other's horizon*, and yet can do so only from *our own position*. It is a constant back-and-forth between what we can attribute to the other from our angle which also aims to take the perspective of the other, not to remain encapsulated in our own perspective. This dynamic describes well the process of dialogical appropriation. Gadamer only then goes too far when he suggests that the truly successful interpretation is one in which both horizons *fuse* in such a way that a new true *substantive and shared truth* is established. This may work for appropriating one's own cultural or religious traditions, i.e. when I as a Protestant reconstruct and adopt insight from the New Testament that I have learned to understand within Protestantism.[47] But it cannot work, not in the same way, for a hermeneutic understanding across axial cultures and religions. Here, the reflexive reconstruction of the basic ontological, ethical, and religious premises in order to better comprehend the other's particular horizon must be the legitimate goal.[48]

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47   See Gadamer (1989), 330-332.

48   Gadamer's notion aims to keep a higher, quasi-transcendent and yet historical truth alive amidst the radical situating of understanding. Yet in light

Finally, Gadamer's focus on linguistic mediation—which is import-
ant since language is the medium of articulating the reflexive insights
of interpretation—still leads to an undertheorizing of empirical factors
that pre-shape a subject's self-understanding. Getting it right about the
background is crucial since the hermeneutic process develops its truth
through *reflexive appropriation*, i.e. making conscious what determines us
unconsciously. So the fact that economic and power relations shape the
very medium of language in its world-constituting force obviously has
an impact on what we are looking for, and how we conceive the process
of articulating hitherto unthematic dimensions.[49] With regard to reli-
gious experience, it has the immense advantage that we now conceive of
our *religious understanding* as itself *institutionally and socially* defined, such
that we may also detect power structures and oppressive tendencies in
the very devout pre-understanding with which we approach the world.
We can now include Vattimo's and Rorty's concern, but more so: we can
actually explain how metaphysical assumptions within the church doc-
trine and tradition can function ideologically so as to cement power, in-
stead of opening subjects to the truth of scripture. Hermeneutics thus
needs to transcend its potentially idealistic focus on a purely linguistic
mediation and be expanded to encompass the full structural complexity
of the 'fore-structure of understanding.'[50]

The real force of our reconstructed critical-hermeneutic view becomes
apparent if we now move beyond the ontologico-existential presupposi-

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of the multiplicity of traditions—as we analyzed with the axial turn—the
self-reconciliation of one tradition, based on a recurring deepening and re-
awaking of its basic ontological and normative assumptions—cannot escape
the particularism charge. The diversity of ontological assumptions against
which interpretive understanding takes place cannot fuse all those substan-
tive worldviews into one single new metaphysics. While any attempt at un-
derstanding will draw on one's own beliefs and assumptions to begin the
process, the reconciliatory fusion of the full substance of the involved tradi-
tions and cultures is both illusory as it would be necessarily assimilationist
and ethnocentric.

49 See Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT
    Press, 2008).

50 See Kögler (1999), chapter 3.

tions towards the normative consequences. So far, the *interpreting self* reflexively appropriates its situatedness via the capability of phronesis, in order to reconstruct ontological assumptions as well as the social structuration of the linguistic background. While ontological assumptions and social structuration equally form the background of each interpreter, the orientation towards the text must nevertheless be one *towards the subject matter*, based on the available pre-understanding. From this *dialogical disclosure* follow three normative principles which guide all meaningful interpretation. And it is these three principles which therefore also implicitly structure all religious appropriation of tradition in a uniquely normative way.

- First, the dialogical disclosure of meaning which requires me to draw on my pre-understanding entails that I project *the Other as a rational subject*. This is so since to make sense, my pre-understanding is tapped as the *taken-to-be-true* beliefs and assumptions. I project those beliefs via a 'fore-conception of rational acceptability' onto the other's symbolic expression. But this means that I recognize the Other as rational. Indeed, dialogical interpretation is modelled after the give-and-take of a reason-giving practice in which I open myself to the Other to be challenged, to learn, to potentially change my view, just as much as I also may re-assert or defend my own previous position. Ideally, both sides learn, a shared new view or two viewpoints emerge. What counts here is that there always is a normative recognition of the Other as a rational co-subject who has something to say to me.[51]

- From this follows the second principle of *universal openness*. In order for this process to work, I have to be open to learn from the other. The insight into this openness is fueled also by the reflexive insight into my own finitude: I lack any Archimedian, foundational, 'God's

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51 Despite the situatedness of the Other, who is detranscendentalized as a situated concrete Other, her status as *rational co-subject* remains—indeed, it is enhanced through the assumption of a different experiential horizon she can bring to the conversation.

eyes view;' I am inescapably situated in concrete contexts. Those do not imprison me in my being like a windowless monad while they do bind me to a partial, concrete, and finite perspective. Yet my contextual boundedness cannot constrain who may approach me with valuable insight. I have to be in principle open to anyone with relevant information, with the capacities to contribute to the issue. There is thus a deep egalitarian universalism embedded in this perspective, which nonetheless rejects the 'view from nowhere' as unattainable and unneeded. What is needed, rather, in this dialogical orientation towards the infinite Other is the commitment to approach the dialogue with an orientation towards truth.

- While interpretive understanding is mediated and situated, it is, through its orientation towards a subject matter, also an *orientation towards truth*. This situated and fallible truth-orientation is defined, while being itself enabled by language ('all that can be understood is language'), as the orientation towards a *discourse-transcendent* dimension of meaning or reality. This truth-orientation is both (a) *constitutive of the possibility to meaningfully engage in interpretive practices* (as I recognize the Other as a rational co-subject insofar as she has valid claims to make *about something* vis-à-vis myself); and (b) metaphysically inaccessible, i.e. barred from a *complete or exhaustive articulation in any existing explicit framework of understanding*. The critical-hermeneutic understanding of truth therefore rejects 'metaphysical realism' (Putnam), understood as the possibility to assert one disclosed reality as the *metaphysically true one*. Instead, it allows for an 'internally realist' conception of truth as specified agreements with standards and criteria relative to specific discursive practices. Its major focus is on truth as world-disclosure, hence the possibility to reconstruct different perspectives as equally truth-enabling, thus overcoming the option that interpretation has to culminate into one single truth or ontological worldview.[52]

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52 At the level of world-disclosure, equally foundational and ontologically convincing interpretations of reality are possible. Final answers as to what con-

4. Recognizing Religion in the Democratic and Globalized Public Sphere

We are now in a position to make the leap towards the democratic public sphere and its normative assumptions. In one sense, we can understand the modern conception of a constitutional state by which (the) people govern themselves via a vibrant and egalitarian public sphere as the final realization of basic ideals of the axial age. In this sense Jaspers emphasized the universalization of reason, the recognition of the value of the individual, and the distinction between a normative 'free-standing' conception of political justification and the existing institutional and social power structures. Since Thomas Hobbes and social contract theory up to contemporary political theorists, the reconstruction of the rational principles and values on which a legitimate social order can be based are at stake. The core entailments of such assumptions are, at least since the French and American revolutions and in our current self-understanding, an unconditional commitment to the freedom and equality of each individual as citizen (or even as a world-citizen). Similarly, citizens are considered to be constitutive and active participants of their democratic societies, which is why both Rawls and Habermas emphasize the centrality of 'public reason' or the 'public sphere' in their conceptions.

Yet as we also had to acknowledge, the breakthroughs of the axial age came in the pluralized guise of different worldviews, religious traditions and metaphysical systems. They were furthermore couched in metaphysical truth-conceptions that disregarded reflection on the mediated sources of self-understanding as much as they privileged exclusivist conceptions of the good life. In turn, political life was grounded in particular religious worldviews and thus structurally determined to disenable the existing plurality of religious, metaphysical, and existential conceptions by oppressively subordinating its 'subjects' under the 'one

stitutes the ultimate or metaphysical ground of reality are abandoned at this level. Proof or experience become internally relative to the accepted standard of a certain discursive practice.

truth under God.' What was thus equally necessary (besides building on the universalism, individualism, and normativism) was to construct a *trans-religious* or *meta-metaphysical* mode of political justification which would allow to build institutions which could disarm the symbolic and material violence which latently lurked in absolutist systems when confronting one another.[53]

Accordingly, the integration into or 'reconciliation' of religious (and other metaphysical) doctrines with a fully egalitarian and free public sphere poses a particular challenge. The reconstruction of the metaphysical entailments of the axial breakthroughs—despite all their progress in terms of cultural evolution—allowed us to clearly see the potentially dogmatic and authoritarian structures of religious faith.[54] The *vertical* subordination under an absolute power whose omnipotent agency determines Being seems *prima facie* incompatible with the Enlightenment ethos of a self-governed policy in which the rational insight into one's own agency as free and equal provides the normative framework.

Yet we can now see that if religious citizens were to take the further reflexive step towards analyzing how the hermeneutic access to their *source of truth* is constituted, they would realize that the normative entailments

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53 Since then the political order "could be legitimated neither religiously (by appeal to divine authority) nor metaphysically (by appeal to an ontologically grounded natural law). From now on, a politics radically situated in this world should be justifiable on the basis of reason, using the tools of postmetaphysical theorizing." Habermas, Jürgen, "Popular Sovereignty," 41). Secularism was the answer to this normative disarmament of religious violence by relegating the religious or metaphysical worldviews to the sphere of privacy. The achievement of this political pacification of religion consisted in their confinement to a non-political sphere of conscience and self-understanding, uncoupled from any political or social powers to enforce one's views on the other. The separation of state and church, the political conception of justice, and the non-metaphysical grounding of political values and constitutional principles are supposed to enable a strictly secular state for which religious (or other metaphysical views) play no constitutive role.

54 This is a dimension that Maeve Cooke underthematizes in her approach, which generally seems compatible with the quasi-transcendental requirement to engage in a hermeneutic appropriation of religious traditions as I have reconstructed it here. See Cooke (2013), but also Kögler (2017).

of their own practice of appropriating religious meaning is quite compatible with basic normative tenets of the liberal public sphere. If it is understood how even a transcendence-oriented world-disclosure—one based on revelation or mystic experiences—is ultimately *mediated* by the interpretive acts and practices of situated subjects, and that such a hermeneutic mediation in no way has to compromise one's self-understanding that one is indeed oriented towards and in dialogue with transcendence, the 'dogmatic' truth claim towards transcendence and trans-human authority can be reconciled with one's being a member of a symphony of traditions, of being one (equal) voice among others. The normative entailments of the hermeneutic process of cultural appropriation such as dialogical recognition, epistemic openness, and shared truth-orientation do constitute the contemporary postmetaphysical conditions of understanding vis-à-vis religious, moral, and metaphysical worldviews or 'comprehensive doctrines' (Rawls). If the recognition of others in a universally open-minded way is *structurally* built into the very process of understanding one's tradition, and if these entailments are *reflexively* understood to be thus entailed, then these traditions are indeed compatible with the normative framework of a universal egalitarian and autonomous constitution of democracy. The *reflexive hermeneutic appropriation* of religious and metaphysical content is the crucial missing link between 'dogmatic' claims of (otherwise unacceptably authoritarian) religious discourses and a postsecular democratic politics that would succeed in truly integrating and recognizing religious citizens. By reconstructing the challenges that John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas set up for recognizing religion in the public sphere, we are putting these claims to a test.

The challenge of Rawls. Rawls' decisive goal in constructing a 'political conception of justice' is a free-standing (albeit moral) conception of democratic politics which is independently *conceived* of any religious, moral, or metaphysical support. It is supposed to construct those principles and norms that all citizens could, under the veil of ignorance, accept as in their best interest. Yet Rawls deals immediately with the fact that citizens endorse a wide variety of 'comprehensive doctrines.' Given the 'fact

of pluralism,' i.e. that there is a multiplicity of worldviews in the background culture which define what agents actually hold to be true and right, the question arises: "How can it be either reasonable or rational, when basic matters are at stake, for citizens to appeal only to the public conception of justice and not to the whole truth as they see it?"[55] The answer for Rawls consists in the normative core of democratic politics, defined by the freedom and equality of all, which is exercised by the citizens themselves as recognizing the principles and norms to which all could freely and equally agree.[56] This entails that the *fact of pluralism*—i.e. that citizens believe in a reasonable diversity of comprehensive doctrines regarding what counts as the whole truth—requires citizens to limit their reliance on these doctrines if they make contributions to the establishment of core constitutional principles. "As reasonable and rational, and knowing that they affirm a diversity of reasonable religious and philosophical doctrines, *they should be ready* to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality."[57] This 'ideal of democratic politics' thus demands a *political ethos* to orient oneself towards a shared and equally accessible practice of reason-giving for one's collective political goals. The 'duty of civility' expresses the deep egalitarian intuition that the citizens construct a shared political space by mutually addressing and recognizing themselves as its authors; they thus create through this rational reciprocity of mutually accessible reasons the deep bond of common citizenship: "The union of the duty of civility with the great values of the political yields the ideal of citizens

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55　Rawls (1993), 216. And even stronger: "How is it possible … for those of faith to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrine may not prosper under it?" in Habermas (2008), 123.

56　Rawls appeals to the historically contingent yet defensible emergence of a tradition or sentiment of 'public reason' according to which core liberal and democratic values—like freedom, equality, solidarity, economic and social justice—have established themselves as existing cultural sources of normative commitment, i.e. as free-standing 'political values.'

57　Rawls (1993), 218, my emphasis.

governing themselves *in ways each thinks the others might reasonably be expected to accept*."[58]

In Rawls, the modern challenge of worldview-pluralism vis-à-vis the egalitarian recognition of all citizens as free and equal leads to two seemingly contradictory principles. On the one hand, since the 'duty of civility' demands citizens to orient themselves at the moral virtue "to be able to explain to one another … how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason,"[59] citizens are *prevented* from representing contributions in the *lingo* of their comprehensive doctrines. The famous 'translation proviso' requires that "proper political reasons—and not reasons solely given by comprehensive doctrines—are presented that are *sufficient* to support whatever their comprehensive doctrines are said to support."[60] This puts the burden of translating whatever your religion suggests into a 'generally accessible' language. The background assumption is that common sense and uncontroversial scientific knowledge generate the sufficient – and only legitimate - resources on the basis of which common norms and policies can be decided.

On the other hand, Rawls is aware of the meaning- and identity-constituting power of encompassing worldviews, and thus suggests that an 'overlapping consensus' between comprehensive doctrines and the liberal political values be established whenever possible.[61] Insofar as a

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58 Rawls, ibid. If the reasons on the basis of which norms or policies are enacted would not be accessible to all, they would express a one-sided majority opinion which forces its will (without the possibility of consent or dissent) on a minority, and thus exercise repression, as it would violate the principle that all (!) citizens recognize one another rationally—i.e. through the very procedure of given reasons to one another—as free and equal. See also Habermas (2008), 122.

59 Rawls (1993), 217.

60 Habermas (2008) on Rawls, 122 f.

61 The idea of an 'overlapping consensus' aims to reaffirm citizens that they may well be able to safeguard and enforce their respective 'comprehensive doctrines,' to be sure, only as long as they can also be made to endorse the basic political values and thus count as '*reasonable* comprehensive doctrines.' For a critique of this approach as both circular and constraining, inasmuch

religious view is able to generate, say, the idea of equality and the inacceptability of slavery, it provides additional motivational and existential support for such political values. Anchoring basic political values like the equality of persons, or the freedom of religion, in background worldviews thus does not, for Rawls, suggest that the commitment to the basic political value is not sincere or deep. It thus still avoids the undesirable situation of a mere *modus vivendi*—a situation in which citizens who endorse different doctrines agree to shared norms only on the basis of their current mutual advantage—since the core normative principles are sincerely endorsed *as such*. They carry over to, or re-ground, so to speak, the political values without diminishing their normative standing. At the same time, the justifications of certain political values by means of their background doctrine cannot play, following the translation proviso, a constitutive role in public life, since those necessarily non-generalizable sources would fail to establish a truly shared and mutually accessible ground for legitimate political norms and policies.[62]

The challenge of Habermas. Habermas draws on critics of Rawls to redefine the relation between religion and the public sphere, specifically to overcome a narrow 'secularist' definition of the public sphere which would illegitimately exclude religious voices. The core intuition behind this readjustment remains egalitarian inasmuch as it would be wrong to subject a special group of citizens—those with deep religious convictions—to burdens that others, the secular citizens, are spared. To impose

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as pluralism is only admitted on the basis of endorsing liberal values, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 17 – 35. However, insofar as certain normative values present meta-norms that allow for the very possibility of politics in light of pluralism, their constitutive and grounding function vis-à-vis religious or metaphysical worldviews may be justified. See also footnote 62.

62 For a critique see Habermas (2019), 91-100. The hermeneutic approach avoids the criticism that the 'doctrine of an overlapping consensus' breaks the public sphere up into to quasi-private worldview-worlds, since it is defined by the shared reflexive understanding that *any tradition* is subject to certain normative principles of interpretive appropriation. It thus creates a sense of sharedness on a meta-reflexive level while recognizing the diversity of the specific traditions, perspectives, and doctrines.

the strict translation proviso onto religious citizens would force them into a culturally imposed duress, a quasi-bipolar existence where one's true self is devout and defined by God, whereas one's public self has to act 'as if' it were secular. Not only would such a constant self-censorship likely dry up the energy, enthusiasm, and engagement that defines the social participation of religious groups and agencies—a *functionally* indispensable and by strict secularists often underestimated factor of democratic societies. It would also *normatively* pose a problem since it would unequally demand self-restrictions of religious citizens in conflict with their free exercise and undiminished standing of religion within our pluralistic societies which is constitutionally guaranteed. The problem arises since the switch of religiously defined political convictions onto a secular basis contradicts the existential self-understanding of devout citizens. "It belongs to the religious convictions of many religious people 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…. Their religion is not, for them, about *something other* than their social and political existence."[63] To demand that religious citizens translate their core convictions into a secular idiom before they participate in public deliberation thus exerts an unjust burden onto them *as equal citizens*.

Habermas suggests a set of steps in order to remedy this situation. To begin with, we have to abandon and redefine the strict translation proviso: "We cannot infer from the secular state a direct personal obligation on all citizens to supplement their publically expressed religious convictions by equivalents in a generally accessed language… the liberal state, which protects all religious forms of life equally, must release religious citizens from the burden of having to make a strict separation between secular and religious reasons in the political public arena…"[64] A *postsecular* self-understanding would extent an open invitation to religiously based discourse and contributions in the *informal* public sphere,

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63   Habermas (2008) approvingly quoting Wolterstoff, 128.

64   Habermas (2008), 129.

i.e. the forums and institutions of civil society. And yet the 'neutrality' towards competing worldviews must still be maintained: "every citizen must know and accept that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold separating the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries, and administrations."[65] The core idea is that within civil dialogues the full range of a society's ethical, religious, and otherwise productive resources should be articulated and unleashed, yet that process must still be undertaken so as to ultimately arrive at shared norms and principles to which all, *in the same lingo and for the same reasons*, can agree. Religious citizens are then fully integrated in the procedural will-formation. Similarly, the translation process is not their responsibility but is collectively conceived as the shared outcome of an intersubjective deliberation in which situated citizens learn from one another. The inclusion of unrestrained religious voices is therefore part of the usual and democratically essential *mutual perspective-taking*, in which the subjects aim to understand one another in order to advance their civic ethos and moral standing, and to do justice to all as affected by diverse contextual life challenges. The inclusion thus contributes to the essential 'polyphonic complexity' of pluralistic democracies since "religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life."[66]

The relaxed translation proviso is now expanded to further aspects in order to complete the postsecular reconceptualization of public democratic life. If religious positions are to be fully integrated into a pluralistic secular life, the religious citizens must come to grips with how to relate to the complexity and pluralism of modern democratic societies. Habermas thus introduces the level of *cognitive presuppositions*. Religion ought to be included, but how can it be done, how could it work? Only, so Habermas, if the religious citizen develops a reflexive stance vis-à-vis (1) the existence and viability of other worldviews and religions, (2) the institutional monopoly of scientific knowledge with regard to empiri-

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65 Ibid., 130.

66 Ibid., 131.

cal reality, and (3) the impartial or neutral nature of the modern pub-lic sphere involving a universalistic morality as well as an egalitarian individualism vis-à-vis the good life. What Habermas demands of the religious mind is to situate itself *reflexively* in this context such that it re-spects the other symbolic perspectives (religious and metaphysical worl-dviews, science, morality, and individualism) but nevertheless be able to maintain its identity, its *proprium* as religion. Religious subjects—recall the normative argument against unequal burdens—cannot and are not asked to become secular. But how can the religious orientation towards my own revealed and identity-constituting truth be reconciled with the plurality of validity claims that define modern societies? How can my own 'ultimate truth' be endorsed and enforced, and yet the legitimacy of other worldviews, scientific knowledge, and a morality that respects individual choices and equality regardless of worldview or religion—i.e. respects subjects as truly free and equal—be *internally endorsed*?

5. Towards a Hermeneutic Reconciliation between Religion and Science

An affirmative answer can ultimately only be given within a hermeneutic reconstruction of religious experience which both safeguards its unique standing and yet allows for the relative right of other knowledge claims within a pluralistic society. The objective pluralism of the axial age break-through is now to be *internalized*, as well as further integrated into a frame-work entailing 'objective' science and universal morality, and yet one's own belief and conviction in the respective revealed faith are supposed to be still reasonable. The hermeneutic answer, as we have seen, entails that I nec-essarily have to base my beliefs and convictions on a *holistic background* of taken-to-be-true beliefs, assumptions, and practices which provide the hori-zon of validity and rational acceptability for me. As a religious subject, this background context is constituted by a complex of tradition which entails revealed truth, specific rituals (to stay in touch with transcendence), and a concrete community of believers. The religious background thus constitutes its *proprium* not merely on a purely cognitive level, but as 'lived religion,' as

an experienced community-towards-transcendence. It is an embodied and collectively shared source of meaning and identity which can never be fully objectified, and which, importantly, resists a full 'discursification' of its truth content.[67] It thus remains discourse-external in its epistemic source, and yet it provides a semantic reservoir of meaning, as its articulations—both by the religious subjects and by those who translate their contributions into a shared accessible language—constitute (for now) the irreplaceable sources of identity and solidarity: "Religiously rooted existential convictions, by dint of their if necessary rationally justified reference to the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truths, evade the kind of unreserved discursive examination to which other ethical orientations and worldviews, i.e. secular 'conceptions of the good,' are exposed."[68]

To be sure, this acknowledgement of the dogmatic (since revelation based) nature of religious validity and truth can only then shed its *anti-deliberative character*, and accept that other validity claims have their own respective legitimacy, if it fully endorses that its own claims are *mediated* accounts of the 'revealed' and therefore 'infallible' and 'absolute' truth. It has to accept that the truth-orientation—which *sub specie participant* is absolute and infallible—is nevertheless always already the linguistically and culturally mediated account of the signs—the texts, testimony, narratives, traditional interpretations—which revealed the truth, just as we reconstructed in our hermeneutic analysis above. The hermeneutic understanding of a necessary and insurmountable truth-orientation vis-à-vis what we receive *in whatever symbolically mediated form* allows us to keep both aspects—the reflexive understanding of one's finite mediated understanding, and the orientation towards the infinite, absolute, infallible truth, or God—together in one perspective. Religious citizens thus can maintain that their own religious tradition connects them with a reality or being which transcends human control and/or understanding, and yet, since they also reflexively comprehend that this 'revelation' is one *for them received by them*, that its interpretive understanding depends on

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67   Cooke (2013); Habermas (2008); (2019).

68   Habermas (2008), 129.

a vastly complex, historically defined, and culturally specific context of beliefs, assumptions, and practices, and for that reason should display a universal openness towards alternative accounts of being.[69]

Now to fully include religious views in a postsecular public sphere requires, so Habermas correctly, an equally demanding *cognitive attitude change* on the side of secular citizens. The requirement here relates to the deep-seated prejudice about the irrationality of religion and its eventual 'progressive' overcoming through science. Yet how can Habermas, who demands of religious citizens to accept the epistemic expert privilege of science, and endorses a free-standing conception of a universal secular morality, now turn around and demand recognition of religion by secular citizens? Habermas' own answer draws on the all-important distinction between science as a *knowledge-generating socio-epistemic practice*, and 'scientism' as a *quasi-metaphysical worldview* that falsely generalizes the specific methods and procedures of natural science towards the whole of human experience and being. The cognitive change required here relates to what he calls a postmetaphysical stage of cultural self-understanding. "Postmetaphysical thinking refrains from making ontological pronouncements on the construction of being as such; however, this does not imply a reduction of our knowledge to the sum total of statements that represent the current 'state of science.'"[70]

Habermas' glib rejection of a thorough hermeneutic inquiry into the different sources of 'understanding being,' however, cannot dispel with the task to reconstruct how our situated human self-understanding projects, against the background of a pre-understanding of beliefs, assumptions, and practices, certain types of beings respective to certain types of discourses. Gadamer's major achievement—and one which otherwise thoroughly influenced Habermas—was to show that aesthetic experi-

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69   The dimension of hermeneutic humanization which was a major concern of Vattimo is thus safeguarded and integrated here, without, however, assimilating the internal perspective of the believer - who is oriented towards a transcendent being or reality - to a postmodern or antirealist conception of experience.

70   Habermas (2008), 140.

ence, and specifically the hermeneutic experience with tradition, cannot be grasped or reconstructed within the objectivistic mode of an (itself problematic) methodologico-empiricist conception of natural science.[71] The reconstruction of being, to be sure, cannot be undertaken *up fronte*; yet the question how being is constructed, or how we are necessarily projecting *diverse ontological assumptions* onto reality relative to different types of 'sciences' or 'world-disclosures' cannot be avoided. Crucial is, in the end, that the languages of normative and intentional reality—the 'life of the mind'—cannot be reduced to, or 'translated' into, the idiom of natural-scientific terminology.

The secular citizen can only begin to take religious contributions seriously once she reflexively limits her own validity claims to empirical-analytic claims, for instance with regard to scientific discourses as reconstructing empirical states of affairs: "In line with the standards of an enlightenment endowed with a critical awareness of its own limits, the secular citizens understand their non-agreement with religious conceptions as a disagreement that it is reasonable to expect."[72] Only if the *secular citizen* overcomes a *secularist ontological over-generalization* of the type of being and validity entailed in her own scientific, i.e. non-religious discourse, can religion as tradition even have chance to be treated as an equal partner, as a potentially resourceful and enhancing perspective within the 'complex architecture of modernity.' But this is obviously necessary if a truly inclusive public sphere is to be realized: "On the normative premises of the constitutional state and of a democratic ethos, the admission of religious assertions into the political arena only makes sense if *all* citizens can be reasonably expected not to exclude the possibility that these contributions may have cognitive substance."[73]

We may in turn claim that such a reflexive self-limitation of science is only possible against the background of a hermeneutic self-understanding of the projections of being relative to different discourses and

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71   Gadamer (1989), esp. 277 f.

72   Habermas (2008), 139.

73   Habermas (2008), 139.

world-disclosures. In order to ultimately balance the relation between religion and science in the public sphere, the hermeneutic grounds of science itself would thus have to be reconstructed. Gadamer's hermeneutics successfully curtailed the illegitimate claims of scientific objectivism within the plurality of scientific approaches, thus enabling the conceptual and methodological space for the humanities and interpretive social sciences.[74] We were here able to reconstruct that the hermeneutic grounding of religious experience aligns in its *disclosure as tradition* with the very principles that define the pluralistic and democratic public sphere. Critical reflexivity vis-à-vis one's situated and partial background, paired with the uncompromised commitment to find common ground and to learn and advance the common good, is crucial for a self-critical and open-minded public life. Its normative basis is to mutually recognize one another as free and equal and *in this capacity* to advance the common good via deliberative practices. Religious appropriation of one's own tradition is to be equally defined by a humble acknowledgement of the mediated and situated perspective of the believer who is approaching its sacred texts with the dialogical aim to access its truth. The situated openness to a truth that is dialogically conveyed aligns with a reflexive self-limitation of one's truth claim against the absolutist and dogmatic validity claims in metaphysical and monotheistic traditions. The truth claims of one's tradition can thus be maintained while the perspectival nature of its disclosure constitutes the grounds to not dismiss the perspectives of others, to engage with them truly in the hope to expand one's horizon, and to open oneself to eventually learn from others even if one does not share their basic metaphysical or religious principles. If such a hermeneutic reflexivity vis-à-vis the limits of one's ultimate horizon becomes widespread, the cooperation between more transcendence-oriented and more immanence-oriented conceptual and existential attitudes should pose no problem for a fully liberated *postsecular* public sphere.

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74   Gadamer (1989), 171 ff.; Malpas/Zabala (2011).

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