GUEST EDITORIAL

Maureen Junker-Kenny
Trinity College Dublin

This Special Issue on a pre-eminent European philosopher and public intellectual, Jürgen Habermas, offers insights into the formative effects exercized by his work across different traditions of thinking, political cultures and generations. Published to mark the occasion of his 90th birthday on June 18, 2019, it focuses on a theme that has gained ground in his thinking over the past three to four decades: religion and its anthropological role in the understanding of self and world, in different stages of social self-organisation, in its relation to reason and ethics, to processes of communicative exchange in the lifeworld and in the public sphere, and in its relation to postmetaphysical thinking. The issue, "Habermas on Religion" thus leads into both well-established and recent debates. It explores the contribution of "religion" to key questions of Habermas's work: how to develop a reason-led (*vernünftige*) identity in a segmented, complex society; what the role of philosophy is after the differentiation of reason into research projects in the individual sciences, yet guided by an overarching systematic idea; into which directions the project of a critical theory of society reaching from economics to psychoanalysis of the first two generations of the Frankfurt School is to be taken; how a theory of democracy is to combine concepts of the public sphere, law, the legitimation of the state, and pre-political foundations; which concrete forms "system" and "lifeworld" take in the current transformations wrought by global economic players; what resources can be drawn on to defend the cultural, political and conceptual structures required to make good the promise of modernity: to respect and foster freedom through the provision of intersubjective and societal conditions that allow individuals to become their own self as a premise for moral judgement and action. Evidence that "religion" is not just one of many specialized subthemes is the publication in German in the autumn of 2019 of his new book in two volumes under the title, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (*Also a History of Philosophy*). This comprehensive study will

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DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V11I4.3035
AUTHOR: MJUNKERK@TCD.IE

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doubtlessly provide answers as well as further enquiries, surprises and re-evaluations, and set up scholars with thought-through outlines, perspectives and intersections between disciplines to explore for some time to come.

After outlining the topics contained in this Special Issue (for which the deadline was June 2019) and their sequence (I), I will identify four debates that arise between them (II).

I. THE THEMES DISCUSSED IN THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The contributions give evidence of the multiple angles from which Habermas's work is being examined. Among the themes linked to the complex of "religion" are: Habermas's ongoing discussion of the types and the status of ethics; the distinction between the informal public sphere and the neutral state; pluralism not merely as a fact, but as a task of recognition and mutual "translation" between citizens; the "pathologies of rationalization" that threaten the project of modernity.

The sequence in which the articles are presented has been chosen for the following reasons. The first three contributions (Cooke, Lafont and Haker) represent three major starting points in political ethics. The following two (Jakobson and Atanasescu) deal with "translation" at the intersection of the religious and the secular. The final two (Viertbauer and Matuštík) focus on Habermas's turn to Kierkegaard for a guiding concept, the "ability to become a self", that meets the requirements of postmetaphysical reason. Viertbauer questions Habermas's treatment of the religious endpoint of the Danish thinker's argumentation, Matuštík the role of new rituals for the self .

As to traditions of ethics and political thought, Maeve Cooke (1) argues for a religious understanding of truth from the equal validity of the ethical level, disagreeing with Habermas's "agnostic position with regard to the validity of claims regarding the good life for humans". Cristina Lafont (2) compares the idea of a "deliberative" democracy justified by "public reasons" to an understanding of "pluralism" in which "fairness" is interpreted as giving equal weight to all comprehensive reasons, regardless of whether or not they protect the equal rights granted by the constitution. The legal instrument of constitutional review is analysed in Supreme Court judgements in the US and Europe on same sex marriage and on the Islamic headscarf as making decisions dependent on "the force of the better argument" and as aiming at

a resolution through "communicative power" when worldviews are set in a stalemate. Hille Haker (3) identifies the goal of perfection championed by biotechnology as a comprehensive view of the "good" and elucidates on the backdrop of its financial and political weight in the recent positions taken by ethics committees the relevance of Habermas's step to extend the deontological discourse model by a "species ethics" (3).

The view of religion differs in each of these authors, in accordance with their distinct premises. The restriction of religious truth claims by the priority of reason in its quality of being generally "accessible" is deemed unjustified by Cooke, whereas for Lafont, religious and other "comprehensive reasons" are subordinate to, but not destined to be replaced by "public reasons". Haker argues for a joint opposition from secular and religious backgrounds to developments that undermine equal rights by their goals of eugenic perfection and that downgrade the normative principle of human dignity to a particular, not generally accessible religious position.

It is evident that the major differences between these approaches call for a thorough analysis of their guiding concepts in order to identify their shared points — for example, the rejection of coercion and authoritarianism — as well as the premises on which they will continue to differ — such as, what constitutes "truth", "communication", being a "citizen", the "good", "morality", the "law", and "religion". I will take up some of these issues in the second part of the Editorial, but Habermas's resetting of the parameters of his own approach should already be mentioned before introducing the following four articles.

The problem Habermas has been tackling since 2000 is to identify what mode of exchange and what level of ethics are up to the task of dealing with alternatives that turn out to be unresolvable by procedural rules and by legal means. For him, a return simply to the level of the "good" is no longer possible in a pluralistic democracy since the resulting substantive proposals would be "paternalistic" for some.[1] If, on the other hand, moral questions are reduced to the legal level of not harming negative rights, the concept of the citizen who is also a morally reflective being is downplayed and their joint deliberation on what policies can be justified is eclipsed. His insistence on a more demanding understanding of the citizen both as addressee and as author of laws and as participant in discourses aiming for a consensus reached

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003), 64.

through communication, not law, had already been one of the crucial dividing lines in his debates with John Rawls in the middle of the 1990s. In the face of the unprecedented power to change humanity by germline genetic intervention, however, a new level of critical self-reflection and response is called for that goes beyond the procedural level of the — still necessary — discourses of universalisation. The horizon of the task of ethics is extended beyond the deontological demand for rational justification. The new species ethical "embedding" is meant to supply the crucial motivational factor: the unsurpassable role of a person's "self-understanding" which forms the link between the ethical and the moral is now recognized.[2] It brings to attention the basis from which the attitude to morality of all individuals proceeds: the social bond to humanity as a species of morally self-reflective, intersubjective beings. This understanding does not contradict postmetaphical reason in its abstemious reserve towards fuller accounts provided by other schools of ethics. The connection highlighted is not marked by particularity, as it extends beyond specific traditions to humanity as such; and it does not identify positive contents that would always remain contested but just one formal characteristic of every human being: their ability to become a self. It allows to state structural requirements — which result in quite definite practical conclusions, such as not to impose irreversible parental preferences on a future child — , yet keeps the format negative: it is to identify conditions that protect the chance of an "unfailed life".[3] Concretizing directions in which becoming a self can be achieved, however, is the individual's own prerogative and is certainly not part of the task of philosophy, as Habermas has made clear repeatedly, no longer according the role of being a provider of meaning to this discipline.[4]

The first three articles thus establish the contours of current debates on religion in civic discourse and political decision-making by indicating positions on what distinguishes the particular and the universal, the ethical and

2 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 2.

3 The development of Habermas's ethics in its discussion of specific approaches to ethics is succinctly outlined by Georg Lohmann, "Moral-Diskurse", in *Habermas-Handbuch*: *Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. Hauke Brunkhorst, Regina Kreide and Christina Lafont (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009). The work in which the move to a "species ethics" is proposed, *The Future of Human Nature* , is analysed by Thomas M. Schmidt, "Menschliche Natur und genetische Manipulation", in ibid., 282-291.

4 Cf. for example, Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 1.

the moral, the substantive and the procedural, the "comprehensive" and the legal, and which they take as foundational. Underlying them is the issue of how constitutional democracies can have cohesion without domination and marginalisation, and how the social bond required for participative and productive solutions to conflicts can be strengthened against pathologies undermining it. It is since 2000 that Habermas in a new phase of his treatment of religion has welcomed the resources these traditions can provide as semantic and pragmatic backgrounds from which insights can be drawn. This leads to the request for mutual "translation" in civic exchange across the divides between worldviews, philosophies and religions. Going beyond Rawls's "proviso", Habermas calls both sides to engage in a mutual effort to translate. It is not a one-sided task, and it is conceived of as a dialogue, not a contest.

The premises and possible understandings of "translation" are examined in the following two articles. Jonas Jakobsen (4) highlights its function to avoid a "secularistic exclusion of religious contributions" from public deliberation. Yet he disagrees with two presuppositions: one, Habermas's "institutional threshold" that distinguishes the "state" in its neutrality with regard to worldviews from the "informal public sphere" where contributions from all traditions and positions are invited; and second, the division between "secular" and "religious" reasons. By contrast, Jakobsen outlines a different understanding of the state and of an "ethics of citizenship" in which a "moderate inclusivism" replaces Habermas's insistence on the use of generally accessible reasons within parliamentary debate. Jakobsen notes the danger of a majoritarian worldview or religion but understands the use of religious arguments also in the parliamentary process as constituting offers for reflection. Thus, it is not about repressing non-religious views but about adding to the range of possibly motivating reasons also within the institutions of the State. While parliament is asked to put respect into practise by also listening to religious reasons, foregoing the need for translation, the same level of inclusiveness is required from participants in civic debate in the informal public sphere. Also arguments they do not share — not because of their religious or secular provenance, but because they oppose their content — have to be tolerated. So the burdens are reversed: both religious and secular justifications are permitted, they can be translated on demand, and whoever is in the minority has to be consulted. But the principled distinction between general, secular, or moral reasons and religious ones is rejected, each member of parliament is allowed to speak in their own tongue, and

controversial views can be expressed by public representatives without a prior filter in the pre-legislative phase of opinion formation.

Adrian Atanasescu (5) approaches the question of translation from a different starting point: he diagnoses a latent contradiction in Habermas's positions since the 1980s and from 2001: between an evolutionary trajectory of replacing religion by communicative reason, and the later turn to a "postsecular project". The overarching "supersessionist" outline of progress from a metaphysical stage in which theoretical, practical and aesthetic validity claims were still fused towards a "postmetaphysical" mode of thinking is dealt a "fatal blow" by the new "postsecular" view. Atanasescu reconstructs how Max Weber's account of modernity as rationalisation and disenchantment is supplemented by Hegel, taking out the pessimism resulting from Nietzschean elements: opening up "a moment of decision that has no further rational ground, a nihilistic moment, which reveals the normative poverty of modernity and the widespread lack of meaning in the life of modern citizens." Yet with Hegel's influence, Habermas is "able to flatly deny that disenchantment of the world bogs modernity down in a polytheistic quagmire". Karl Jaspers's theory of the axial age leads to a new appreciation of religion as having a joint origin with metaphysics. However, the unresolved tension between the overall view of religion as superseded by the power of language and the new view since 2001 puts the task of translation into a precarious position: It becomes "the linchpin that holds together the old project of 'postmetaphysical' modernity and the new project of 'a post-secular society'." His concluding question turns to the political task of forging agreements in the public realm: "how can Habermas be sure that 'salvaging' translations will be found for every contentious issue that may occur in the public sphere of complex, plural societies?"

Between Jakobsen's mediating attempt to soften the contrasts between the counterparts of the neutral state and citizens in the plural public sphere and Atanasescu's analysis of a looming aporia, their concepts of "religion" are clearly distinct. For Jakobsen, it is one source of personal motivation besides others, but not radically different; for Atanasescu, it requires a return to the metaphysical mode of thinking before the division into validity spheres established by modernity. The modern era claims for humans what belongs to God: "'Communicative reason' develops its full potential *only when* the three aspects of validity (truth, rightness and truthfulness) are splintered in distinct

'validity claims', removed from their pre-modern anchoring in a transcendent God... the unconditionality once attached to some ontological principles (or divine revelation) is transferred over to the unconditionality of validity claims raised in everyday communication."

From this unresolved disparity of perspectives on translation as a task for fellow citizens, to be discussed in the second part, the step to the final two contributions is short. With Kierkegaard, they treat a thinker whose work has equally produced a wide range of interpretations on his understanding of "religion" and on his concept of the "self" which already figured as a key term in the new level of "species ethics".

Klaus Viertbauer (6) investigates the concept of "becoming a self" in Kierkegaard's analysis of human freedom with its anchor in the connection to God as creator. He compares the different assessments the Danish religious thinker has undergone in Habermas's work and identifies a link between the latter's assessment of religion as "opaque" and his lack of distinction between two types of religiosity in Kierkegaard. For Viertbauer, the "fideist" version (religiousness B) leads to religion as a counterpart of reason, whereas religion as a form of life (religiousness A) would not have produced such a disjunctive view. Viertbauer's comparison of different approaches to a theory of subjectivity leads into the history of reception of Kierkegaard and the current debate on whether an authentic existence is possible without God, thus, more precisely, how stage two of existence, the ethical, relates to stage three, the religious; if Kierkegaard's term for the personal decision to believe in a creator God who grounds individuals in their facticity, the "leap" into faith, has to be read as irrational; where "sin" is entered into the analysis of the double constitution of human freedom; whether this direction of post-Kantian philosophy of religion can be interpreted differently than in the steep terms of dialectical theology, yet without, on the other hand, replacing the concept of a transcendent God with the immanent power of human interaction.

The final contribution by Martin Matuštík (7) develops Kierkegaard's perspective on faith not as a belief system but as a communication of existence into the area of ritual theory, agreeing with the relevance Habermas accords to having ongoing access to cultic expression. Matuštík objects that in his reception of Karl Jaspers's thesis of an "axial age" — of significant changes in human self-understanding when the great philosophical systems originated together with the historical religions — Habermas restricts his analysis of ritual to the

"received cults of established Axial religions". Locating humanity as being on the cusp of a "Second Cognitive Revolution" marked by the "dialectic of rituals and algorithms", Matuštík asks how it is possible to "access these archaic ritual sources of human solidarity in the age of artificial intelligence" which he identifies, quoting Yovel Noah Harari's 2016 book, *Homo Deus*, as "the data religion". As a counter-weight to the hyposthetisation of machines into analogues to humans, emergent rituals have to be taken seriously in their resistance to "mindless algorithms generated by AI *that*, not a *who*, no longer needs human solidarity". Attention has to be paid to the "emerging unchurched spiritualities and new faith communities" whose "rituals are institutionally homeless" but that can contribute to stabilising the "risky identity-formation of postmetaphysically unsettled modern individuals". Renewing human solidarity by inaugurating unprecedented rituals testifies to a capacity of humans that manifest their abiding difference to the entities programmed by them. Thus, agency is seen to include the ability to express oneself in ritual performance. Against the new pressures of conformity imposed by a self-effacing creed in technology he asks: "What must the social and political institutions and communal solidarities be like that could stabilise now the improbable existential dissenters in the postsecular condition of AI?"

Already on their own, each of the authors — Haker, Lafont and Matuštík as invited contributors, Atanasescu, Cooke and Jakobson selected by peer review, Viertbauer as initiator and organiser of the Special Issue — raises points of debate worth pursuing. From their combination, four areas can be identified where questions have to be taken further.

II. AREAS FOR FURTHER DEBATE

Opening the discussion about factors shaping the assessment of "religion" is the diagnosis of pathologies; tackling them at the cultural level requires all the resources that shape self-understandings (II 1). The second point of major division is whether a conceptual and institutional difference should be made between the ethical and the moral (II 2). Only with this clarification can the core question for the theme of the Special Issue, "religion", be examined: how is "transcendence" to be understood, as a dimension that is convertible to the human endowment with language, or as referring to a God who is distinct from the world and humans if the term is not to lose its mean-

ing (II 3)? The fourth point concludes with the opportunity provided by the contingent origins of European thinking: the history of encounter and mutual determination between philosophy and monotheism (II 4).

II.1 Indicators of cultural pathologies

Part of Habermas's defense of the "project of modernity" is to identify its pathologies, follow them up into their current features and analyse levels and directions for responses. Some of the contributors disagree with the appreciation of modernity as a moral project of recognizing the equal freedom and ability for cooperative self-governance of all humans. Others do not share the Critical Theory heritage of analysing alienating forces at work in society that need to be countered by the means of politics and law from the local to the global planes, by scholarly research, ethical and religious initiatives and social movements. At least three factors can be named that encapsulate threats to the promise of modernity and that are taken up by some of the authors in this volume: the "colonization of the lifeworld" (a), the reduction of morality to law (b), and the "self-objectification" following from an instrumental relationship to oneself and the world (c).

a) The lifeworld as colonized by systems

Among the pathologies of rationalisation is the substitution of interactive forms of negotiation by the currencies of the system. When markets assume "regulatory functions in domains of life that used to be held together by norms — in other words, by political means or through pre-political forms of communication", then the "democratic bond" is threatened with "corrosion".[5] Habermas thus points to crucial challenges to cooperative structures that arise from leaving matters to be regulated not by discursive efforts but by the market. Their business models and funding streams cannot be contested because the power of the individuals affected is unequal. Assisted human reproduction is one such area that Haker sees as exemplifying "what Habermas has described as the colonization of the lifeworld, i.e. the domination by an instrumental rationality that obeys the rules of commodification rather than communication." Haker points out the comprehensive conceptions of the "good" that are involved in the drive for eugenic intervention. Their images of

5 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008), 107.

what constitutes a "flourishing life" risk becoming mandatory without even being discussed in the political culture; this is due to the prevalence of the market over constitutional principles in societies with more attention to liberal concerns than to deontological limits. The concrete threats to freedom, equality and dignity issuing, for example, from allowing insurance companies access to genetic test results should be as much on the agenda as the effort of dealing with different religious understandings of life.

b) The use of legal rights like "weapons"

From the perspective of the Frankfurt School, critiques of technology as systems that dominate what used to be self-governed spaces in the lifeworld, replacing the standards of interaction in primary relationships with new objectifying imperatives, appear as strangely subdued in liberal analyses. This could be connected to the prevalence of constructing morality from the starting point of "reciprocity" which is characteristic of legal, contractual agreements. Public culture is reduced to the perspective of individual clients interested in securing their rights. In a striking formulation, Habermas has likened these to "weapons". He anticipates that the understanding of being a citizen could be reduced to a minimal level, resulting in "the transformation of the citizens of prosperous and peaceful liberal societies into isolated, self-interested monads who use their individual liberties exclusively against one another like weapons."[6] It is remarkable that Habermas assigns the task of translation to individual citizens, marked by an active interest in connecting with others, not to the representative level of government executives meeting with religious organisations. Exchange is to happen in direct interaction in the not yet fully colonized lifeworld or in the media, thus, in a participative way, not primarily via official spokespersons. This does not deny the need for expert committees and the value of the long-standing engagement in inter-religious dialogue self-organised by the religions which equally treat issues arising on the ground. But it accords priority to developing mutual understanding below the level of the law, not using it as the first resort in the possibly mistaken assumption that it will help to change attitudes.

6 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 107.

c) Self-objectification

The chance of upholding the resolve to resist the encroachment of system imperatives such as competitiveness, of prioritizing strategic thinking in the service of self-assertion, and a calculating attitude towards nature just as a resource for profit, however, depends on the continued presence of a self-understanding marked by the consciousness of freedom. Without a sense of actuality of this key principle of modernity, the scope for agency is set to shrink even further. Haker enquires whether "our present will in the future be seen as the point at which the self has lost any interest in Kierkegaard's question of existential ethics, so that it does not engage any longer in the task of being oneself, and regresses to a self that is merely interested in being in control." A clear case of objectification is the concept of health and illness she refers to that is produced by linking an entirely biological definition to key terms of the liberal idea of a good life, "opportunity" and "choice", without the involvement of the patient. By contrast, Habermas insists on the irreplaceability of the person's own response which cannot be assumed in advance, before taking into account the individuality of the affected subject.[7] Also Matuštík's urgent appeal to take note of new forms of performative resistance to instrumental attitudes to the self and to its replacement by AI indicates the need for support in cultivating relationships of awareness to the world, oneself and others, enabled by the human capacity for ritual.

II.2 Distinguishing the moral from the ethical

In view of several articles arguing for either the priority of the good, or for downgrading its contrast to morality, the key role played by the latter for the "institutional threshold" is a point for further debate. From two sides, the need for a deontological level of discourse is put into question: for liberals, "political reasons" in the plural take over the role of representing the norm of justice that is due to and demanded from free and equal citizens. For many of the advocates of an ethics of the flourishing life, the universalising test of the categorical imperative is judged to be formal and empty, in line with Hegel's influential critique of Kant. The articles by Cristina Lafont and Jonas

7 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 90; for further references to "self-instrumentalisation", cf. 66-72 and "objectivating attitudes", 97.

Jakobsen represent the first, those by Maeve Cooke and Adrian Atanasescu the second approach with which I will begin.

Maeve Cooke's interest in how the ethical takes shape in social institutions below the level of the state opens up an important discussion, including her distinction between an authoritarian and a non- authoritarian culture of the institution in which interpretations of what unites the members are open to question. An account of associations of voluntary belonging is necessary to overcome a simple polarity between individual and state — which Habermas's "communicatively socialised individuals" are not subject to but which is typical for liberal accounts that fail to appreciate the multiple agencies mediating concretely between these two.[8] Yet what Cooke finds missing is the provision also for "ethical validity claims": "postmetaphysical thinking abstains from offering substantive ethical orientation and guidance: it does not provide concrete direction with regard to questions of the good life. As Habermas writes, postmetaphysical philosophy gives up its 'enlightening role' with regard to life practices as a whole." What gets lost with this refusal is, on the one hand, the chance to debate conceptions of the good life: "Since contestation is likely to involve plural and possibly conflicting ethical ideas and values, the process of construction will be agonistic rather than harmonious. Nonetheless, the individuals engaged in contestation will consider themselves part of a common project of construction — as co-authors both of a common good that defines the (unstable) identity of the social institution in question and of their own ethically self-determining agency". On the other hand, beyond the divisions featuring in her perceptive account of the conflictual course of reinterpretations within traditions of the good and of faith, a new level is indicated, that of "disclosure": "the context-transcending power of ethical validity must be understood both as transcendent of human practices and as substantive rather than formal-procedural. Without such an idea of ethical validity, we could not make sense of its radically disclosive power to enlighten us." The "ethical validity" is thus located as originating from be-

8 One example would be Kant's idea of churches as an "ethical commonwealth" that encourages and gives space to individuals who are strengthened in their moral intention by the support of like-minded people. For the relevance of this point in assessing Kant's philosophy of religion, cf. Herta Nagl-Docekal, "Eine rettende Übersetzung? Jürgen Habermas interpretiert Kants Religionsphilosophie", in *Glauben und Wissen*: *Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Rudolf Langthaler and Herta Nagl-Docekal (Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), esp. 110-117.

yond humanity. From the standpoint of morality, the question can be asked whether this is heteronomous since the receptive capability, the imagination and the will of the listeners are not explained as presupposed for recognizing such disclosure as relevant for their lives.

Jonas Jakobsen argues for the semantic resources of religions to be brought in beyond the "institutional threshold", thus abandoning the requirement of the neutrality of the state. The aim is greater inclusivity, yet also the "generality" of reason is catered for by asking positions to be justifiable. At the same time the right of free speech is the reason why also "controversial" views are invited. Thus, the attempt is to serve several distinct interests at the same time.

Would it be helpful to go back one level from the need to offer public justifications, respect for free speech and the personality of the legislators to the reason why all this is deemed necessary? The key point is not to instrumentalise another person for one's own ends, and to check through the test of universalisability that one is not making an exception for oneself at the cost of others. This is what reflection at the moral level is tasked to do. It asks the self in its unsubstitutability to measure its own action by this standard, and the limits it imposes, for example, on free speech not to become hate speech. While public representatives are allowed to also mention their personal motivations, these cannot replace reasoned argument which each person, be their worldview religious or secular, is capable of on the basis of their endowment with a sense of moral obligation. For statements arising from their "authenticity", there is no need to translate or to be "validated" in the sense of requiring justification.[9] The reason for the state to be neutral with regard to worldviews is exactly the equal respect for each citizen deriving from their human dignity. In a culture of expressivism, it seems to be a curtailment of personality rights to insist on parliament as the institutional set-

9 Cf. Saskia Wendel, "Religiös motiviert — autonom legitimiert — politisch engagiert", in *Religion — Öffentlichkeit — Moderne*: *Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. Judith Könemann and Saskia Wendel (Transcript, 2016), 296-97. The key reason why exchange at the level of worldviews or of the "good" cannot replace the moral level is stated by Christoph Hübenthal, *Grundlegung der christlichen Sozialethik: Versuch eines freiheitsanalytisch-handlungsreflexiven Ansatzes* (Aschendorff, 2006), 368, where he points out that the "good" (and one can add the "authentic") is only a formal category, which in actual cases might consist of antidemocratic, racist or otherwise non-egalitarian positions. The only way to counter such content is through argumentation at the moral level, while worldviews just remain alternative options led by a different concrete filling of the idea of the "good".

ting where policy proposals are scrutinised and justified by reasons that have undergone the test of universalisation, linked with analysing the evidence for the domains in question. But if morality is a human capacity, it is questionable not to take seriously everyone's equally original ability to examine their judgements and actions on whether they are in the interests of all or just self-serving. This position is not only evident in the "discourse" requirement but also in Habermas's confidence that religions will be able to endorse from their own resources[10] the requirements he sums up as the standard reached by the stage of modernity: the division between political and religious governance, the recognition of the results of scientific debates, and the willingness to co-exist with other religions. It means acknowledging the insights from the theological effort spent by these traditions to show that religion does not spell theocracy, that faith and reason are distinct, but not opposites and that membership presupposes the freedom of an unconstrained response including the possibility to decide to leave.

II.3 Transcendence

It is an important qualifier for the notion of "transcendence" to assume that humans share a moral foundation. Also religious believers can draw on their moral capacity which they see as an endowment from the "transcendent" understood as distinct from humans. Several articles deal critically with two points of Habermas's position. Jakobsen and Viertbauer question the corner into which faith in a transcendent God is placed: as "opaque" and "infallible" over against a reason deemed self-critical and aware of its fallibility (a). Other authors like Cooke and Atanasescu insist on the decidedly "metaphysical", "erupting", or "disclosive" status of the transcendent (b). The question remains whether the reduction to an innerworldly transcendence of language is an adequate answer to the questions posed by religion (c).

a) Questioning the distinction of religion as "opaque" from the ethical

One of Jakobsen's reasons to call for allowing religious points to be made in parliament is the observation he shares with Craig Calhoun that non-religious views contain pre-reflective, not transparently presentable elements as well. Therefore, their principled distinction from ethical conceptions of the "good"

10 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 137-38.

as in the following quote is questionable: "Religiously rooted existential convictions (…) evade the kind of *unreserved* discursive examination to which other ethical orientations and worldviews, i.e. secular 'conceptions of the good' are exposed" since they rely on "the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revelatory truths".[11] This moves religions into a dangerous territory: they may lack an internal barrier other worldviews have, being bound to a unitary view of truth that cannot be completely exposed to a critique by reason.[12]

This portrayal leads into the debate on the alleged link between religious understandings of "truth", intolerance and violence and raises the question what exactly is the element that justifies locating them as the counterpart to reason, their joint origins with philosophical systems in the axial age nonewithstanding: is it the origin in "revelation", as distinct from human agency, or the process of deciding on the core truths of a religious tradition by establishing key statements as "dogmas", or is it the self-ascription of specific pronouncements of the leadership in one Christian church as "infallible"? Or is it their particularity as such that resists being converted into "generally accessible" reasons where conflicts can be resolved "at the cognitive level?[13] This would be true of all cultures as well and would require a more in depth examination of the relation between the universal and the particular. Also Viertbauer points out in his analysis of Kierkegaard's argumentations that the "fideist" understanding of the concept of God chosen by Habermas is not the only option.

b) Transcendence as radically "Other"

The second objection seeks to preserve the "otherness" of transcendence which for Cooke needs to be respected if "learning" from religions is not simply incorporating them into one's own secular framework. For believers and "metaphysical thinkers… context-transcending validity has its source external to human communicative practices". She invokes the founding generation of the Frankfurt School: "for Horkheimer and his Frankfurt School colleagues, critical social theory runs the risk of contributing to the reproduction of an enslaving and

11 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 129.

12 Jakobsen summarizes, with reference to Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008), that there "is always a risk that leaders and charismatic figures will exploit the strong potential for group-based solidarity in religious traditions for sectarian or even violent purposes".

13 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 135.

degrading social order, if it does not subscribe to a conception of reason, and concomitant idea of truth, that is radically 'other' to prevailing conceptions of human rationality". Due to its independent origin, transcendence can be "disclosive": Instead of limiting "truth's power to radically disrupt human thinking and behaviour", its appearance is valued as "enlightening, exposing the falsity of the ethical practices we engage in in our everyday lives, and of the commitments and convictions structuring and shaping them."

Beyond defending the use of the term "transcendence" in a religious, not an immanent sense, a specific theological position becomes visible here: it is characteristic of dialectical theology to abandon the connection of faith to the general consciousness of truth that Patristic theologians, Thomas Aquinas and Schleiermacher engaged with in their eras; they insisted that there can be no truth without the conditions for understanding it. From this line of the Christian theological tradition, the question is whether the return to such a "radically other" concept of revelation is justified. Since the major objections from theologians who deal with Habermas's work do not come from this perspective, it is worth pointing out that generations of moral, systematic and practical theologians have worked to overcome the extrinsecism of a concept of "God's Word" or of revelation that fails to spell out the human capacity to be addressed by God. The term for this, as emphasized by Hille Haker, is "*Ansprechbarkeit*" which includes an anthropological reflection on why God's message can be understood and why it is relevant for human life. It matters also in the internal process of interpretation within a religious community where the dividing lines are drawn, since a decidedly minimalist understanding of human capacities falls back on the concepts of the creator God and of salvation. The benchmark against which dogmatic statements ultimately have to be justified are the biblical sources they are striving to translate under new cultural conditions. Can mistrust in human freedom be squared with the original message, Jesus' call to *metanoia* towards the kingdom of God as the creator of all humans and of a world of abundant resources?

c) Facticity as not resolvable by human capacities

While the extrinsecism-critical tradition in theology shares Habermas's view that the source of moral obligation is autonomous freedom, it also insists with Kant that it matters for all human beings if there is a source of meaning beyond human efforts. It is instructive that Habermas ends his discussion of

Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* in a way similar to how he concluded his treatment of Kant: with a call for the joint effort to make communicative reason a reality.[14] The question remains whether it is possible to transfer the problem identified in Kierkegaard's analysis of freedom in its dual structure of infinity and finitude to human capacities: how can fellow-humans resolve the insight into the bottomless facticity of everyone's existence, that is, the lack of necessity that is the cause of the two types of despair? An "immanent transcendence" provided by the anonymous, yet in Habermas's view, "individuating" power of language does not solve this question.[15] One problem is that he breaks off the philosophical enquiry too early, demoting it to conflicts that are in principle negotiable; the other is his overhasty allocation of the Danish thinker's argumentation to the late medieval anxiety expressed by Luther of how to find a gracious God. Interpreting Kierkegaard's analysis of freedom in its dual constitution immediately under the label of "sin" overlooks what is really philosophically at stake, namely human contingency and finitude. At the conclusion of the same book, *The Future of Human Nature*, on the other hand, Habermas interprets the concept of God as creator, as distinct from the model of emanation, as a model of allowing the other, the human creature, her irrevocable freedom. This conclusion would connect with Kierkegaard's "grounding" oneself in the power who "posited" the creature; it is, however, only highlighted as the "leap" into faith which cannot be reconstructed rationally. The chance of pursuing his analytics of freedom into a resolution that anchors it in the creator God's granting of existence is not availed of, though it would have provided an example of a post-Kantian development in philosophy of religion in which the last step belongs to the

14 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 11: The "'right' ethical self-understanding… can only be won in a common endeavour." Jürgen Habermas, "Replik auf Einwände, Reaktion auf Anregungen", in *Glauben und Wissen*: *Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Rudolf Langthaler and Herta Nagl-Docekal (Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 376, reiterates his critique of Kant's concept of the "highest" good" and of the postulate of the existence of God following from the hope for meaning inherent in moral action.

15 Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992), 25, quoted in Viertbauer: "Prelinguistic subjectivity does not need to precede the relations-to-self that are posited through the structure of linguistic intersubjectivity and that intersect with the reciprocal relations of Ego, Alter, and Neuter because everything that earns the name of subjectivity, even if it is a being-familiar-with-oneself, no matter how preliminary, is indebted to the unrelentingly individuating force possessed by the linguistic medium of formative processes — which do not let up as long as communicative action is engaged in at all."

will but the prior steps are lucid and not opaque. It is possible for human freedom to remain at the ethical stage without losing her authenticity; the religious stage remains a choice one can forego.

II.4 The contingent origins of European thinking in the encounter of monotheism and philosophy

A final indication of enquiries to be pursued further between ethics, political theory, philosophy of religion and theology is how European self-understandings were forged through the mutual determination of philosophical, biblical and theological thinking about the cosmos and the self, God and inner freedom, prayer and work, history and evil, science and politics. Part of this history are the theologians mentioned before who worked to recover a nuanced understanding of human freedom and agency after the Augustinian overemphasis on divine grace. Already Gregory of Nyssa had developed a theological anthropology of freedom that included a theory of language, against the Gnostic contempt for human embodiment. Aquinas highlighted the legislating power of human reason as part of the "nature" that is "presupposed" by grace, while still needing to be "perfected" by it. Following Thomas's corrections of Augustine's anthropology and eschatology, it was Duns Scotus who reconceived the doctrine of God, Christology and theological anthropology in terms of freedom when the high medieval synthesis was breaking up in the era of Nominalism. As many of the authors of this volume agree, religion has to be distinguished from authoritarianism. One task for enquiry would be to examine whether it is correct to assume the following correspondences, and to provide counter-models: The more extrinsic the Word of God, revelation or redemption are conceived, the more powerful does the understanding of church and its means of grace become. The less human conscience and agency are respected, the more objectivist are the categories of ethics; and the less trust is bestowed on the human capacity to connect to others through a social bond, the more coercive will political governance be imagined. It is worth continuing the history of encounter of ethical monotheism and philosophy through joint efforts to provide alternative visions of humanity to the comprehensive doctrines of scientism and naturalism: a species that remains imperfect and thus continues to pose the task of mobilising the human capabilities of good will and hope in ultimate meaning, rather than an understanding of world, self and others in terms of control and domination.

Jürgen Habermas is to be thanked for a still continuing work that treats such questions in their depth and in all their interdisciplinary connections.

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