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DISCUSSION&REPLIES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

GUEST EDITORIAL

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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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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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TRANSCENDENCE IN POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING: HABERMAS'S GOD

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Abstract. Habermas emphasizes the importance for critical thinking of ideas of truth and moral validity that are at once context-transcending and immanent to human practices. In a recent review, Peter Dews queries his distinction between metaphysically construed transcendence and transcendence from within, asking provocatively in what sense Habermas does not believe in God. I answer that his conception of "God" is resolutely postmetaphysical, a God that is constructed by way of human linguistic practices. I then give three reasons for why it should not be embraced by contemporary critical social theory. First, in the domain of practical reason, this conception of transcendence excludes by fiat any "Other" to communicative reason, blocking possibilities for mutual learning. Second, due to the same exclusion, it risks reproducing an undesirable social order. Third, it is inadequate for the purposes of a critical theory of social institutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his review of *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, a recently translated collection of essays by Jürgen Habermas, Peter Dews divides Habermas's *oeuvre* into three phases distinguished by level of confidence in the scope and power of communicative rationality.[1] In Dews' account, the third phase starts at the end of the 1980s with *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, the volume to which the book is a sequel.[2] It is marked by Habermas's new willingness to concede that the vision of communicative rationality driving his critical theory may

1 Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll* (Polity Press, 2017). Peter Dews, "Review of: Jürgen Habermas, Postmetaphysical Thinking II", last modified November 10, 2017, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/postmetaphysical-thinking-ii/.

2 Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (MIT Press, 1992).

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lack motivating power. He seems prepared to accept that a critical philosophy needs to provide motivating insights into the core of human existence, and the human impulse to transcend the given, and to question whether his vision of communicative rationality can provide such motivation. In the initial stages of the third phase, Habermas merely hints that this may be a deficiency of his postmetaphysical approach.

> Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses.[3]

A similar note of caution is evident in a discussion he conducts with philosophers of religion and theologians around the same time, when he observes that the process of critical appropriation of the essential contents of the major religious traditions is still in train and that its results are hard to foresee.[4]

Nonetheless, his evident awareness of a potential problem helps to explain his later sustained engagement with the relationship between postmetaphysical thinking and religion. In his subsequent writings on religion, politics and philosophy, Habermas describes religion as a reservoir of motivating insights from which postmetaphysical thinking can fruitfully learn.[5] He calls for a secular mentality that is not secularist, by which he means a mentality that is open to learning from religions, and highlights the importance of translating religious insights into a secular language that would make them accessible to everyone, irrespective of religious belief or lack of it. At the same time, he continues to emphasize the importance for critical thinking of ideas of truth and moral validity that are at once context-transcending and "innerworldly". He attributes to these ideas a transcending power extending beyond all existing human contexts that can be made sense of only within human practices: it is a transcendent power immanent to the human world. This is his thesis of immanent transcendence, which he also refers to as "innerworldly transcendence" or "transcendence from within".[6] As Dews puts

3 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 51.

4 Jürgen Habermas, *Texte und Kontexte* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 141.

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

6 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project", in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*: *Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio

it, Habermas's concept of context-transcending validity "does not rely on a divine transcendence which erupts *into* the here and now".[7] However, Dews concludes his review of *Postmetaphysical Thinking II* by querying Habermas's distinction between metaphysically construed transcendence and transcendence from within. He invites us to consider whether this is, as he puts it, "not a distinction without a difference".[8] I read Dews as asking whether there is any significant difference between Habermas's conception of validity as context-transcending and the conceptions of God as context-transcending that are held by many religious believers. Dews writes: "After all, regardless of the direction we portray the transcending movement as taking, it cannot occur at all without a division — and a gap — between our finite, mortal world and a 'beyond' of some kind". His final, provocative sentence is: "we may well begin to wonder in what sense he [Habermas] does *not* believe in God".[9]

For the purposes of the present argument, I accept Dews' invitation to think of Habermas's commitment to the idea of context-transcending validity as a form of belief in God.[10] My answer to his question is: The distinction *does* make a difference. I argue that in the domain of practical reason there are differences between Habermas's postmetaphysical "transcendence from within" and metaphysical "transcendence from beyond" that impact significantly on the enterprise of critical social theorizing. I contend, furthermore, that Habermas's postmetaphysical "God" is not one to which critical social theorists should commit themselves.

I give three reasons for this contention. First, Habermas's particular version of context-transcending validity curtails the process of socio-cultural learning between postmetaphysical thinkers and religious believers that Habermas now regards as part of the "unfinished project of modernity". Second, it lacks the radically disclosive quality that some early Frankfurt School critical theorists considered an essential ingredient of truth. Third, it leads

Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (MIT Press, 1996), 5,17; Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification* (MIT Press, 2003), 10–11; Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 82.

7 Dews, "Review of: Jürgen Habermas, Postmetaphysical Thinking II".

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 I leave aside the important question of whether Habermas's commitment to communicative rationality, which is based on an empirically supported "rational reconstruction" of idealizing suppositions built into everyday linguistic practices, is analogous to religious *faith*.

Habermas to take an agnostic position with regard to the validity of claims regarding the good life for humans (ethical claims in his terminology), with unwelcome consequences for critique of institutionalized authority — religious authority as well as political and other forms.

Before elaborating on these three troubling consequences of Habermas's postmetaphysical approach to context-transcending validity, it will be helpful to clarify what Habermas means by "metaphysics".

Metaphysics for Habermas "is the enterprise of framing a comprehensive view of the world and the place of human beings within it, in which cognitive, normative and evaluative perspectives are fused."[11] By contrast, postmetaphysical thinking insists on a separation between these three perspectives. In the 1980s, around the time of publication of the *Theory of Communicative Action*,[12] Habermas formulated the separation of perspectives as one between three categorially distinct spheres of validity, each with its own logic of justification: the sphere of science, the sphere of law and morality and the sphere of ethical and aesthetic evaluation. What counts as justification in the sphere of science is a matter for scientists and involves an appeal to truth, construed as universal in scope. What counts as justification in the sphere of law and morality is a matter for legal and moral theorists and involves an appeal to moral-practical rightness, construed as both universal in scope and entailing a principle of universalizability. What counts as justification in the sphere of ethics is determined by the norms relating to the good life operative within a particular form of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). What counts as justification in the sphere of aesthetics is determined by expert cultures of art critics in particular cultural contexts. In each case, there is a corresponding mode of argumentation. Habermas's discourse theory of truth and moral-practical rightness, first sketched in the 1970s, is a theory of the logic of argumentative justification in the first two spheres.[13]

In this initial version, Habermas reserved the term "discourse" for forms of argumentation that satisfy certain demanding conditions. In discourses, participants necessarily suppose the approximate satisfaction of idealizing conditions relating to access, conduct and the validity-orientation of argumentation: they necessarily suppose, for example, that no relevant voice may

11 Dews, "Review of: Jürgen Habermas, Postmetaphysical Thinking II".

12 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Beacon Press, 1984 & 1987).

13 Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien", in *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion*: *Walter Schulz zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Fahrenbach (1973).

be excluded, that every participant must have equal opportunity to speak and that all participants are concerned with the common search for the single right answer. The conditions are idealizing in the sense that they project an ideal that can, at best, be met only approximately in actual practices of communication. Only discourses concerned with questions of truth (theoretical discourses) and those concerned with moral validity (moral-practical discourses) were considered discourses in the strict sense. Other argumentative forms were characterized as "critique".[14]

In developing his discourse theory Habermas's initial focus was moral validity in a narrow sense.[15] This became known as "discourse ethics".[16] Despite its misleading name, discourse ethics rests on a categorial distinction between moral validity claims and ethical claims. Habermas aligns himself with Kant's attempt to answer the question of what it means to act rightly in a moral sense, while insisting on significant differences between their two approaches.[17] First, discourse ethics is dialogical: norms are valid if they could be vindicated by an agreement reached among participants in real argumentations (guided by idealizing suppositions); by contrast Kant assumes that individuals can test the validity of their maxims of action "monologically", in isolation from others. Second, it is a de-transcendentalized version of Kantian ethics. To begin with, it de-transcendentalizes reason. It gives up Kant's dichotomy between an intelligible realm comprising duty and free will and a phenomenal realm comprising inclination, subjective motives and political and social institutions. By contrast, discourse ethics posits a relation of productive tension between the intelligible and the phenomenal — between immanence and transcendence. In addition, its *method* is de-transcendentalized. It replaces Kant's transcendental deduction of the moral principle with a formal-pragmatic argument based on the rational reconstruction of necessary presuppositions of argumentation in general.

Notwithstanding these significant differences, Habermas follows Kant in limiting morality to the class of universally justifiable normative judgments, leaving aside matters of "the good life". Thus, he demarcates ethics, which

14 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1984, 42.

15 Maeve Cooke, "Discourse Ethics", in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, ed. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer and Axel Honneth (Routledge, 2019).

16 Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (MIT Press, 1990).

17 Ibid., 203–4.

deals with questions of the good life for humans, from moral theory, which offers an account of the validity of universal norms and principles.[18] Some critics of discourse ethics in its initial formulations expressed concern that it leaves aside many kinds of questions that are morally relevant; furthermore, that it is insensitive to particular needs, aspirations and life-experiences. They pointed out that ethical questions are often experienced as more pressing and more difficult than questions of moral justification in the narrow sense and are at least equally in need of argumentative probing.

His subsequent expansion of the category of discourse helped him to respond to this objection. The expanded discourse theory included ethical discourses, concerned with questions of the good life, and pragmatic discourses, concerned with prudential questions of how to act in specific contexts.[19] Later, it included legal-political discourses, in which ethical, moral and pragmatic questions are interconnected, and discourses of application, which seek to determine how abstract moral principles and norms should be applied in particular cases.[20]

In the expanded version, ethical validity claims, too, may be the subject of argumentative thematization in discourses. Furthermore, Habermas acknowledges that ethical questions, like moral questions, carry a sense of obligation and may have a context-transcending reference point.[21] As examples of ethical claims, we could think of claims to the validity of certain fasting prescriptions, or to the validity of particular rules for slaughtering animals, as are common in certain cultures. For Habermas, ethical discourses do not rest on the idealizing supposition that a rational consensus as to the single right answer is achievable. On a pluralist understanding of ideas of the good life, which for Habermas is an integral part of the modern world-view, there is no single right answer to ethical questions; hence, no universal consensus is discursively achievable, even under optimized justificatory conditions. Thus, Habermas's original distinction between "discourse" and "critique", and accompanying distinction between morality and ethics, persists within the expanded category of discourses. On one side, now, there are discourses con-

18 Ibid., 196–97.

19 Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (MIT Press, 1993), 1–18.

20 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT Press, 1996).

21 Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 5.

cerned to thematize pragmatic, ethical or legal-political matters, or to apply laws, ordinances and policies appropriately through reference to context-specific norms. On the other side, there are discourses concerned to justify the truth of propositions, and of de-contextualized moral norms or principles, through reference to an idea of universally binding validity.

The separation of human thinking and action into three distinct spheres of validity, which Habermas likewise considers an integral part of the project of modernity, corresponds to a rejection of the pre-modern, substantive conception of reason. Habermas contrasts substantive rationality, which he associates with religious and metaphysical world views, with the formal understanding of reason that he attributes to Kant and which he sees as gaining traction from Kant onwards.[22] When conceived along Kantian lines, reason, at least in the domain of law and morality, is conceived not in terms of its material content but as a framework of formative principles; the focus is on procedure, the conduct of action in line with principles of reason, rather than on what reason concretely tells us to do. Consequently, in embracing a formal-procedural rather than substantive conception of rationality, 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.[23]

Habermas rejects metaphysical thinking, not just because it offers a comprehensive view of the world and the place of humans within it, thereby affirming an anachronistic conception of substantive reason; he also rejects it because comprehensive views are underpinned by projections of a transcendent power that is "other" to human reason. In the domain of practical reason, postmetaphysical thinking, at least "for the time being", rejects any notion of validity that has a source beyond the human world of linguistic communication. Note this stronger version of this is Habermas's thesis of immanent transcendence. Distancing himself from the idea of an "Other" to reason, he advocates a deflationary interpretation of the "unconditioned" or "absolute", according to which the transcending power of reason has its origins within

22 Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 3–4.

23 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 14–15. Maeve Cooke, "The Limits of Learning: Habermas's Social Theory and Religion", *European Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2016).

the forms of communication through which human beings reach an understanding with one another. He writes:

> The linguistic turn permits a deflationary interpretation of the "wholly Other": […] In the forms of communication through which we reach an understanding with one another about something in the world and about ourselves, we encounter a transcending power.[24]

This is the linchpin of his theory of communicative action and the account of rationality corresponding to it. The theory aims to show that a potential for freedom, which is construed in terms of human practices of communication, can be extracted from analysis of everyday language use. In its simplest terms, communicative action is a form of human linguistic interaction that involves raising and responding to validity claims with the aim of reaching mutual understanding.[25] Corresponding to the three spheres of validity that constitute rationality in modernity, validity claims may be raised in the sphere of objective knowledge (truth claims), in the sphere of law and morality (moral-practical claims) and in the sphere of evaluative expressions, beliefs and judgments.

Communicative action establishes a relationship between speaker and hearer that is based on a number of normative expectations and obligations. Speakers take on an obligation to support their claims with reasons, if challenged, and hearers take on a similar obligation to provide reasons for their "yes" or "no". Speakers and hearers seek mutual understanding, in the sense of agreement as to the validity of the claim in question. From this we can see that communicative action is a more or less rudimentary form of argumentation. Corresponding to this Habermas proposes communicative rationality as a conception of context-transcending reason based on the idealizing suppositions built into the very concept of argumentation — suppositions relating to access, to conduct and to the validity orientation of argumentation. Since communicative rationality is based on potentials built into human practices of argumentation, its context-transcending power can be experienced only within such practices and, in the case of moral-practical validity claims, has its source within them. This accounts for the *immanent* character of its transcendence. Its *transcending* power resides in the idealizing suppo-

24 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003), 10.

25 Maeve Cooke, *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (MIT Press, 1994).

sitions.[26] It derives in part from the suppositions relating to access to argumentation and to its conduct, and in part from the supposition, in the case of truth and moral validity, that participants seek to reach agreement on the universally binding character of the proposition, norm or principle under discussion. It should be noted that participants regard the sought-for agreement fallibilistically: they acknowledge that any agreement reached in actual human practices is always open to challenge, even when it is reached under seemingly optimal justificatory conditions.

According to Habermas, this "weak proceduralist understanding of the "Other" preserves the fallibilist as well as the anti-skeptical meaning of the 'unconditioned'".[27] We may ask, however, whether this is sufficient. In the following sections I focus on some unwelcome consequences.

II. POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING AND MUTUAL LEARNING

In this section I argue that Habermas's immanent-transcendent conception of moral validity impedes mutual learning between the postmetaphysically thinking sons and daughters of modernity and their metaphysically thinking siblings. Diverging somewhat from Habermas's use of the phrase,[28] by "sons and daughters of modernity" I mean those inhabitants of modernity who differentiate between the standards of validity operative in the domain of theoretical reason and those operative in the domain of practical reason (while allowing for their interpenetration), and who have, in addition, internalized modern normativity with regard to democratic values of liberty, equality and solidarity. For the purposes of the present discussion I follow Habermas in characterizing the postmetaphysically thinking inhabitants of modernity as religious unbelievers and their metaphysically thinking counterparts as religious believers. I acknowledge that this is contentious: not all modern religious believers are metaphysical thinkers in Habermas's sense and not all modern metaphysical thinkers are religious believers.

26 Cooke, *Language and Reason*, 147–66.

27 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 11.

28 This is a less demanding characterization of the normative horizon of modernity than Habermas offers. See my remarks above on the separation of value spheres and also the demands Habermas makes on modern religious believers in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion.*

The problem of mutual learning arises from Habermas's postmetaphysical approach to context-transcending validity. As mentioned, in the domain of practical reason postmetaphysical thinking supports a conception of context-transcending validity only in the case of moral norms and principles. This is because context-transcending validity is tied to the idea of a universal consensus regarding the universalizability of interests: it is tied to the idea that a norm to be valid, must be universalizable, acceptable to everyone, everywhere as being equally in everyone's interests. The postmetaphysical character of moral validity resides in the "innerworldly" constitution of its transcendent quality (as we have seen, it is innerworldly — immanent — because it has its source in human practices). More precisely, the immanent character of moral validity is due to its construction in idealized human practices of argumentation (in this sense it is a constructivist conception). Habermas *defines* moral validity as an agreement reached argumentatively in an idealized communicative situation. The validity of moral norms is not just *tested* in (an idealized) procedure of argumentation, it is *generated* within (an idealized) procedure of argumentation. It does not matter that such a situation is an idealization of actual human practices of argumentation. Indeed, Habermas emphasizes that the "ideal speech situation" is a "methodological fiction", not a condition that could ever actually be achieved.[29] What matters is that the very concept of moral validity is defined in terms of this idealizing projection. The "ideal speech situation" is a *conceptual* thought-experiment. For the purposes of conceptualizing moral validity, it calls on us to imagine a social condition in which disputing parties arrive at norms and principles that are morally valid in an unconditioned, universally binding sense.

In Habermas's original formulation of discourse theory in the 1970s, both the concepts of propositional truth and of moral validity were defined in terms of an (idealized) discursively reached agreement.[30] From the 1980s onwards, in response to critics, Habermas began to revise his theory of propositional truth. He gradually distanced himself from his previous definition of truth as the outcome of a discursive procedure, replacing it with an idea of truth as justification-transcendent, in the sense that it does not coincide even with the outcome of an idealized justificatory procedure: even in his conceptual thought experi-

29 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 322–23.
30 Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien".

ment, in which ideal justificatory conditions actually obtain, an argumentatively reached agreement merely *points towards* truth in an unconditioned, universally binding sense. Habermas writes that it *authorizes* truth. In short, in this new version, there is a gap in principle between truth and justification. Although they remain internally connected (justification under ideal conditions "authorizes" us to refer to something as true), the concept of truth transcends the concept of justification, no matter how idealized. For Habermas, moral validity lacks this justification-transcendent character.[31] An idealized discursively reached agreement does not merely authorize the rightness of moral norms and principles: it *warrants* their rightness. In Habermas's words: "[i]dealized warranted assertibility is what we *mean* by moral rightness…it exhausts the meaning of normative rightness itself".[32] In sum, by contrast with truth, which relates to an objective world deemed to have some essential independence of human practices of justification, the very domain of moral validity is humanly, indeed argumentatively, produced.[33]

Habermas remains adamant that moral validity claims are truth-analogous. They have a cognitively construed context-transcending power that derives from their connection with unconditioned, universal validity. In the domain of practical reason only *moral* norms and principles have a cognitive meaning in this strong sense. As discussed, Habermas adopts an agnostic position with regard to the question of the context-transcending power of ethical validity claims. Certainly, his discourse theory enables criticism of ethical discourses from the point of view of access and conduct. In other words, it enables criticism of ethical validity claims from the point of view of *the way in which* they are thematized, for example, criticism of the exclusion of relevant voices from discussion or of the suppression of some participants' voices. However, it has nothing to say about the validity of their *propositional content*s. The same holds for religious validity claims; in this case, however, by contrast with ethical validity claims, Habermas denies the possibility not only of discursive vindication but also of *thorough-going* discursive examination.[34]

31 Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 237–75.

32 Ibid., 258.

33 Ibid., 262.

34 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 129, for a critique see Maeve Cooke, "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy", in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Polity Press, 2013).

This has worrying implications for the ability of critical social theory to learn from beliefs, practices and traditions that are justified through appeal to ideas of the good for humans, the source of whose validity is deemed to have some essential independence of human communicative practices.

In Habermas's critical social theory, learning means socio-cultural learning and has a strong cognitive sense. It is a movement in the direction of truth or moral rightness. Moreover, learning means *mutual* learning. Participants in processes of socio-cultural learning engage with their interlocutors as partners in the search for the single right answer to questions in the domains of truth or moral validity. If we probe this conception of learning, we see that, qua mutual learning, it presupposes a shared understanding of the meaning of learning and, hence, a shared conception of truth or moral validity. If participants in argumentation have fundamentally different conceptions of context-transcending validity, and by extension learning, they will not be able to see the outcome of their deliberations as *mutual* learning; at best, they will be able to say that they have learnt something of value for themselves. Think of an exchange between you and me on the question of marriage irrespective of gender. Let's say, my view of moral validity is utilitarian (I might hold, for example, that a moral norm is valid only if it maximizes happiness). Yours is religious (you might hold, for example, that a moral norm is valid only if it is in line with current Roman Catholic teachings). In argumentative exchanges with each other, both of us might change our views with regard to marriage irrespective of gender and, indeed, on the validity of a certain understanding of utilitarianism or of Roman Catholic teaching; the substance of our new views might even converge — for example, we might end up agreeing that marriage irrespective of gender is morally acceptable. However, none of this is sufficient for the result to count as *mutual* learning in the strong cognitive sense in which Habermas understands it. In order for it to count as mutual learning in this strong cognitive sense, you and I, by way of our argumentative exchange, would also have to learn something with respect to the very c*oncept* of context-transcending validity. The same holds for argumentative exchanges between postmetaphysical thinkers who share Habermas's constructivist understanding of moral validity and metaphysical thinkers for whom context-transcending validity has its source external to human communicative practices. For the parties in the argumentative exchange to regard the outcome as *mutual* learning in Habermas's strong

cognitive sense, they would also have to engage with the arguments for his constructivist understanding vis-à-vis a metaphysical understanding, and hold that they had learnt something about the strengths and weaknesses of the respective arguments. In other words, in order for the participants in an argumentative exchange to conceive of the outcome as mutual learning in the strong cognitive sense in which Habermas understands learning, they must also seek a common understanding of what context-transcending validity means. But this implies a readiness on the part of postmetaphysical thinkers to learn from metaphysical thinkers, in this case, from metaphysically thinking religious believers, as regards the validity of postmetaphysical thinking (and vice-versa). Habermas's account of postmetaphysical thinking seems to rule this out *by fiat*. Learning from religion, as he understands it, is a matter of appropriating the propositional contents of religious teachings within a staunchly postmetaphysical framework. He speaks of "critical appropriation" of the contents of religious beliefs, practices and traditions, of a methodological atheism/ agnosticism with regard to the contents of religious traditions, and of "salvaging" these contents.[35]

Habermas characterizes learning from religion as a process in which the insights of particular religious traditions are translated into a secular vocabulary that would make them accessible to those with different religious beliefs as well as those with none. Put differently, he views the major world-religions as semantic reservoirs, which secular modern societies may draw on productively in order to enrich their moral vocabularies; however, the religious contents in question must first be translated into a secular language in order to make them accessible to all members of society, irrespective of religious belief. His concern is not just accessibility: the underlying point is that only secular translations of religious utterances are open to thorough-going discursive examination and vindication, since only secular translations have a relation to context-transcending validity in the postmetaphysical sense embraced by Habermas.[36] My claim, in sum, is that Habermas advocates learn-

35 Habermas, *Texte und Kontexte*, 163–139 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 14–15; Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 209–48, for a critique Maeve Cooke, "Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion: The Limitations of Habermas's Postmetaphysical Proposal", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60, no. 1–3 (2007).
36 Cooke, "Violating Neutrality?", Cooke, "The Limits of Learning: Habermas's Social Theory and Religion".

ing from religion, but what he has in mind is a circumscribed form of learning that does not extend to the constructivist conception of moral validity affirmed by his postmetaphysical project.

Habermas is committed to the view that only a constructivist understanding of moral normativity is appropriate for the sons and daughters of modernity. As he puts it on occasion, modernity must generate its own normativity.[37] If it does not, it will undo the historical learning process set in train within modernity, which has enabled the rational contestation of established authorities and led to a widespread commitment to universalist values of inclusion and equality. But the view that modernity must generate its own normativity *imposes* a certain view of normativity on its inhabitants. It leaves no space for reflective examination and discussion of the question of whether the source of normativity is human or non-human. I see this as a dogmatic closing of the horizons of modernity, out of tune with Habermas's insistence that modernity is an unfinished project. Indeed, Habermas's objections to the Hegelian philosophy of history suggest that he sees the project of modernity as not just unfinished but as *unfinishable* project. One of his objections is that Hegelian philosophy of history injects into its reading of history precisely the normativity it seeks to extract from historical processes.[38] I read him as objecting not only to the circularity of justification; I take him also to object to how this precludes theoretical re-interpretations of the posited telos of history. Specifically, it precludes theoretical re-interpretation of Hegel's understanding of the meaning of genuine human freedom, since the truth of the idea of freedom is determined by Hegel's theory prior to all human action in the world. But, absent the guarantees provided by Hegelian philosophy of history, we cannot assume that the theory's interpretation of its basic normative concept is the right one, or even that the theory is right to be guided by any version of this concept. It may turn out, for example, that the theory's interpretation of its basic normative concept, or the very concept itself, serve to maintain and reproduce a kind of social order that is undesirable in light of new ecological visions of how humans should live in relation to themselves and other organisms. By contrast, when the project of modernity is thought of as unfinishable, the meaning and value of freedom and, more generally, the

37 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 7.
38 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 2.

specific contents of what constitutes social learning, must remain a perpetually open question for critical social theory. This would mean that the project of modernity itself is permanently open to re-imagination and re-articulation — allowing even for the possibility that modernity is inherently hostile to the development of genuine human freedom or that human freedom is not the goal for which we should be striving. The same holds for postmetaphysical thinking, which Habermas sees as indispensable for the project of modernity. If critical social theory is to keep open the horizons of modernity, taking seriously the view that modernity is an unfinishable project, it must be open to the possibility of learning about the limitations of postmetaphysical thinking in general and of a constructivist understanding of moral validity in particular. With regard to the latter, postmetaphysical thinking must be ready to learn from its religious (and non-religious) interlocutors whose conceptions of context-transcending validity attribute to it a moment of radical otherness to the ideas of rationality and truth inscribed within any human practices.

III. POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING AND TRUTH

A second, related, problem with Habermas's postmetaphysical conception of transcendence is that it limits truth's power to radically disrupt human thinking and behaviour. For the early Frankfurt School critical theorists, commitment to the radically disruptive power of truth marked a crucial distinction between critical theory and pragmatist social philosophy. Acknowledging that both critical theorists and pragmatist social philosophers like Dewey are committed to the endeavour to realize better forms of human life, Horkheimer sees the pragmatists as insufficiently attentive to the ways in which the rationality prevailing within the established social order not alone is hostile to human freedom and happiness but prevents its inhabitants both from seeing this and from imagining what a better form of life would be.[39] In other words, for Horkheimer and his Frankfurt School colleagues, critical social theory runs the risk of contributing to the reproduction of an enslaving and 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 and the practices in which they are in-

39 Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (Continuum, 1972), 3.

scribed. In this respect Horkheimer underscores the importance of a "dangerous, explosive" conception of truth.[40] We could say: Horkheimer calls for a context-transcending conception of reason that is *radically disclosive* — one that not only transcends the values appealed to in human practices, but has, in addition, the power to open our eyes to ideas of the good life that are decisively different to those currently available.[41] Furthermore, such disclosure is 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. Radical disclosure implies an idea of truth or reason that is not purely formal: if denied all content, it would be unable to impact forcefully on us, compelling us to see the falsity of existing practices and forms of life and enabling us to envision different, better ones. While Habermas holds that the transcending power of universal validity claims is a "critical thorn" that sticks in the flesh of social reality,[42] his discourse theory of practical validity lacks a radically disclosive moment. As discussed, his theory does not say anything about the power of ethical or religious validity claims and its account of the power of moral validity claims construes it purely formally and procedurally as (idealized) discursively achieved universalizability.

Interestingly, in a much earlier article Dews suggests a criticism of Habermas's thinking along these lines.[43] Drawing on the writings of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Dews hints at certain difficulties with Habermas's particular paradigm of intersubjectivity. He applauds Lacan's alternative intersubjective paradigm for its conception of truth as a power that "transcends the conceptual grasp of finite human subjects", a power that, in consequence, is not theoretically retrievable.[44] While both Habermas and Lacan conceive of truth in context-transcending, universalist terms, Habermas makes truth the product of communicative reason, at least in the moral-practical domain.

40 Max Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth", in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Eike Gebhardt and Andrew Arato (Urizen Books, 1978), 425.

41 Maeve Cooke, "Contingency and Objectivity in Critical Social Theory: Horkheimer and Habermas", in *Facts and Values*: *The Ethics and Metaethics of Normativity*, ed. Giancarlo Marchetti and Sarin Marchetti (Routledge, 2016).

42 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 322.

43 Peter Dews, "The Paradigm Shift in Communication and the Question of Subjectivity: Reflections on Habermas, Lacan and Mead", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 49, no. 194 (4) (1995).

44 Dews, "The Paradigm Shift in Communication and the Question of Subjectivity", 490.

By contrast, truth for Lacan has a moment of radical otherness that enables it to present itself to us as a problem.[45] We could say: for Habermas truth (in the domain of practical reason) is the outcome of a problem-solving discursive procedure; by contrast, truth for Lacan is *itself a problem*. This gives it an "imperious" quality.[46] Lacan writes: "One is never happy making way for a new truth, for it always means making our way into it. It demands that we put ourselves out"[47]. Indeed, for Lacan, the claim of truth is so strong that it can engrave itself in our bodies in the form of symptom.[48] The "God" that Dews now finds implicit in Habermas's thinking makes no such claims on us. This postmetaphysical "God" lacks the radically irruptive quality that truth has for Lacan and, apparently, for Horkheimer. Is Horkheimer right to hold that critical social theory needs such a radically disclosive conception of truth if it is to avoid perpetuating social conditions that are hostile to human freedom and happiness? Our discussion in Section I provides grounds for thinking that he is; moreover, for why Habermas should acknowledge this. Appealing to Habermas's view of modernity as an unfinishable project, I suggested that critical social theories should acknowledge the importance of permanent re-imagination and re-articulation of their basic normative concepts and show willingness to abandon them if they do not contribute towards achieving better forms of human life. Such re-imagination and re-articulation raises two interrelated questions. The first is a question of motivation: What impels those guided by the theory to re-imagine and re-articulate its basic concepts? The second is a question of justification: What allows them to think that their re-imaginings and re-articulations are more conducive to better forms of human life than the conceptions they have superseded? Without an idea of truth as having a content that impacts forcefully on us, making us see the falsity of existing practices and forms of life and helping us to envision alternative, better ones, it would be hard even to begin to answer either question.

45 Ibid., 499.

46 Ibid.

47 Lacan, quoted in Dews, "The Paradigm Shift in Communication and the Question of Subjectivity", 499.

48 Dews, "The Paradigm Shift in Communication and the Question of Subjectivity", 499.

IV. POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING AND INSTITUTIONALIZED AUTHORITY

A third reason for querying Habermas's postmetaphysical conception of context-transcending validity arises from its abstinence with regard to the question of the power of ethical validity claims. As we saw in Section I, Habermas maintains that his constructivist approach is appropriate only in the case of highly abstract moral norms, adopting a position of abstinence with respect to the validity of ethical ideas and values. This abstinence has unwelcome implications for critical theorizing about social institutions in general, and religious institutions as a subset of these, providing a further reason to reject Habermas's "God" — his particular version of immanent transcendence in the moral-practical domain. For, as I now argue, a critical theory of institutionalized authority requires a substantive, context-transcending idea of ethical validity in order to distinguish between authoritarian modes of institutionalized authority and modes that are authoritative but non-authoritarian.

In my account, authority is an *ethically inflected* power. Authority has the power to structure and shape ethical identities: to form humans as concrete beings, in relation to more or less explicit ideas of the good, through ethical prescriptions and recommendations in specific contexts of judgment, decision and action.

Authority is distinct from dominating power. One important difference is authority's connection with obligation. The power of authority depends on a sense of obligation on the part of those over whom it is exerted; importantly, it is obligation in the form of *self*-obligation. Thus, authority, unlike domination, has a moment of freedom built into it. Acceptance of authority is always in some sense freely granted: at a minimum, there is voluntary recognition and affirmation of the *bearer* of authority.[49]

49 The question of the moment of freedom involved in acceptance of authority is complicated. In Hobbes' Leviathan, for example, humans in the state of nature contract freely to constitute a sovereign power with absolute authority, driven by their interest in the ethical values it fosters (above all, security and commodious living); whether or not they subsequently agree with the content of specific prescriptions is not relevant from the point of view of freedom (with some exceptions, when it is a matter of life or death). For Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, by contrast, humans do not only contract freely to constitute a sovereign power, their subsequent freedom depends on their agreement with the ethical content of the laws to which they are subject (though they may have to be shown that they should agree).

Despite the conceptual connection between authority and freedom, the exercise of authority may undermine freedom, which I conceive of as a form of ethically self-determining agency.[50] By "ethically self-determining agency" I mean roughly: agency concerned to work out for itself, in interaction with others, what it means to lead a good life, in ways that are not determined by irrational compulsion or by caprice or random choice and decision-making. I characterize "ethical authoritarianism" as a perverted exercise of authority based on a claim to privileged insight into what is good in an ethical sense for those over whom it is exerted. For example, the educational system institutionalized in a particular social order may incorporate liberal-capitalist ideals of successful identity-development, shaping the identities of students according to values such as the competitive acquisition of material goods. If it, and its officers (school principals, teachers, administrators, etc.), impose these ethical values on students, preventing them from questioning their validity, it is ethically authoritarian in my terminology. Or again, religious institutions may incorporate ideas and values in relation to heterosexuality that impede the efforts of some of their members (broadly understood) to work out for themselves what constitutes a good life. If these institutions and their officers (religious leaders, teachers, administrators, etc.) block thematization and critique of their institutionalized ideas and values, they are ethically authoritarian. In both cases, at issue is not the particular ethical prescriptions issued by the institutions in question, but the institutions' (implicit or explicit) claim that their authority is unquestionable by those over whom it is exerted. I argue, however, that ethical normativity can (and should) be authoritative without being authoritarian. Moreover, since critical social theories are concerned to identify the pernicious effects of social institutions and, by extension, the features of good social institutions, they must be able to make this distinction.[51]

I understand social institutions as supra-individual entities that primarily serve the semantic function of shaping and stabilizing social meanings.[52] Examples include families, religious bodies, parliaments, Churches, trade unions,

50 Maeve Cooke, "A Pluralist Model of Democracy", in *What is Pluralism? The Question of Pluralism in Politics*, ed. V. Kaul and I. Salvatore (Routledge, 2019).

51 Cf. Rahel Jaeggi, "Was ist eine (gute) Institution?", in *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik*, ed. Rainer Forst et al. (Suhrkamp, 2009).

52 Cf. Luc Boltanski, *On Critique* (Polity Press, 2011).

the World Bank and sports clubs.[53] My general claim is that social institutions incorporate ethical values, which are expressed more or less explicitly in the various prescriptions, recommendations and other norms of thought and behaviour issuing from their operations.[54] The authoritativeness of social institutions consists in the reasoned acceptance by those subject to them of these ethically inflected norms. By contrast with authoritarian authority, which undermines ethically self-determining agency, authoritative authority contributes to the formation of such agency; it does so by providing ethical orientation in concrete situations that the subjects in question accept or challenge on the basis of rational reflection. In the case of social institutions, its ethical power is manifested in laws, ordinances, rules, policies, prescriptions, recommendations, doctrines and other norms, though it is often tacit rather than explicitly articulated.

Prescriptions and recommendations are authoritative but non-authoritarian when they are affirmed on the basis of rational reflection by particular human subjects in particular life-situations as important aids to orientation in their endeavours to live an ethically good life, and as powerful motivations to live such a life. The ultimate source of their authoritativeness is not a particular institution or its officers, but the truth of the ethical ideas and values to which the institution and its officers more or less tacitly appeal. This presupposes an idea of ethical validity (ethical truth) that transcends the values incorporated in any particular institution. Authority becomes authoritarian when institutions or their officers present themselves as the unquestionable source of ethical validity, or as unquestionable authorities for transmitting particular interpretations of it, permitting no contestation of the ethical ideas and values manifested in the norms they prescribe or recommend. By preventing contestation, they impact negatively on the freedom — the ethically self-determining agency — of the individuals subject to these norms: these are hindered in their efforts to work out for themselves, in interaction with others, what it means to lead a good life, in ways that are not determined by irrational compulsion or by caprice or random choice and decision-making.

If social institutions are to exercise power that is authoritative but non-authoritarian, they must be open to transformation in response to the ethi-

53 Cooke, "A Pluralist Model of Democracy".
54 Ibid.

cal challenges they encounter from those subject to their normativity. These challenges may be directed at various aspects of a particular institution's ethically inflected identity: at its operation, its organization and/or its incorporated ideas of the good life. This means, in turn, that social institutions must see themselves, and be seen by those subject to their normativity, as in a permanent process of construction through contestation: they must recognize the inherent instability of their institutional identities. They must acknowledge, furthermore, that the process of construction through contestation is ethically motivated; driven by a concern to shape the institution's identity through incorporation of particular ethical ideas and values. 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. In sum, for institutions to be non-authoritarian, yet authoritative, they and those subject to their normativity must engage in a perpetual process of mutual ethical identity-constitution, guided by an idea of ethical validity that transcends the particular ethical ideas and values incorporated in particular institutions. Furthermore, 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 in matters relating to the good life for humans and to point us in the direction of living such a life; consequently, no distinction between the authoritative and the authoritarian would be possible. Habermas's critical social theory's abstinence with regard to the question of the power of ethical validity claims means that it is unable to makes this distinction.

Habermas's discourse theory allows no distinction between authoritative and authoritarian ethical validity claims but it does allow for a form of authority that is non-authoritarian. In this theory, as we have seen, the authority of moral norms and principles resides in their universalizability, which is determined in argumentative processes by the human subjects concerned. Since those subject to the authority of moral norms are also their co-authors, moral authority is not authoritarian.

However, this non-authoritarian account of moral validity is of limited help in critically assessing the contents of claims to ethical validity that are tacitly or explicitly raised by, and within, social institutions. From the critical perspective of Habermas's discourse theory, ethical validity claims can be criticized in just two respects: i) irrespective of content, from the point of view of how they are thematized; ii) with regard to their content, if they infringe against moral norms in the narrow sense. However, his theory offers no possibility for assessing their *ethical quality*. But it is primarily ethical quality that is at stake when the authoritativeness of social institutions is challenged. In the case of social institutions, therefore, Habermas's critical social theory hands over the question of authority to anti-authority theorists on the one side, and authoritarian theorists on the other, leaving no room for a third position in which the exercise of authority is authoritative. In short, its ethical abstinence results in a critical perspective that impedes exploration of the features of the authoritative authority of social institutions, religious and otherwise.

V. CONCLUSION

We are now better placed to answer Peter Dews' question of the sense in which Habermas does *not* believe in God. The answer is: he does *not* believe in God in a metaphysical sense; he believes in a "God" that is constructed by way of human linguistic practices. Thus, even if we characterize his conception of moral validity as a conception of God, we must acknowledge it as a resolutely postmetaphysical conception.[55] In my discussion, I gave three reasons for why Habermas's "God" is not one that should be embraced by critical social theory. First, in the domain of practical reason, his postmetaphysical conception of context-transcending validity excludes by fiat any "Other" to communicative reason, thereby curtailing the possibility of mutual learning between the postmetaphysically thinking sons and daughters of modernity and their metaphysically thinking siblings. Second, by virtue of the same exclusion by fiat, it runs the risk of reproducing an undesirable social order. Third, it impedes development of an account of social institutions as the locus for the exercise of authoritative, but non-authoritarian authority.[56]

55 See note 10 above.

56 I thank the two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

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THE PRIORITY OF PUBLIC REASONS AND RELIGIOUS FORMS OF LIFE IN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACIES

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Abstract. In this essay I address the difficult question of how citizens with conflicting religious and secular views can fulfill the democratic obligation of justifying the imposition of coercive policies to others with reasons that they can also accept. After discussing the difficulties of proposals that either exclude religious beliefs from public deliberation or include them without any restrictions, I argue instead for a policy of mutual accountability that imposes the same deliberative rights and obligations on all democratic citizens. The main advantage of this proposal is that it recognizes the right of all democratic citizens to adopt their own cognitive stance (whether religious or secular) in political deliberation in the public sphere without giving up on the democratic obligation to provide reasons acceptable to everyone to justify coercive policies with which all citizens must comply.

I. INTRODUCTION

In debates about the proper place of religion in democratic societies a key issue is whether democracy and secularism are necessarily connected.[1] Fears of such a connection lead some critics of liberalism to the conclusion that liberal democratic institutions are ultimately incompatible with religious forms of life.[2] Needless to say, if there is no hope that secular and religious citizens

1 For an earlier version of this paper see Cristina Lafont, "Citizens in Robes: The Place of Religion in Constitutional Democracies", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 43, no. 4-5 (2017).

2 For one of the most influential examples of this line of argument see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1984); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1988); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1990). For an overview of current defenses of this line of argument among the so-called New Traditionalists see Christopher J. Eberle and Terence Cuneo, "Religion and Political Theory", https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/religion-politics/.

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can take ownership of and identify with these institutions in equal measure, then the future of democracy within pluralist societies is seriously threatened. These fears commonly arise in debates about the liberal criterion of democratic legitimacy, according to which citizens ought to justify the imposition of coercive policies on one another with reasons that everyone can reasonably accept.[3] Since religious reasons are not generally acceptable to secular citizens and citizens of different faiths as legitimate basis for coercion, endorsing this criterion entails the claim that, for the purposes of political justification, public reasons should take priority over religious considerations.[4] This view suggests that commitment to liberal democracy is most suitable for secular citizens and only suitable to religious citizens who are willing and able to leave their religious beliefs aside in forming their political convictions. In order to palliate the exclusionary effects of such requirement the secular state may need to find compensating accommodations for religious citizens whose idiosyncratic religious beliefs and practices cannot be easily aligned with, translated, or integrated into a secular outlook. Religious citizens may be tolerated, perhaps even accommodated, but not politically integrated as equals.

Understandably, critics of this view argue that singling out religion for exclusion from political justification is unfair to religious citizens and incompatible with the democratic ideal of treating all citizens as free and equal. In their opinion, giving equal consideration to everyone's views is the only way to grant equal treatment to all citizens. This, in turn, requires the inclusion of religious reasons on equal footing with public reasons in political deliberation. Therefore they question the claim that commitment to liberal democracy requires accepting the priority of public reasons. In their view, the priority of public reasons is an *optional* feature of a specific family of *conceptions* of constitutional democracies, those that fall under the heading of "deliberative democracy," but by no means a *necessary* element of the very *concept* of con-

3 Defenses of mutual justifiability as a criterion of democratic legitimacy come in different varieties. For some paradigmatic examples see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 217–20 (Hereafter PL); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT Press, 1996), 107–11; Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 133; Gerald Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1996) and Gerald Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

4 E.g. see Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000) (Hereafter RCSR).

stitutional democracy.[5] If this is the case, then citizens seriously committed to the legitimacy of constitutional democracy do not have to subscribe to the priority of public reasons.

In what follows I would like to question this claim. In my view, *the priority of public reasons* is a *necessary* component of any plausible account of the legitimacy of the institutions of constitutional democracy. Defenders of those institutions may disagree with specific interpretations of the priority of public reasons but, whichever version they favor, they cannot dispense with the priority. I will offer support for this claim in two steps. First, I critically analyze the main features of the alternative conception of constitutional democracy that liberal critics endorse. This analysis shows that, in the absence of some version of the priority of public reasons, these critics cannot give a plausible account of the legitimacy of some of the institutions that their own conception relies upon (1). In a second step, I then briefly sketch the contours of a conception of the priority of public reasons that, in my view, more accurately expresses what is at stake in the debate. By offering a more realistic and less restrictive interpretation of the priority of public reasons, I hope to show how religious and secular citizens can equally endorse the institutions of constitutional democracy (2).[6]

II. PLURALIST VS DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

The public reason conception of political justification is characterized by three distinctive claims that liberal critics reject, namely, that (1) there is a set of reasons that are generally *acceptable to all* democratic citizens, that (2) these reasons are *independent from* religious or otherwise comprehensive doctrines, and that (3) they ought to have *priority* in determining coercive policies.[7] As indicated above, critics question the first two claims on skepti-

5 For an argument along this lines see e.g. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 113.

6 In what follows I draw from some sections of Cristina Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere", in *The Oxford Handbook on Secularism*, ed. Phil Zuckerman and John Shook (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).

7 I omit the additional claim that (4) public reasons are sufficient to decide all or nearly all fundamental political questions, what Rawls calls the "completeness of public reason," because this claim is not endorsed by all advocates of the public reason conception of political justification. See note 17 below.

cal grounds and the third on normative grounds. In order to articulate an alternative view of political justification, they draw from pluralist models of democracy, which dispense with the assumption of shared public reasons characteristic of the model of deliberative democracy. Even defenders of aspirational models of political justification who endorse the regulative ideal of trying to offer reasons that other citizens may reasonably accept nonetheless contend that, since there is no guarantee that such efforts may succeed, the only alternative open to citizens in that situation is to vote on the basis of whatever considerations they think are right.[8] If giving priority to some type of substantive reasons over others in making political decisions cannot be justified in a way that all citizens can accept, then the only option left is to fall back on a purely procedural solution such as majority rule.[9]

Some critics also point out that the pluralist model of democracy is not only more attractive than the deliberative model, but that it also offers a more accurate account of the institutional features of extant constitutional democracies. Given that all existent democracies endorse secret ballots, the norms embodied in actual democratic practices suggest that nothing is wrong with letting citizens vote on the basis of whatever reasons they see fit. The fact that the deliberative conception seems unable to account for the legitimacy of this institutional feature of liberal democracies is an additional factor that counts against the plausibility of such conception.[10]

I totally agree with the institutional perspective that underlies this criticism. Framing the debate on the proper conception of political justification exclusively in terms of the ethics of democratic citizenship and the duty of civility can be misleading. It may suggest that the debate turns on whether or not citizens should follow some ideal moral norms and principles when

8 The aspirational model comes in different varieties. See e.g. Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 238 (2010); Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 10.

9 For defenses of this conclusion see e.g. Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community", 70; Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, 10; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues", in *Religion in the Public Square*, ed. Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 150; Paul J. Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 3.

10 For a detailed articulation of this line of criticism of the deliberative conception of democracy see, Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty* 143-176, esp. 145-147.

engaging in political activities, whereas in fact the fundamental question is whether or not citizens can, upon reflection, endorse the ideal norms and principles actually embodied in the democratic institutions and practices in which they participate.

However, precisely if one adopts an institutional perspective, the claim that the pluralist approach accurately reflects the existing institutions of constitutional democracy seems plainly false. As mentioned above, the pluralist approach reflects the fact that the secret ballot allows citizens to vote on the basis of whatever reasons they wish. However, this is not the whole story. What also needs to be accounted for is the significant fact that such decisions may be overruled if they are deemed to be unconstitutional. That is, defenders of the pluralist approach need to account for the fact that constitutional democracies impose a constraint upon how insensitive to reasons political decisions taken by secret ballot and majority rule can be. However, since this is a *substantive* constraint the resort to *procedural* fairness won't do. Whereas secret ballot and majority rule can meet the fairness criterion of giving equal treatment to everyone's views, constitutional review cannot even get off the ground on the basis of such a criterion. Given its aim, this process must identify and reject those views, whichever they are, that support policies in fact incompatible with the equal protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens. No matter what specific institutional form this review process might take in different democratic societies, it is of necessity a process sensitive to substantive considerations about appropriate standards, reasons, and arguments.

Now, since defenders of the pluralist approach endorse constitutional democracy, they are committed to the view that "the state is to protect a schedule of basic rights and liberties enjoyed by all its citizens." This indicates that their account of the proper behavior of citizens who engage in political advocacy and voting cannot be as unconstrained as advertised. As Wolterstorff points out, there is an important proviso: citizens should exercise their political voice on the basis of whatever reasons they wish, *provided their actions fall within the boundaries of the constitution*. However, once this crucial proviso is added, a tension between the key commitments of the pluralist conception surfaces: on the one hand, a commitment to the equal protection of the basic rights and freedoms of all citizens and, on the other, a commitment to the equal considerations of all points of view that grounds the rejection of the priority of public

reasons. It is hard to see how the first commitment could find institutional expression without any deviation from the second commitment. If legislation is subject to constitutionality constraints, if the latter can legitimately overrule the former, then it must be because the reasons that are geared to test whether a piece of legislation is compatible with the equal protection of all citizens' constitutional rights can overrule other types of reasons and considerations in support of the policy in question, be they religious or otherwise comprehensive. Thus, if institutionalizing constitutional review is feasible at all, if there is a way for this institution (e.g. judicial review) to do what it is set up to do, it must be because it is possible (1) to draw a distinction between the type of reasons and arguments that are relevant for reviewing the constitutionality of legislation, whatever those are, and the types of reasons and arguments that are relevant for justifying why some piece of legislation is good, beneficial, or whatever the case may be, and (2) to give some constraining priority to the former set of reasons and arguments over the latter. The very idea of constitutional review seems to rest on these two assumptions. If we adopt this institutional perspective, we can articulate an interpretation of the priority of public reasons and the duty of civility that reflects more accurately what is at stake behind the public reason conception of political justification.

III. THE PUBLIC REASONS CONCEPTION OF POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The public reason conception that I propose is based on a specific interpretation of the three claims mentioned above, namely, that (1) there is a set of reasons that are generally *acceptable to all* democratic citizens, that (2) these reasons are *independent from* religious or otherwise comprehensive doctrines, and that (3) they ought to have *priority* in determining coercive policies. A defense of the first claim requires identifying reasons and arguments of a certain kind that all democratic citizens, whether religious or secular, can reasonably accept ought to have priority for justifying coercive policies. However, I find the characterizations of public reasons in terms of special epistemic properties such as being "accessible", "shareable", "intelligible", etc., highly misleading. Instead, my proposal follows Rawls in identifying public reasons as "properly political" reasons. These are reasons based on those political values and ideals that are the very condition of possibility for a democracy: the

ideal of treating citizens as free and equal, and of society as a fair scheme of cooperation, which find expression in the constitutional principles to which citizens are bound in liberal democracies. These democratic values and principles embedded in the institutions of constitutional democracies provide a reservoir of generally acceptable reasons from which all citizens can draw to publically justify the coercive policies they endorse to their fellow citizens.[11]

An advantage of the political interpretation of the content of public reasons is that it does not face the kind of skeptical doubts that plague epistemic interpretations. Since democratic citizens are precisely the citizens committed to the values and principles of constitutional democracies, it is platitudinous to claim that they share these reasons or that they find them generally acceptable. The standard objection is not that this set of reasons does not exist, but rather that the set is too thin to provide a sufficient basis for determining which coercive policies are justified. However, in contrast to Rawls, my proposal is not committed to the "completeness of public reason."[12] To claim that public reasons take priority for the purposes of justifying coercive policies is not the same as the claim that public reasons alone must be sufficient to provide such justification or that they must be the only reasons that citizens can legitimately appeal to for that purpose. Perhaps the best way to explain the difference is by focusing on the second claim mentioned above, namely, that public reasons are *independent from* religious (or otherwise comprehensive) doctrines.

This claim is usually cashed out in terms of "neutrality" and, as such, it has been the target of the most vigorous criticisms of the public reason view.[13] However, it is important to see why this is so. If, following Rawls, one endorses the completeness of public reason, namely, the view that there is a set

11 See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 212–54, and John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited". In *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

12 Rawls 1993 claims that public reason "is suitably complete, that is, for at least the great majority of fundamental questions, possibly for all, some combination and balance of political values alone reasonably shows the answer." (241) This assumption has been forcefully criticized by many authors. For detailed versions of this critique see e.g. Michael J. Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 223ff., and Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, part III.

13 For some well-known examples see Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); Richard J. Arneson, "Liberal Neutrality on the Good: An Autopsy", in *Perfectionism and Neutrality*: *Essays in Liberal Theory*, ed. George Klosko and Steven Wall (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

of reasons shared by all democratic citizens that are sufficient to determine all or nearly all policies that touch upon constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, then the claim that this set of reasons is independent from all religious or otherwise comprehensive conceptions of the good becomes quite problematic. For it suggests that one could determine the policies that ought to be enforced without any consideration whatsoever as to why they are good. That can't be right. However, notice that what creates the problem is the assumption of "sufficiency" and not the assumption of "independence". The problem is not that public reasons are indistinguishable from reasons that are religious or otherwise comprehensive, but rather that the latter cannot be excluded from the set of reasons sufficient to determine the policies that ought to be enforced. Without the assumption of sufficiency, however, all that is needed to justify the claim that public reasons are independent from other types of reasons is the capacity to intuitively distinguish them for the purposes at hand.

My interpretation of the independence claim is based on the intuitive contrast between, on the one hand, reasons and arguments that aim to show whether or not some specific policy is good, desirable, beneficial, valuable, etc. and, on the other, reasons and arguments that aim to show whether or not the policy in question is compatible with the equal protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens. This contrast can be understood as a specific case of a more general distinction between *the rationale that motivates a practice* and its *justification*. This is a familiar contrast. The reason why people marry, travel, or go to the movies is because they find these practices good, valuable, desirable or whatever the case may be. However, this does not yet tell us whether or under which conditions these practices are justified. For present purposes, we can interpret the contrast in terms of Rawls's catchy characterization of the difference between the right and the good: "the right draws the limit; the good shows the point." (Rawls 2000, 231)

Notice that this way of understanding the logical independence between both types of reasons does not involve any problematic assumption of neutrality. Indeed, if we interpret the claim of independence in this way, it becomes clear that arguments and reasons geared to show the *point* or rationale of a given practice cannot be "neutral" or independent of conceptions of the good, be they religious or secular, since their aim is to show why the practice in question is good, i.e. valuable, important, beneficial, etc. It seems clear that a crucial element of advocating for the adoption of a specific policy is to of-

fer arguments and reasons that purport to show why the practices the policy regulates are good, worth protecting or whatever the case may be. However, it seems equally clear that offering these kinds of arguments or reasons may not be enough to *justify* the adoption of the policy in question. For its *justification* may also depend on other kinds of considerations or constraints, for example, whether it is compatible with other practices, whether its benefits and burdens can be fairly distributed, whether it would excessively constrain important rights and freedoms, whether it would have discriminatory effects, etc. This indicates a sense in which the latter considerations may have *constraining priority* over the former without in any way annulling their relevance and import. Take the example of same-sex marriage. LGTB citizens want to be able to marry because of the value of marriage, that is, because they find the institution good, beneficial, desirable or whatever the case may be. Certainly, no one wants to marry for the sake of freedom and equality. However, this does not mean that equal treatment or protection of freedom are not important considerations, perhaps even decisive ones, for justifying whether same-sex marriage should be permitted or its ban overruled as unconstitutional.

III.1 The Mutual Accountability Proviso

This intuitive distinction indicates how the *priority of public reasons* can be defended without the additional burden of a commitment to neutrality. In contrast to proposals that either exclude religious or otherwise comprehensive views from public debate or that include them without any restrictions, my proposal articulates a policy of mutual accountability that imposes the same deliberative rights and obligations upon all democratic citizens.[14] This proposal recognizes the right of all democratic citizens to adopt their own cognitive stance, whether religious or secular, in public political debates without giving up on the democratic obligation to justify the coercive policies with which all citizens must comply by providing reasons that are acceptable to everyone.

According to the accountability proviso I defend, citizens who participate in political advocacy can appeal to whatever reasons they wish in support of

14 I offer a detailed account of my proposal: Cristina Lafont, "Religious Pluralism in a Deliberative Democracy", in *Secular or Post-secular Democracies in Europe? The Challenge of Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. Ferran Requejo Coll and Camil Ungureanu (Routledge, forthcoming).

the policies they favor, provided they are prepared to show—against objections—that these policies are compatible with the democratic commitment to treat all citizens as free and equal, and can therefore be reasonably accepted by everyone. In order to fulfill this democratic obligation, citizens must be willing to engage in an argument on the compatibility of their favored policies with the equal protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, and they must be willing to accept the outcome of *that* argument as decisive in settling the question of whether these policies can be legitimately enforced. Objections to the compatibility of such policies with the equal protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens must be (1) properly addressed in public debate, and (2) defeated with compelling arguments before citizens' support (or vote) for their enforcement can be considered legitimate.

It is in virtue of this democratic obligation that public reasons have constraining priority. They are the only reasons towards which no one can remain indifferent in their political advocacy. Whereas public reasons need not be the source from which a rationale in support of coercive policies must be crafted, they are the kind of reasons that cannot be ignored, disregarded or simply overridden once citizens bring them into public deliberation. They are the reasons that must be addressed and properly scrutinized in public debate if they are offered as objections to the coercive policies under discussion. Since citizens of a constitutional democracy are committed to the equal protection of all citizens' basic rights it is perfectly appropriate for them to call each other to account regarding the kind of reasons that they are considering or ignoring while advocating for the policies they favor, as this *allows them to establish whether or not these reasons are compatible with maintaining that commitment*. Granted, the shared commitment does not suffice to guarantee *agreement*. But it does give rise to forms of *argumentative entanglement* that allow members of a political community to transform public opinion over time by their continuous efforts to enlist the force of the better argument to their cause and change each other's minds.

III.2 Citizens' Right to Legal Contestation and Argumentative Entanglement

In constitutional democracies with judicial review, the right to legal contestation guarantees that all citizens can, on their own initiative, open or reopen a deliberative process in which reasons and justifications geared to show the constitutionality of a contested policy are made publically available, such that

they can be scrutinized and challenged with counterarguments that might lead public opinion to be transformed and prior decisions to be overturned. The right of citizens to question the constitutionality of any policy or statute by initiating legal challenges, allows them to *structure* public debate on the policy in question as a debate about fundamental rights and therefore as a debate in which the priority of public reasons (with its corresponding standards of scrutiny) must be respected. They can do so even if such structuring did not seem antecedently plausible to the rest of the citizenry, perhaps because they had framed it in other terms or because they had failed to foresee the impact that the policy would have on the fundamental rights of certain citizens. Obviously, a claim that a contested statute violates a fundamental right may turn out to be mistaken, and litigants may not be able to change a prior decision or public opinion. But, even in such a case, they still have the right to receive an explicit reasoned justification about why exactly the statute in question does not violate their rights and why it is therefore compatible with treating them as free and equal. For those who continue to disagree, this reasoned justification in turn highlights the reasons, arguments, and evidence that they would need to more effectively challenge in order to convince the majority of citizens to change their opinion on the matter.

From this perspective, the right to legal contestation guarantees all citizens that their communicative power, their ability to trigger political deliberation on issues of fundamental rights, won't fall below some unacceptable minimum regardless of how unpopular or idiosyncratic their views may seem to other citizens. The conception of public justification as mutual accountability that I defend emphasizes the contribution that structuring political debates in accordance with the priority of public reasons (and its corresponding standards of scrutiny) has upon the legitimacy of enforcing contested policies. It gives rise to forms of argumentative entanglement that allow members of a political community to gain traction within each other's views and transform them over time.

Although examples are always problematic, the development of the debate on same-sex marriage in the US offers a good illustration here. For decades the issue was treated in public debate as turning mainly on the meaning of marriage. On that question, there was widespread agreement that marriage is between a man and a woman. However, once political initiatives for state constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage became part of the po-

litical agenda, and citizens legally contested such initiatives in the courts, the focus of public deliberation shifted from an ethical and religious debate on the meaning of marriage to a constitutional debate on equal treatment and fundamental rights. Judicial review of the constitutionality of state bans on same-sex marriage led public debate to treat the issue as a matter of fundamental rights. Quite surprisingly, once the debate became structured in that way, a major shift in public opinion took place in favor of same-sex marriage. Although this development is a complex empirical issue, it is hard to avoid the impression that once the debate became a constitutional debate, many of the citizens who were against same-sex marriage on the basis of their religious or otherwise comprehensive views about the meaning of marriage could not find convincing reasons to justify unequal treatment under the law, and that they therefore changed their minds *about whether it should be legal*. There are good reasons to assume that without the extra political power that the right to legal contestation granted litigants, such that they could *structure* the political debate as a constitutional debate about fundamental rights, the 'unfettered' public debate would have continued to turn exclusively on religious and ethical questions about which citizens strongly disagree. As a consequence, the comprehensive views of the majority regarding the meaning of marriage would have continued to dictate policy.

By contrast, once the public debate became framed in constitutional terms the standards of scrutiny characteristic of judicial review (e.g. identifying legitimate government interests, investigating the proportionality of the means, weighing the empirical evidence, etc.) allowed litigants to get traction within and ultimately transform the views of the majority. Indeed, whereas it is unclear what standard of scrutiny could be used to resolve religious and ethical debates over the meaning of marriage amongst citizens holding different comprehensive views, it is quite clear that the standards of scrutiny appropriate for a constitutional debate give rise to forms of argumentative entanglement that allow citizens to call each other to account, gather and weigh factual evidence for and against proposals, and influence one another's views over time as a consequence. In the example of the debate over same-sex marriage, the review process required its opponents to identify legitimate government interests to justify the ban. Once such interests were publicly identified (e.g. protecting the health and welfare of children, fostering procreation within a marital setting, etc.) the debate began to turn on questions for which

factual evidence could be decisive in settling the answer (e.g. statistical evidence about the welfare of children raised in same-sex couples households, the existence of married couples unable to procreate, etc.) But let me briefly focus on a different example that may help address the worry that acceptance of the liberal criterion of democratic legitimacy and the priority of public reason threatens religious forms of life.

III.3 The Priority of Public Reasons and Religious Forms of Life

Current debates in European countries on whether to ban the Islamic headscarf from public places seem to be following a very similar path. These debates have mainly focused on the meaning of the practice of wearing the Islamic headscarf. On that question there are deep disagreements. However, since political initiatives to ban the Islamic headscarf from public places became part of the political agenda in most European countries and citizens began to legally contest such initiatives in the courts, the focus of the debate has started to shift from a debate on the cultural and religious meaning of wearing the headscarf to a debate on fundamental rights, equal treatment, and non-discrimination. The recent ruling of Germany's Highest Court that the ban on teachers wearing headscarves is not compatible with religious freedom and that excepting Christian symbols from the ban constitutes religious discrimination and is therefore unconstitutional is helping to structure public political debates in accordance with the priority of public reasons and the duty of mutual accountability.[15] Here again there are good reasons to assume that without the extra political power that the right to legal contestation grants litigants, such that they might be able to *structure* the political debate as a constitutional debate about fundamental rights and freedoms, the 'unfettered' public debate would continue to turn on religious and secular comprehensive views about which citizens strongly disagree. As a consequence, the

15 In March of 2015, Germany's highest court ruled that a complete ban on teachers wearing headscarves is not compatible with religious freedom. This ruling also overturned another clause in North Rhine-Westphalian law that exempted manifestations "of Christian and Western educational and cultural values or traditions" at schools from the otherwise complete ban on ostensible demonstrations of religious affiliation. The court decided that this exception constituted a privileging of Christian symbols over those of other religions, which would go against the ban on discrimination on religious grounds that is enshrined in the German constitution. This decision overturned the Court's own ruling on 2003, which allowed states to pass laws banning the headscarf.

comprehensive secular views of the majority about the meaning of the Islamic headscarf would simply continue to dictate policy in European countries.

These examples reveal an important motivation behind the debate about the kinds of reasons that citizens should use to justify coercive policies. It is the danger that a majority could, simply on the basis of their *comprehensive* beliefs, whether religious or secular, illicitly restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of their fellow citizens. However, framing the problem in such anti-majoritarian terms may obscure the democratic character of the interpretation of public reason as mutual accountability that I propose.

III.4 Citizens in Robes

In *Political Liberalism* Rawls claims that in constitutional democracies with judicial review the Supreme Court is the exemplar of public reason.[16] According to my interpretation of public reason, this claim is trivially true. For supreme constitutional courts are precisely the institutions in charge of ensuring, among other things, that policies and statutes respect the priority of public reason, that is, that they do not violate the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens. However, if we keep in mind the internal connection between judicial review and citizens' right to legal contestation we can draw two important conclusions on the democratic significance of the norms of political justification characteristic of constitutional democracies. On the one hand, if citizens endorse the institutions of constitutional democracy that means that they should behave like they expect the Court to behave, that is, *they should strive to meet the same standards of scrutiny and justification characteristic of public reason that the exemplar they have instituted is supposed to meet.*[17] Contrary to what the inclusion and translation models suggest, it makes little sense for citizens to delegate the task of securing the equal protection of their fundamental rights to state officials and the courts while simultaneously undermining that task by letting ordinary citizens make political decisions about fundamental rights in a way that simply gives equal consideration to everyone's comprehensive views and lets the numbers decide. On the other hand, for that very same reason, the contribution of judicial review to political justification cannot be that the courts undertake constitutional review in

16 See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 231-40.

17 As Rawls 1993 puts it, "public reason sees the office of citizen with its duty of civility as analogous to that of judgeship with its duty of deciding cases." (p. lv)

isolation from political debates in the public sphere, as if justice needs to be in robes in order to properly preserve the priority of public reasons.[18] To the contrary, the main way judicial review contributes to political justification is that it empowers citizens to call the rest of the citizenry to put on their robes in order to show how the policies they favor are compatible with the equal protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens to which they are all committed as democratic citizens. It is in virtue of this communicative power that all citizens, whether religious or secular, can participate as political equals in the ongoing process of shaping and forming a considered public opinion in support of political decisions they all can own and identify with.

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18 See Ronald M. Dworkin, *Justice in Robes* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).

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HABERMAS AND THE QUESTION OF BIOETHICS

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Abstract. In *The Future of Human Nature*, Jürgen Habermas raises the question of whether the embryonic genetic diagnosis and genetic modification threatens the foundations of the species ethics that underlies current understandings of morality. While morality, in the normative sense, is based on moral interactions enabling communicative action, justification, and reciprocal respect, the reification involved in the new technologies may preclude individuals to uphold a sense of the undisposability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) of human life and the inviolability (*Unantastbarkeit*) of human beings that is necessary for their own identity as well as for reciprocal relations. Engaging with liberal bioethics and Catholic approaches to bioethics, the article clarifies how Habermas's position offers a radical critique of liberal autonomy while maintaining its postmetaphysical stance. The essay argues that Habermas's approach may guide the question of rights of future generations regarding germline gene editing. But it calls for a different turn in the conversation between philosophy and theology, namely one that emphasizes the necessary attention to rights violations and injustices as a common, postmetaphysical starting point for critical theory and critical theology alike.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, Jürgen Habermas published a short book on questions of biomedicine that took many by surprise.[1] To some of his students, the turn to a substantive position invoking the need to comment on a species ethics rather than outlining a procedural moral framework was seen as the departure from the "path of deontological virtue,"[2] and at the same time a departure from postmetaphysical reason. Habermas's motivation to address the developments in biomedicine had certainly been sparked by the intense debate in Germany, the

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003).
2 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 125, fn. 58.

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European Union, and internationally on human cloning, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, embryonic stem cell research, and human enhancement. He turned to a strand of critical theory that had been pushed to the background by the younger Frankfurt School in favor of cultural theory and social critique, even though it had been an important element of its initial working programs. The relationship of instrumental reason and critical theory, examined, among others, by Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse and taken up in Habermas's own *Knowledge and Interest* and *Theory of Communicative Action* became ever-more actual with the development of the life sciences, human genome analysis, and genetic engineering of human offspring. Today, some of the fictional scenarios discussed at the end of the last century as "science fiction" have become reality: in 2018, the first "germline gene-edited" children were born in China.[3] Furthermore, the UK's permission to create so-called "three-parent" children may create a legal and political pathway to hereditary germline interventions summarized under the name of "gene editing."

In this article, I want to explore Habermas's "substantial" argument in the hope that (moral) philosophy and (moral) theology become allies in their struggle against an ever-more reifying lifeworld, which may create a "moral void" that would, at least from today's perspective, be "unbearable" (73), and for upholding the conditions of human dignity, freedom, and justice. I will contextualize Habermas's concerns in the broader discourse of bioethics, because only by doing this, his concerns are rescued from some misinterpretations.

II. NEW FRONTIERS OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE RESPONSE OF BIOETHICS

Technological utopias regarding the control — and creation — of human life are closely tied to modern rationality, entailed in the imagery of the *homo faber* of the technological revolution. Over the last few decades, a debate emerged

3 Up to the present, no scientific publication of the exact procedure exists, but it is known that the scientist, Jiankui He, circumvented the existing national regulatory framework and may have misled the prospective parents about existing alternatives and the unprecedented nature of his conduct. Yuanwu Ma, Lianfeng Zhang, and Chuan Qin, "The First Genetically Gene-Edited Babies: It's "Irresponsible and too Early"", *Animal models and experimental medicine* 2, no. 1 (2019); Matthias Braun and Darian Meacham, "The Trust Game: Crispr for Human Germline Editing Unsettles Scientists and Society", *EMBO reports* 20, no. 2 (2019).

whether it is possible to envision a "liberal", or rather "libertarian" eugenics, namely to develop and permit reproductive technologies that give individuals the choice to have or not to have children with particular health issues or dispositions to genetically caused diseases. Biomedical ethics departs insofar from the traditional medical-ethical model as it often responds to the overlapping segments of medical research and clinical practice. Counseling individuals in prenatal decision-making, for example, is regarded more in view of the transmission of genetic information and medical prognoses than in view of the crisis counseling methods applied, for example, in counseling of pregnancy conflicts.[4] The effect of this transformation of medical interaction is that patients are considered as autonomous decision-makers who lack medical information but do not require advice in their practical-moral decisions.

By now, liberal bioethics is dominated by this approach that prioritizes patients' rights, ignoring almost completely the social cultural, and economic contexts and mediations of individual actions.[5] The culture of emphasizing individual autonomy may not account for the precarious — asymmetrical — relationship between doctors and patients, and it easily overlooks the vulnerability of a person or a couple facing difficult medical decisions. Feminist bioethics especially has critiqued this emphasis on autonomy, arguing that it ignores the relatedness and interdependency of persons, promoting instead an ethics of care that attends to interdependency, and a feminist ethics of justice.

The life sciences are linked to multiple private companies, the pharmaceutical industry, and the economic organization of healthcare facilities are good examples of the blurring lines of healthcare provisions and marketing of goods to consumers.[6] This is not different in the field of reproductive medicine: the

4 Cf. Hille Haker, *Ethik der genetischen Frühdiagnostik. Sozialethische Reflexionen zur Verantwortung am Beginn des menschlichen Lebens* (Mentis, 2002).

5 One example may suffice: In the US, women of color are more likely to be poor, more likely to be maltreated in hospitals, more likely to be refused necessary reproductive care, and more likely to die during childbirth than white and Latino women. Yet, these disparities are rarely addressed in liberal bioethics literature on reproductive medicine. Cf. Tyan P. Dominguez, "Adverse Birth Outcomes in African American Women: The Social Context of Persistent Reproductive Disadvantage", *Social Work in Public Health* 26, no. 1 (2011); Sandra Lane, *Why Are Our Babies Dying? Pregnancy, Birth, and Death in America* (Routledge, 2015).

6 Medical sociologist Peter Conrad argues that the transformation of the 'traditional' medicine to a market-oriented medicine is the most striking feature of modern medicine. Peter Conrad, "The Shifting Engines of Medicine", *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 4,

global Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) market generated revenue of $22.3 billion in 2015 and is expected to reach $31.4 billion by 2023.[7] ART therefore exemplify one area that 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.[8] With the new methods of genetic modification, hereditary alteration of the human embryo that changes the DNA of all future generations has become feasible and is currently discussed in national and international advisory committees. The history of racism, eugenics, and crimes committed in the context of reproductive medicine is forgotten or ignored,[9] and the scientists' enthusiasm is thinly veiled by their assertion that they are aware of their responsibility.

At the turn of the century, the philosophers Allen Buchanan, Dan Brock, Norman Daniels and Daniel Wikler offered a "moral framework for choices about the use of genetic intervention technologies" that has shaped the debate since then.[10] In the course of their book, they try to show that only a deontological, liberal moral framework that corresponds with the three principles of reproductive autonomy, harm-prevention, and justice offers an adequate ethical answer to the new possibilities of genetic interventions. The authors embrace the above-mentioned moral neutrality of physicians' or any professional in the healthcare system regarding prospective parents' decisions, yet argue that morally speaking, parental liberties are limited by their obligation not to harm their offspring. In order to define "harm" of offspring, they apply a functional understanding of health and disease as defined by Christopher Boorse.[11] Ac-

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no. 6 (2005); Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008).

7 Cf. Hille Haker, "A Social Bioethics of Genetics", in *Catholic Bioethics and Social Justice: The Praxis of Us Healthcare in a Globalized World*, ed. Therese Lysaught and Michael McCarthy (Liturgical Academic Press, 2018).

8 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Heinemann, 1984), Vol. I, Part IV.

9 Keith Wailoo, Alondra Nelson, and Catherine Lee, *Genetics and the Unsettled Past: The Collision of DNA, Race, and History. Collision of DNA, Race, and History* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2012); Sheldon Krimsky and Kathleen Sloan, *Race and the Genetic Revolution: Science, Myth, and Culture* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2011).

10 Allen Buchanan et al., *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 14.

11 Christopher Boorse, "A Second Rebuttal on Health", *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 39, no. 6 (2014); Christopher Boorse, "Health as a Theoretical Concept", *Philosophy of Science* 44, no. 4 (1977).

cording to this functional model, a harmful condition is the absence of "general-purpose natural capacities" that enable a person to carry out "nearly any plan of life."[12] These natural capacities are "capabilities that are broadly valuable across a wide array of life plans and opportunities typically pursued in a society like our own."[13] Disease is understood as "an adverse deviation from normal species function,"[14] calling for 'beneficial' genetic intervention if that is technically possible. As is the case in Boorse's concept,[15] the embodied experience of illness, it seems, is translated — and translatable — into the objective language of disease. But such a translation disregards, as Habermas argues in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, the "unbridgeable semantic chasm between the normatively charged vocabulary of everyday languages in which first and second persons communicate with one another about something and the nominalistic orientation of the science specialized in descriptive statements."[16] Buchanan et al. conclude their reflection on liberal eugenics with the statement that parents are *morally* obliged to intervene in cases where 'deviations' could be treated medically, or where it is probable according to medical diagnosis that future children will not cross the threshold of a minimal quality of life. As for public health policies, the authors call for policies of harm-prevention and enhancement that "encourage prospective parents to avoid the birth of persons with serious disabilities."[17] The avoidance of future children with certain health issues, they claim, is not only compatible with the moral recognition of actual persons of disability but also justified from the perspective of social justice that must attend to the (future) welfare of children.

For a superficial reader, Habermas's argumentation against liberal eugenics resembles the position of religious critics of reproductive medicine, brought forward, for example, by the Vatican in its often-quoted Encyclical *Donum Vitae* from 1987. The Catholic Church's position was highly influential in the regulation of ART in many countries, rendering it an interesting case of the role of religion in the public sphere. Here, however, I am only

12 Buchanan et al., *From Chance to Choice*, 168.
13 Ibid., 174.
14 Ibid.
15 Christopher Boorse, "On the Distinction between Disease and Illness", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 5, no. 1 (1975).
16 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008), 206.
17 Buchanan et al., *From Chance to Choice*, 184.

interested in the reception of Habermas's text that could be seen in the vicinity of the Catholic position. In the encyclical, John Paul II had emphasized the "gift" of procreation over against the "making" of children through ART:

> The child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage: it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development. […] The tradition of the Church and anthropological reflection recognize in marriage and in its indissoluble unity the only setting worthy of truly responsible procreation.[18]

Habermas would certainly agree that being recognized by parents is a condition for the child's "proper human development." Perhaps one could even demonstrate psychologically that parents see their children as a sign of their love. *Donum Vitae* makes an additional move, however, claiming that the good of the family, understood as self-giving love, contributes to the good of civil society, which requires the stability of families for its own flourishing. The objectification that is a necessary part of ART threatens not only the future child's wellbeing but the whole moral order:

> No one may subject the coming of a child into the world to conditions of technical efficiency which are to be evaluated according to standards of control and dominion. *The moral relevance of the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and between the goods of marriage, as well as the unity of the human being and the dignity of his origin, demand that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses.*[19]

Here, technical efficiency is contrasted with the conjugal love, and human dignity is inserted as the "unity" and "dignity of his origin." In other contexts, Habermas famously demanded that theological reasoning is "translated" into secular reasoning, and one could say that in this section of *Donum Vitae*, the theological text already makes this effort, arguing with the developmental conditions, anthropology, and the common good of society. The separation of the good and the just is not as easy as Habermas argues, because *Donum*

18 Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day. (Donum Vitae)* (Roman Curiae, 1987), II, A, 1.

19 Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*, II,B,4c. My emphasis.

Vitae claims that neither the individual nor society can flourish without the family that is based on the self-giving love of spouses. Yet, with its ontological interpretation of marriage as only a form of self-giving love, and the teleological structure of reproduction, *Donum Vitae* represents a metaphysical thinking that Habermas argues modern philosophy *cannot* embrace: the theological-normative claim entails a comprehensive concept of the good that is rooted in divine love, enabling the self-giving love and solidarity of human beings. Habermas seems to allude to such a metaphysical understanding of Christian theology when he juxtaposes it to his own postmetaphysical philosophy — but this depiction ignores the critique of the theological anthropology and ontology that John Paul II (and also Joseph Ratzinger, for that matter) represents, from within theology. Habermas is familiar, for example, with German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz' critique of this metaphysical theology, and he is aware of Metz' reinterpretation of Christian reason as "anamnestic reason."[20] The *new political theology*, Metz argues, is sensitive to historical experiences, which Christian theology ought to interpret in light of the biblical ethics and the *eschatological proviso* that Metz interprets in conversation with early critical theory, especially Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. In the discussion of faith and reason, Metz would have provided Habermas with a postmetaphysical-theological approach that differs considerably from the one that then Cardinal Ratzinger defended in their conversation. Unfortunately, Habermas does not engage with the works of critical social and political (theological) ethics. For the reception of theology in bioethics one should note that not only philosophers but also (feminist) theologians have long raised their critique of the underlying (gendered) understanding of self-giving love that orients John Paul II's "theology of the body." This critical reception is rarely mentioned when "religious bioethics" is dismissed as "metaphysical" or "comprehensive" visions, which immunizes liberal bioethics against any critical assessment that may be raised from critical theology. While Habermas, unfortunately, often reduces theology to providing an ultimate source of meaning, rituals for existential experiences, the motivation to act morally, and the communitarian belonging that ena-

20 Johann B. Metz and Johann Reikerstorfer, *Memoria Passionis: Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Herder Verlag, 2011); Johann B. Metz, *Im Dialektischen Prozess der Aufklärung: 2. Teilband. Neue Politische Theologie: Versuch eines Korrektivs der Theologie* (Herder Verlag, 2016).

bles solidarity,[21] for most liberal bioethicists, a dignity-based ethics merely demonstrates the *irrationality* of certain traditions unless it is translated into (liberal) autonomy.[22] For all these reasons it matters to clarify what Habermas actually argued for and against in his essay.

Habermas's book was quickly viewed as an attack on the freedom of individuals to make reproductive choices, while his central concerns about the risk that reification of human life and human beings threatens the *self-identity* of a future child and the *conditions of morality* that are based on mutual recognition and respect were mostly dismissed. John Harris, an outspoken proponent of genetic enhancement and a prominent bioethicist in the UK who continuously attacks "religious arguments" that he reduces to the sanctity of life, called his essay "mystical sermonizing" that was taking "the debate to a depth that neither rationality nor evidence can reach."[23]

III. THE FUTURE OF HUMAN NATURE

Obviously, Habermas begins his essay at a different point than Buchanan et al. who argue for the moral justification and political-legal permission of genetic diagnosis, genetic therapy, and human enhancement in the name of human freedom, avoidance of harms, and justice. But Habermas's essay also differs from a theological position with which he otherwise shares the insistence on the inviolability of human dignity. Habermas's concern is whether the "colonized lifeworld" will, in the future, still encompass the moral view at all. He quotes Adorno who famously coined his own response to the "good life" negatively, as minima moralia, allowing only for "reflections from damaged life." This, Habermas holds, is the melancholic status quo of the disenchanted life-world. In his essay, he puts it this way: in the "rubble" of normative models of the good life, the philosopher finds the plurality of competing models, restricted to properly frame the rules of justice and a political order, within

21 Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Polity Press, 2010); Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*.

22 Ruth Macklin, "Dignity is a Useless Concept: It Means no more than Respect for Persons or Their Autonomy", *British Medical Journal* 327 (2003).

23 John Harris, quoted in Vilhjálmur Árnason, "From Species Ethics to Social Concerns: Habermas's Critique of "Liberal Eugenics" Evaluated", *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 35, no. 5 (2014).

which the multitude of visions can be pursued. The problem with this entry point to the discourse on biomedicine is that it may well capture the role of *philosophy* — but it certainly does not capture the utopian enthusiasm of *science* that is associated with the new technologies of genetic interventions.

Whereas Adorno reflects the political and social catastrophes of the 20th century, the biomedical sciences seem to be rather unaffected by them, in spite of the fact that the World Medical Association imposed regulations on medical research in the wake of the heinous and criminal medical experiments conducted by Nazi physicians, but also by medical scientists in the US.[24] It is striking how similar the "old" and "new" utopias of overcoming the felt constraints of human nature are. Take, as a rather arbitrary example, William Winwood Reade's enthusiasm regarding the prospect of science in the mid-19th century:

> A time will come when Science will transform [the bodies we now wear] by means which we cannot conjecture, and which, even if explained to us, we could not now understand, just as the savage cannot understand electricity, magnetism, steam. Disease will be extirpated; the causes of decay will be removed; immortality will be invented. *Finally, men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man then will be perfect; he will then be a creator;* he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a god… the humans of the future 'will labour together in a Sacred Cause: the extinction of disease and sin, the perfection of genius and love, the invention of immortality, the exploration of the infinite, and the conquest of creation.[25]

The same enthusiasm is found in the books and articles of the trend-setting promoters of enhancement in Silicon Valley, and numerous liberal bioethi-

24 As is well known, horrific medical experimentations did not end with World War II, Nazi eugenicists became the leading human geneticists in Germany until a generational change in the 1970s, and the racial undercurrent of international genetic research was also never made transparent. Cf. Peter Weingart, Jürgen Kroll, and Kurt Bayertz, eds., *Rasse, Blut und Gene: Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986). For the US history, cf. Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (University of California Press, 1986). Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (Pantheon Books, 1997).

25 Winwood Reade, Christopher Coenen explains, was an explorer of Africa and a freethinker who had fairly close contact with Charles Darwin and who called himself his disciple. He published a popular world history in 1872. Cf. Christopher Coenen, "The Earth as Our Footstool: Visions of Human Enhancement in 19th and 20th Century Britain", in *Inquiring into Human Enhancement*, ed. Simone Bateman et al. (Springer, 2015), 189. (My emphasis in quote).

cists today embrace the new genetic techniques as a step towards overcoming nature. Take, as an example, Julian Savulescu:

> Enhancement is a misnomer. It suggests luxury. But enhancement is no luxury. In so far as it promotes well-being, it is the very essence of what is necessary for a good life. There is no moral reason to preserve some traits — such as uncontrollable aggressiveness, a sociopathic personality, or extreme deviousness. Tell the victim of rape and murder that we must preserve the natural balance and diversity. […] When we make decisions to improve our lives by biological and other manipulations, we express our rationality and express what is fundamentally important about our nature. And if those manipulations improve our capacity to make rational and normative judgements, they further improve what is fundamentally human. To be human is to be better.[26]

Likewise, John Harris asks rhetorically what can be "bad" about something that is so obviously "good":

> If, as we have suggested, not only are enhancements obviously good for us, but that good can be obtained with safety, then not only should people be entitled to access those goods for themselves and those for whom they care, but they also clearly have moral reasons, perhaps amounting to an obligation, to do so.[27]

Habermas does not attend to the historical continuity in the declared discontinuity of "liberal eugenics." Instead, searching for a path that is neither grounded in a metaphysical understanding of human nature nor in scientific naturalism, he is interested in Kierkegaard's concept of existential freedom. This concept is neither reducible to liberal autonomy in Buchanan et al.'s sense nor to the theological self-less and self-giving love that the Vatican claims as self-ideal and model of the good life both for one's personal life as well as for society. Instead, Habermas inquires how, in view of the multiple factors that determine one's existence, the individual self is still "able-to-be-oneself"[28]. For Habermas, Kierkegaard paves the way to an existential ethics that may be seen as the heir of the metaphysical-theologically virtue ethics

26 Julian Savulescu, "Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings", *Gazeta de Antropología* 32, no. 2 (2016).

27 John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 35. Quoted in: Simone Bateman and Jean Gayon, "The Concept and Practices of Human Enhancement: What Is at Stake?", in *Inquiring into Human Enhancement*, ed. Simone Bateman et al. (Springer, 2015), 31.

28 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 13. In the following, page numbers for the quotes from this book are put in parentheses.

of Christian ethics. The disintegration, fragmentation, and the "self-induced objectification" is Kierkegaard's starting point for the subject's reflective self-relation. To "gather" and "detach" oneself, to "gain distance" from oneself, to "pull" oneself out of the scattered life and to "give" oneself and one's life "continuity and transparency" are not pre-determined but tasks of freedom any subject must engage with: one must choose one's own identity, one must speak for oneself, and one must give an account of one's actions and ultimately, one's life.[29] Embracing this task of giving meaning to one's life, contrasted to the mere mastering of one's life by pursuing goals that increase the scope of one's individual autonomy, the modern subject becomes an "editor" or, as Habermas has it, the "author" of one's life: responsible for oneself and "to the order of things in which he lives." While Kierkegaard adds the *responsibility* "to God," Habermas emphasizes that for Kierkegaard, faith offers *consolation* in its promise of salvation.

From Habermas's postmetaphysical standpoint, the chasm between faith and reason is unbridgeable; the subjective experience of the believer who acknowledges that she, "by relating herself to herself relates to an absolutely Other to whom she owes everything," (9) is no option for the non-believer. Postmetaphysical reason cannot turn to theology but is restricted to discerning meaning in the theory of intersubjectivity and communicative action. Reflecting on both, philosophy *can*, however, show that while freedom is not an unconstrained capability, and the subject certainly not "in control" of its own history, it is also not rendering the individual powerless and "unfree." For postmetaphysical philosophy, human existence does not allude to a creator God but still maintains the structure of a 'given' existence that must be appropriated retrospectively; postmetaphysical reason translates the metaphysically grounded normative claims into the "binding force of the justifiable claims" which interacting subjects "claim towards one another" (10). Hence, language that "precedes and grounds the subjectivity of speakers" reveals "more a transsubjective power than an absolute one." (11)

For postmetaphysical philosophy, this means that its task is not only to reinterpret the meaning of life but also the freedom of the (moral) self. Like Haber-

29 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 6f. Judith Butler's Adorno Lectures echo this task, although Habermas critiques her turn to the "crypto-theological" ethics of responsibility by Levinas who departs from the Kantian egalitarian framework of morality in favor of a "triadic, asymmetrical relation." Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 204, fn. 19.

mas, Horkheimer and especially Adorno were skeptical of any metaphysical grounding of the meaning of life; Adorno especially withdraws to the analysis of the aporia of reason: utopian visions — or salvation and redemption — are impossible after the historical abyss of the Shoah. Turning to the relationship between utopia and ideology, Habermas claims that utopian visions may find rescue in art and aesthetic experiences, but this potential of the aesthetics must not obscure the risk of ideologies in politics. Habermas, in contrast, argues that the linguistic structure of intersubjectivity already entails the 'moral grammar' of freedom and justice that is a condition for one's ethical life as well as for morally justifiable action. Yet, he agrees with Adorno and the early critical theorists in his *Theory of Communicative Action* insofar, as it is not at all clear whether communicative action "wins" against instrumental reason: when practical reason is reduced to instrumental reason, reification concerns the subject, too, potentially transforming one's self-relation to mere self-control.[30]

Habermas emphasizes the *dialectic* of givenness and autonomy, which requires the acknowledgment of the force of something beyond the self's control (language is a case in point), while at the same time acknowledging the task of the subject to give an account of one's life to oneself and to others. Today, the question is whether our present will in the future be seen as the point at which the self lost any interest in Kierkegaard's question of existential ethics, so that one does not engage any longer in the task of being oneself, and regresses to a self that is merely interested in being in control. The liberal framework that guides the reproductive technologies is too weak to resist the reductive understanding of freedom as self-mastery, taking instrumental reason yet one step further, namely to the control of human life's beginning and its biological constitution. Clearly, Habermas sees such a step as a threat to the *moral identity* of a postmetaphysical subject: when the "ethical self-understanding of language-using agents is at stake in its entirety" (ibid.), philosophy cannot be constrained to merely attend to the *rules*. It must take a position that is itself "ethical" or "substantial," though it is neither *merely* existential-ethical nor *merely* communitarian.

With this, *The Future of Human Nature* radically questions the enthusiastic embrace of freedom and the assumed obligation regarding genetic modifications of future children. Habermas stresses that he is not speaking as a cultural

30 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, Part IV.

critic who opposes the advances of scientific knowledge. Rather, he claims, he is "simply asking whether, and if so how, the implementation of these achievements affects our self-understanding as responsible agents." (12). His reflection is anything but a "mystical sermonizing." Likewise, any attempt to welcome Habermas as the lost and newly-found son of Christian theology would be futile: all he asks is whether it is still possible to speak of mutual recognition and respect when one party is "manufactured" rather than "grown."

IV. DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Habermas draws a distinction between the understanding of dignity of human life and human dignity or, in his words, between indisposability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) and inviolability (*Unantastbarkeit*). The former reflects the moral inhibition to (merely) *dispose* over human life, because it has an "integral value for an *ethically* constituted form of life as a whole." (35) Rather than reflecting an ontological status, this understanding of dignity connects the pre-personal life before birth and the dead to the embodied life of human beings. The second understanding of dignity, human dignity, constitutes as strict inviolability; it only applies to born and living human beings, because they are the ones who are addressed in the second-person standpoint that is inherently aimed at mutual recognition.[31] Why does this distinction between the conditional dignity of human *life* and the unconditional dignity of the *human being* as a living person matter? In the discussion about abortion Habermas clarifies why he believes both sides, i.e. those who argue for the unconditional dignity of the human embryo and those who argue that human embryos are biological material with no moral relevance, are wrong: "both sides, it seems, fail to see that something may be 'not for us to dispose over' and yet not have the status of a legal person who is a subject of inalienable human rights as defined by the constitution." (31).

31 The English language does not capture the point adequately: *unverfügbar* marks a limit to human instrumental actions; (biological and nonbiological) material, in contrast, is disposable as a means to ends. Since human life cannot be entirely separated from an emergent or a deceased human being, it falls into a different category that Habermas tries to discern in non-ontological, yet ethical terms. Because of the continuity of human development, human life has intrinsic value, although it does not meet the standard of the principle of intersubjective, reciprocal recognition that is captured in the *inviolability*, *Unantastbarkeit* that is reserved for the dignity of the *human being*, as stated in the German Constitution.

Apart from the limit cases of abortion and embryo research, selection, or modification, there *is* agreement that human beings are to be respected for their own sake, i.e. as "persons in general, as a part or a member of his social community (or communities), and as an individual who is unmistakably unique and morally nonexchangeable." (35). Together with this fundamental respect, human dignity constitutes moral and legal rights that must be granted to every member as a requirement of a just society. The same protection does not hold in the strict sense for human life, even though the sense that it should not be completely disposable rests upon the broad understanding of dignity. Habermas takes his argument further, however, and it is this step that may well be considered a "substantial," i.e. ethical rather than a moral statement. The moral emotions of "disgust", "vertigo", or "revulsion" (39) allude to the slipping ground under our feet, now that the characteristics associated with the human species as we know it — genetic make-up, mortality, life-span, intelligence, growth, emotions etc. — become the object of technical interventions.[32] The cultural-ethical respect, dignity of human life, which Albert Schweitzer had called the respect for life (*Ehrfurcht*) although Habermas does not refer to him, prevents reification: seeing ourselves as "ethically free and morally equal beings guided by norms and reasons" is only possible when the *continuity of life* is not disrupted by the disposability (*Verfügbarkeit*) of human life at certain stages. But, critics have asked, why should we be concerned about genetic interventions if they alleviate suffering and increase human capabilities? Is the anthropological "vertigo" only the effect of the new, the unknown, which our experience must adapt to before it is considered the new normal?

One concern about genetic interventions into a future human being is the irreversibility of the actions even if they are regarded as necessary, good, or essential for a good life. Whatever will be developed as a "gene editing"

32 John Zhang, the founder of the company Darwin Life, expects a big market for spindle nuclear transfer (originally a technique to replace mitochondrial DNA but potentially a way to "rejuvenate" eggs of women whose chances to have child through IVF are limited by their age). But not only this: "Zhang's breakaway plans don't stop at spindle nuclear transfer. He says a future step will be to combine the technique with editing genes, so that parents can select hair or eye color, or maybe improve their children's IQ. 'Everything we do is a step toward designer babies,' Zhang says of Darwin Life. 'With nuclear transfer and gene editing together, you can really do anything you want.'" Emily Mullin, "The Fertility Doctor Trying to Commercialize Three-Parent Babies", last modified June 13, 2017, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/608033/the-fertility-doctor-trying-to-commercialize-three-parent-babies/.

tool will affect a particular embryo and future child, but also all future offspring, with multiple ramifications such as the reproductive freedom of the next generation and their potential health risks.[33] The medical risks may not be known for decades to come, and if it should turn out that the so-called off-target effects are more serious than foreseen in the animal studies, a simple "reset" will not be possible. Habermas, however, is not concerned with these medical-ethical questions. Instead, he claims that the irreversibility concerns our bodily and mental *integrity*. As we have seen, the Vatican interprets "integrity" as "unity," but for Habermas, it is the capability of "being oneself" in Kierkegaard's sense of embodied freedom as the task to give an account of one's life. Genetic modifications, Habermas argues, go beyond the impact parents have on their children through education because they may well destroy the dialectic of the specific heteronomy of one's origin — specific because *ethically* undisposable (*unverfügbar*) to anybody — and the necessity of retrospective self-appropriation of one's life story. *Therefore*, they may violate the right to bodily and mental integrity.

Habermas's argument is easily conflated with a protective stance regarding the natural basis as such, but this is not the case, as the reference to Kierkegaard clarifies. As for everyone else, it matters that future children are not only vulnerable as human embryos but throughout their lives. Autonomy "is a precarious achievement of finite beings who may attain something like 'strength,' if at all, only if they are mindful of their physical vulnerability and social dependence." (34) Future children may conform with their parents' decisions and be grateful for their foresight, but they may also disagree with their parents' decision. Although Habermas himself warns against an overdramatization, he also asks whether the *post factum* knowledge of the "de-differentiation of the distinction between the grown and the made intrudes upon one's subjective mode of existence." (53) From the second-person standpoint of the prospective parents, a human being *is anticipated* in the

33 Because the effects of germline gene editing must be examined over several generations, the future children need to be monitored throughout their lives to receive data on the safety and risks of the procedure. Among others, these children will be advised to procreate through ART to reduce adverse possible genetic alterations that may only express in their own offspring. Of course they can "opt out" of such monitoring once they can make their own decisions — but they will then be faced with the same questions of responsibility regarding the health of their offspring as their parents, however *because* of the parents' decision in the past.

cellular organism, emerging in the process of individuation. From the third-person standpoint of either biology or philosophical anthropology, one can say that human beings do not first have "non-human" life that takes a "leap" at a certain point into human life. Human beings emerge as a result of their biological and genetic developmental program just as animals emerge from *their* biological and genetic program that gives them their specific shape. Human beings are indeed influenced somatically by multiple 'environmental' factors, beginning with the epigenetic influences during pregnancy and ending with the social and cultural influences after birth. They never transcend their biological condition, yet the bodily functions become a part of their embodied personal identity. "Giving an account of oneself" does not only require the retrospective integration of intersubjective, social, and environmental influences, it also requires the integration of the dialectic of one's biological and genetic bodily material and one's sense of embodiment.

The problem with Habermas's argument is that it speculates about the ethical self-understanding of a future child, and it is in fact not clear why one's biological origin should be more relevant than the positive or negative effects of one's formation after birth — notwithstanding the necessary assumption of continuity of one's life. Together with the continuity of one's life, "authorship" and "authentic aspirations" (59) *only* rest upon the affirmation of one's existence — otherwise the consenting future child who affirms, for example, the parental health-related decisions would suffer as much from a damaged self-identity as the one who disagrees with the choices made. Heteronomy is a well-known fact of every life, and "authorship" does not mean that the dialectic of givenness and self-appropriation that defines freedom stops when one narrates one's life. Many life stories, fictional and non-fictional, recount the devastating consequences of parental and social disciplining, and psychoanalysis, among others, has shown convincingly that this formation is neither necessarily reversible nor non-somatic. The heteronomy of one's beginning does not necessarily intrude into the task of becoming and being oneself. Yet, as Judith Butler has shown — and the vast literature on life narratives supports this — the self is necessarily "opaque", "precarious," and often confronted with experiences of ruptures.[34] Retrospective consent or dissent concerns both sci-

34 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005). Cf. my interpretation of the shifts in autobiographical and fictional life stories in modern literature,

ence-driven and culture-driven scenarios, and therefore, the ability to give an account of oneself may not be more threatened by the genetic interventions than by many other beginnings that a future child will never have consented to. Quite to the contrary, the dialectic of freedom creates a narrative paradox: one cannot give a "true" account of one's life, yet one must create a certain "continuity and transparency," as Kierkegaard held. One's integrity rests upon the moral integration of multiple opaque, yet "undisposable" experiences and one's responses to them over the course of one's life. One narrates one's story in *multiple* ways, depending on one's different audiences, without telling false stories.[35] Moreover, one's account may well change over time, so that the conformity with parental decisions may shift depending on one's own experiences.

Habermas seems to be unsure of his claim himself. Hence, he connects it to the relationality of any self-identity. For the defenders of liberal eugenics, "enhanced" genetic traits are as objective a good as naturalness is for the Catholic Church. Both sides refer to a good that they consider rational, a result of human freedom; they only differ on the concept of freedom. In Habermas's version, however, liberalism must refrain from endorsing comprehensive visions of the good unless there is a consensus that can be presupposed, as is the case, he holds, in the treatment of diseases, independent of the techniques that are used. With this, Habermas agrees that health-related genetic modification, even germline gene editing, may be responsible, while he questions that enhancement is an obligation as Savulescu and Harris hold. According to Savulescu, however, it expresses "our rationality" and "the very essence of what is necessary for a good life."

When parents make decisions for their children, present or future, they need to take the asymmetry of the parent-child relation into account. Habermas therefore asks whether the knowledge of having been partly programmed precludes the self from entering into reciprocal relationships:

analyzed in view of the question of moral identity: Hille Haker, *Moralische Identität. Literarische Lebensgeschichten als Medium ethischer Reflexion. Mit einer Interpretation der "Jahrestage" Von Uwe Johnson* (Francke, 1999).

35 For the importance of this aspect of narrating life in modern literature cf. my interpretation of Johnson's novel, Hille Haker, "Das Selbst als eine Andere: Zur Konstruktion moralischer Identität in den Jahrestagen von Uwe Johnson", in *Johnson-Jahrbuch Bd. 12*, ed. Michael Hofmann (Akademie Verlag, 2005).

> Our concern with programming here is not whether it will restrict another person's ethical freedom and capacity of being himself, but whether, and how, it might eventually preclude a symmetrical relationship between the programmer and the product thus 'designed'. (65)

Hence, what is first presented as an argument of self-identity is now reframed in the language of intersubjectivity. Because parent-child relations are asymmetrical, they increase the vulnerability of the one party, the child, to the injury or harm by the other, the parents.[36] As M. Junker-Kenny has argued, parents walk a fine line as the caretakers of their children, and as moral agents who must respect any other person's dignity in the above-mentioned definition, they must anticipate their child's future autonomy in their actions:

> Adults accompanying children's 'social birth' have to walk a tight line between respect for their difference and respect for their dependence. In both, they have to be able to distinguish between their own desires and hopes, and the reality of the other.[37]

If the very first stages of human life require a certain respect for the dignity of human life but do not constitute the strict respect for the dignity of the human being — how can parents then "walk the tight line" in this situation? And should they not be supported in their decisions by laws and regulations that at least provide the framework for their decisions? The regulative idea behind health-related interventions, Habermas claims, is to provide the future child with a healthy life, and this is part of the anticipated communicative action that a parent or, for that matter, a doctor can assume (52). According to this regulative idea, in the case that genetic interventions, especially the techniques of gene editing, can be used for therapeutic purposes, the consensus of the future child may be assumed. But from a medical-ethical perspective, the question is also whether there are alternatives that are less intrusive — or alternatives that require parents to refrain from having a genetically related

36 Cf. a more thorough argumentation in *Ethik der Genetischen Frühdiagnostik. Sozialethische Reflexionen Zur Verantwortung am Menschlichen Lebensbeginn*. Hille Haker, "Eine Ethik der Elternschaft", in *Kinderwunsch und Reproduktionsmedizin*: *Ethische Herausforderungen der technisierten Fortpflanzung,* ed. Giovanni Maio, Tobias Eichinger and Claudia Bozzaro (Alber, 2013); Hille Haker, *Hauptsache gesund? Ethische Fragen Der Pränatal- und Präimplantationsdiagnostik* (Kösel, 2011).

37 Maureen Junker-Kenny, "Genetic Enhancement as Care or as Domination? The Ethics of Asymmetrical Relationships in the Upbringing of Children", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 1 (2005): 12.

child, as would be the case if they opted for sperm or egg donation that do not require genetic modification. The current debate reduces these options to the "no alternative" cases, which seem to be so rare or constructed for the purpose of the argument that it surprises how quickly the bioethics community — either the academic debate or the policy advisory groups in several countries — have embraced the argumentation that genetic modification is medically warranted, perhaps even beyond therapeutic interventions: the US National Academy of Science, for example, in only two years shifted "from *forbidden* until criteria are met, to *permitted* if criteria are met—even though the criteria have not yet been agreed upon."[38] Habermas does not address the question whether, in therapeutic scenarios, parental desires to have a genetically related child trump the future rights of children not to be exposed to unknown health risks and to their own reproductive freedom. But I would hold that his argument is stronger when these conflicting rights or interests are confronted: the symmetry of the relation may not be threatened because of the genetic modification *as such*, but it may well be threatened by the judgment that parental preferences (in this case to have a genetically related child or a particular child with certain genetic traits) are considered a right while the future children's rights (to their own health and to their own reproductive autonomy) are dismissed as either controllable in the future or outright irrelevant. The above-mentioned theological understanding that parental love must include a notion of *self-giving* can be transformed into an argument that parents must at least anticipate their future children as vulnerable agents, equal to their own vulnerable agency — agents who will have to live with the decisions their parents have made for them. From this perspective, I cannot see how parents can want their children to be subjected to unforeseeable health risks and to a potentially life-long monitoring for the sake of scientific oversight that includes the strong recommendation to use ART in their own reproductive decisions. The future children's right to the same freedoms that parents claim for themselves, not the assumed difference between genetic and social influences, ought to inform parental decisions.

38 Braun and Meacham, "The Trust Game: Crispr for Human Germline Editing Unsettles Scientists and Society", 1, (My emphasis). The NAS formulation in 2015 read: "not allowed as long as the risks have not been clarified," and in 2017: "allowed if the risks can be assessed more reliably."(quoted Braun and Meacham, "The Trust Game: Crispr for Human Germline Editing Unsettles Scientists and Society", 1).

Ultimately, the new technologies establish a new *regime* of what Foucault called "biopower", with agents subjecting themselves voluntarily to its inherent rationality. Moreover, the reference to reproductive autonomy conceals the fact that parents do not define the parameters of genetic modifications: scientists who are as interested in their research as they may be in couples' reproductive autonomy, e.g. private reproductive clinics such as Zhang's "Darwin Life" who enthusiastically embrace the "designing" of human beings, or research institutions decide what ought to be genetically modified. In short, the idealized sovereignty of parental agency is embedded in a web of scientific practices, which entails social evaluations that span from the ideal of "normal functioning" human beings to the good of genetically modified human beings. The experience of infertility or genetic susceptibility to disease, however, is a reminder of the limits of mastering our bodily functions, as couples entering ART know all too well. Practical rationality, in its necessary link to existential and moral identity, requires that social *and* scientific practices see human beings not just as living machines but as embodied moral agents.

The ethical concept of human dignity, I hold, responds to the vulnerability of human beings, i.e. to the contingency of one's body and bodily life, to the vulnerability to (moral) injuries and (moral) harm as well as to the social dependence (33f).[39] Human dignity is *constitutive* for the moral world that rests upon the mutual recognition and respect of equals, independent of the members' actual capabilities. Together with, not against Christian theology, philosophy reminds us that vulnerable agency involves, at least in part, opening up to one's own receptivity and affectability by another being whose very life one cannot control. This is certainly *not* an argument against autonomy or against ART, but it shifts the understanding of freedom from instrumental rationality to the realm of communicative action. Yet, I conceive this practice differently than Habermas. In my view, his mistake is that he too quickly narrows it to normative considerations. Vulnerable agency, as I understand it, means an *openness* to

39 The concept of vulnerable agency not only entails the susceptibility to frailty and moral harms but also to structural injuries that heighten the first two elements. On the other hand, vulnerability is connected to a positive, constitutive *openness* to experiences that are beyond one's control, rendering the moral self at the same fragile and open to transformations through the encounters with others and the world. Hille Haker, "Vulnerable Agency: A Conceptual and Contextual Analysis", in *Dignity and Conflict*: *Contemporary Interfaith Dialogue on the Value and Vulnerability of Human Life*, ed. Jonathan Rothschild and Matthew Petrusek (Notre Dame Univ. Press, 2020).

the other, to being *affected* and *addressed* by the other, and the aim of addressing and affecting others through one's own actions. This receptivity is relevant theologically, too. Johann Baptist Metz reminds Christians of theology's own understanding of being addressed. In a letter to Habermas from 2009, Metz explains that for him, the question of 'being' must be seen through an anthropological understanding: being human means "to have been addressed."[40] Faith is not a private religious experience but an experience of being the unexchangeable, unreplaceable addressee who is called to respond, first and foremost to the suffering other or those who need one's attention most urgently and/or directly.[41] With Kierkegaard, Habermas thinks of Christian faith as self-constitution that *originates* in God or the Divine, but I agree with Metz that faith means the openness to having been *addressed,* and not (merely) the metaphysical or transcendental condition of one's being-oneself. This theological concept of addressability can inform the ethical understanding of responsibility as response-ability that precedes and grounds the concept of accountability. Addressability (*Ansprechbarkeit*) and response-ability (*Antwortfähigkeit*) are the foundations for the *reasonability* of taking the moral perspective — even though it cannot ultimately be proven philosophically. To be sure, this does *not* solve the normative problem of a morally right action, or at any rate not without further mediations. But it may pave the way to the acknowledgment of the anticipated mutual recognition that ultimately defines moral responsibility in general, and parental responsibility in particular.

Prospective parents never set the agenda of their interaction with each other and/or their future child alone. Cultural, social and medical frameworks mediate prospective parental imaginations, and scientists regularly announce the technical possibilities publicly, emphasizing their scientific successes. In calling the decision to give birth to a child with a particular, perhaps dis-abling health condition *irresponsible*, bioethics may, however, only echo the self-understanding of a society that is threatened by persons who do not seem to fit into the mainstream understanding of "normal *social* functioning" when scientists speak of the *biological* 'normal species functioning' as an ethical threshold. My concern is that this culture, backed by utilitarian and

40 Johann B. Metz, *Gott in Zeit: Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 5*, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2017), 106.

41 Cf. Metz and Reikerstorfer, *Memoria Passionis*.

liberal bioethics alike, will create the grounds for an extended heteronomy, misrecognition, and extended injustice rather than fostering a culture of autonomy, recognition, and justice.

In the postscript to the English translation, Habermas assumes that the astonishment with which his book was met especially in the US is due to the different traditions and cultures of liberalism in the US and in Europe, and certainly in Germany. This may be the case. In the US, millions of people — and women especially — are denied reproductive healthcare services, with the indifference or explicit support of Christian communities and the Catholic Church. Bioethics, which must indeed aim at responding to those who are structurally most vulnerable to suffering and moral harms, cannot be separated from a social and political ethics. It must critique approaches that may emphasize the freedom of the individual but forget that for many, freedom is indeed "a precarious achievement of finite beings."[42] US bioethics, including both liberal and Christian bioethics, has long been indifferent to its own history and its continuing social *and* racialized injustice, and instead emphasized an autonomy that is out of reach for many groups.[43] In the US, the discrepancy between liberal values and principles and the political and legal denial of basic rights, including the right to healthcare, is striking. The unjust healthcare system affects people who live in poverty and/or are the working poor, people of color, women, and sexual minorities to a much higher degree than all other groups. For many of those individuals falling into these groups, the question of hereditary modification is most likely out of question. Public health policies — the issue Buchanan et al., among others, are addressing in their book — must attend to the context of these other reproductive injustices when promoting just access to ART and genetic enhancement of one's offspring. Obviously, it is too simple to merely point to other injustices when grappling with justice in the area of reproductive health services; but bioethicists can also not simply ignore these underlying health injustices in the very context they address. Hence, from a European perspective one may be instead surprised about the (liberal) surprise that Habermas is concerned

42 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 34.

43 Karla F. C. Holloway, *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, and a Cultural Bioethics* (Duke Univ. Press, 2011); Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, "Code Black: A Black Catholic Liberation Bioethics", *Paper presented at the Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium* (2009). Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis Books, 2010).

about the future of human freedom and dignity when genetic enhancement is promoted as a good for the human species. The defenders of enhancement are not concerned about *discerning* what "good" means in the ethical (and moral) understanding, and how the deliberation of the "right" can even enter the deliberation. If successful, I am not sure whether the "moral void" that Habermas fears as a future, has not already arrived.

For social and political ethics, existing structural vulnerabilities, harms, and injustices must orient public policies. Freedom may well be understood as the transcendental condition of morality; or it may be understood, as Habermas has it, in intersubjectivity terms. From a justice-oriented perspective, however, freedom must be spelled out further, namely as liberation from the unfreedom of oppressive structures and discrimination. Clearly, it is not easy to discern the best possible actions and policies in the context of ART and genetics. But today, this task calls for a new beginning of the relationship of philosophy and (Christian) theology. Informed by critical and moral theory, they are well able to discern and critique a scientific (as well as ethical) understanding that pursues a comprehensive vision of the good which it justifies only rhetorically: what is *called* "good," e.g. genetic enhancement, cannot be "bad." In future conversations, it will matter most *which* ethical or moral tradition and *which* theology one refers to, because perhaps the real threat today is that both disciplines are at risk to forget which questions they forget to ask.[44] Habermas reminds his readers that scientific and medical reification of human life may create new heteronomies, and as of today, his concerns have not lost their actuality.

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44 Johann B. Metz, "Verzeitlichung von Ontologie und Metaphysik". In *Gott in Zeit: Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 5*, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2017).

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MODERATE INCLUSIVISM AND THE CONVERSATIONAL TRANSLATION PROVISO: REVISING HABERMAS'S ETHICS OF CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract. Habermas's 'ethics of citizenship' raises a number of relevant concerns about the dangers of a secularistic exclusion of religious contributions to public deliberation, on the one hand, and the dangers of religious conflict and sectarianism in politics, on the other. Agreeing largely with these concerns, the paper identities four problems with Habermas's approach and attempts to overcome them: (a) the full exclusion of religious reasons from parliamentary debate; (b) the full inclusion of religious reasons in the informal public sphere; (c) the philosophical distinction between secular and religious reasons; and (d) the sociological distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western' religions. The result is a revised version of the ethics of citizenship, which I call *moderate inclusivism*. Most notably, moderate inclusivism implies a replacement of Habermas's 'institutional translation proviso' with a more flexible 'conversational translation proviso'.

I. HABERMAS'S ETHICS OF CITIZENSHIP[1]

There is a tension in deliberative democratic theory between two ideals: the ideal of inclusion and the ideal of generality. According to the ideal of inclusion, the legitimacy of laws, policies and basic rights depends on the extent to which all affected parties are able to raise their concerns and voice their opinions in ongoing processes of democratic deliberation. The ideal of generality, on the other hand, implies a claim about *the type of reasons* that are appropriate in political deliberation, namely those that can be shared and meaningfully evaluated across sectarian and subcultural divides. The simultaneous

1 I thank anonymous reviewers and members of the research group *Pluralism, Democracy and Justice* (UiT — The Arctic University of Norway) for comments and suggestions.

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commitment to both ideals creates a tension between the right to deliberate according to one's "authentic cognitive stance",[2] on the one hand, and the duty to present others with reasons that they can understand and asses in virtue of their "common human reason"[3], on the other. Put differently, there might be cases in which citizens have to choose between (a) disclosing "the whole truth as they see it"[4] in a political dispute, and (b) saying something that others can recognize as a valid or legitimate political argument.

Even though the tension between inclusion and generality applies to political debates in general, it is the specific case of religious argumentation that has received the most attention in political philosophy.[5] This is due not just to the fact that religion in politics is a theme that engages many citizens as well as philosophers, it also has to do with the fact that religious reasons are considered by many to be *paradigmatically* sectarian or non-shareable.[6] As Boettcher puts it: "Religious traditions have different authoritative texts, social teachings and methods of interpretation, and citizens cannot be expected generally to share distinctively religious standards of evaluation for political claims"[7]. Along similar lines, Habermas argues that religious claims to validity "remain particularistic even in the case of proselytizing creeds that aspire to worldwide inclusion".[8]

2 Cristina Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere: What are the Deliberative Requirements of Democratic Citizenship?", in Habermas and Religion, ed. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Wiley, 2013), 231–33.

3 John Rawls, Political Liberalism (Columbia Univ. Press, 2005), 137.

4 Rawls, Political Liberalism, 216.

5 See for example Robert Audi, "Wolterstorff on Religion, Politics, and the Liberal State", in *Religion in the Public Square*, ed. Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues", in *Religion in the Public Square*, ed. Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism", in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Columbia Univ. Press, 2011); Jeremy Waldron, "Two-Way Translation: The Ethics of Engaging with Religious Contributions in Public Deliberation", *Mercer Law Review* 63, no. 3 (2012); Andrew March, "Rethinking Religious Reasons in Public Justification", *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013); Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2017).

6 Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 232.

7 James W. Boettcher, "Habermas, Religion and the Ethics of Citizenship", Philosophy and Social Criticism 35, no. 1–2 (2009): 221–22.

8 Jürgen Habermas, "Reply to my Critics", in Habermas and Religion, ed. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Wiley, 2013), 374.

For Habermas, the truly distinguishing feature of religion — its "Alleinstellungsmerkmal"[9] — is its rootedness in cultic practices, and the corresponding distinction between members and non-members: "By using any kind of religious reasons, you are implicitly appealing to membership in a corresponding religious community".[10] Religious reasons therefore fail to satisfy the criterion of generality, and 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.[11] If religious reasons are unleashed without modification in institutionalized politics, the political community is "in constant danger of disintegrating into religious conflicts".[12] Given that the validity of religious reasons depends on the acceptance of "the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revelatory truths",[13] these conflicts cannot be resolved "at the cognitive level",[14] that is, through communicative means, but only through non-communicative means, such as voting, majority rule, bargaining, political power, or even violence.

According to Habermas, however, simply excluding religious reasons from political deliberation due to their lack of generality would create two serious problems in the political culture, one related to *injustice* and the other related to the *functional requirements* of modern democracies.

The first problem with excluding religious argumentation (the problem of injustice) is that an unfair asymmetry is created in the political culture, given that religious citizens will face an "unreasonable mental and psycho-

9 Jürgen Habermas, Nachmetaphysiches Denken (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012), 104.

10 Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, "Dialogue", in The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Columbia Univ. Press, 2011), 61. Lasse Thomassen mistakenly believes that, "for Habermas, religion provides a privileged example of ethical worldviews" (Lasse Thomassen, "Inclusion of the Other? Habermas and the Paradox of Tolerance", Political Theory 34, no. 4 (2006), 450). In fact, Habermas argues that ethical reasons are secular and therefor open to rational examination in a way that religious reasons — given their reliance on revealed doctrines of faith — are not: "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" (Jürgen Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion (MIT Press, 2008), 129).

11 Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", New Perspectives Quarterly 25, no. 4 (2008).

12 Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion, 135.

13 Ibid., 129.

14 Ibid., 135.

logical burden" that other citizens do not face.[15] If secular political discourse becomes the norm that everyone must obey, then, Habermas believes, non-religious citizens are able to speak their minds freely and directly whereas religious citizens are forced either to find a secular 'translation' of the view they wish to advocate, or withdraw from the debate. This is not necessarily a problem for all believers, but it will be a significant burden for those "monolingual" citizens[16] who are unable to distinguish between politics and religion. For them, the requirement of generality in political discussions will be experienced as "an attack on their personal identity".[17] From the standpoint of justice, this is a problem because the conditions for political participation — for realizing one's political autonomy — are unequal.[18]

The other problem with excluding religious argumentation from public deliberation has to do with the functional requirements of a liberal democracy. A stable and well-functioning democracy depends crucially on the active participation of the citizens[19] as well as on the citizens' attitudes and political virtues, such as the willingness to listen to opponents, to include minorities and marginalized groups in the political culture, and to sometimes sacrifice private goals for the sake of the common good.[20] Now, according to Habermas, religious traditions have the potential not only to motivate and inspire their own followers to take active part in politics and civil society, but also to contribute with insights, perspectives and motivational resources to the political culture more broadly.[21] For example, religious vocabularies have the potential to counterbalance the pressures from unbound capitalism and bureaucratization, as well from naturalistic worldviews and understandings of the human person, as manifested for example in genetic manipulation, which, according to Habermas, threaten to reify human relations and self-relations.[22] By this, they

15 Ibid., 130.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 I provide a critical discussion of this argument — Habermas's 'split identity objection' to Rawls and the standard liberal position — in part 3 of this paper.
19 Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity", in The Condition of Citizenship, ed. Bart van Steenbergen (Sage Publications, 2003), 27.
20 Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion, 105.
21 Simone Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion", Constellations 14, no. 2 (2007).
22 Jürgen Habermas, The Future of Human Nature (Polity Press, 2003).

keep alive a sensitivity for something that money, power and science cannot produce, namely a lifeworld that provides citizens with resources of meaning, identity and solidarity in a still more fragmented modernity:

> The liberal state has an interest in unleashing religious voices in the political public sphere, and in the political participation of religious organizations as well. It must not discourage religious persons and communities from also expressing themselves politically as such, for it cannot know whether secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity.[23]

By this, we should be able to see why Habermas's "ethics of citizenship"[24] attempts to overcome the tension between inclusion and generality, that is, to articulate the normative expectations associated with democratic citizenship in a way that takes both ideals into account. One the one hand, religious argumentation fails to satisfy the criterion of generality, and therefore poses a potential threat to the "unifying bond"[25] of multicultural democracies. On the other hand, completely excluding such arguments from political deliberation would not only be unfair, it would also cut modern societies off from important moral and ethical-political resources (the first pertaining to universally binding norms, the second to more context-bound democratic values, meanings and identities). So, how does Habermas's ethics of citizenship conceptualize the required balance between generality and (religious) inclusion?

Habermas's proposal is to articulate a dualistic conception according to which generality is taken care of in the formal or institutional public sphere, that is, in parliaments, courts, ministries and administration,[26] while inclusion is taken care of in the informal or "wild"[27] flows of communication that run through different non-governmental publics and are channeled by mass media.[28] With regard to the first, formal, sphere, Habermas sides with Rawls and the liberal tradition (e.g. Audi 1997; Boettcher 2009) against religious inclusivists such as Cooke (2007), Eberle (2002), and Wolterstorff (1997): "all coercively

23 Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion, 131.
24 Ibid., 140.
25 Ibid., 105.
26 Ibid., 130.
27 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT Press, 1996), 307.
28 Jürgen Habermas, "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research", *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006).

enforceable political decisions must be formulated and justifiable in a language that is equally intelligible to all citizens".[29] For Habermas, this 'must' implies not just a normative imperative but also an institutionally and legally enforceable exclusion of religious arguments: "In parliament, the rules of procedure must empower the house leader to strike religious positions or justifications from the official transcript".[30] This, of course, does not mean that religious citizens cannot advocate religiously inspired views and policies, based on religious values, but it means that these views should be translated into generally accessible and rationally examinable claims *before* entering the institutional threshold of the formal public sphere — also known as Habermas's "institutional translation proviso".[31]

With regard to the second, informal sphere, Habermas believes that this is the place to fully include religious citizens and their contributions to public life in general and political deliberation in particular. The informal sphere (or spheres) includes the media, civil society and forums of public debate outside of the state. It forms a "context of discovery"[32] in which the citizens' experiences, aspirations, hopes, identities, opinions, etc., are articulated, debated and revised in ongoing processes of communication and critical reflection. By taking part as free and equal deliberators in these processes, religious citizens are able to influence the democratic process 'from below', freely prioritizing what they see as the better argument, while at the same time accepting an institutional translation proviso 'from above'.

For Habermas, however, merely tolerating religious arguments in the informal sphere is not enough. In order to truly include religious citizens on equal, symmetrical conditions, non-religious citizens must be willing to listen to, and learn from, them: They must remain cognitively open to the rational insights of religious speech. Remember that, according to Habermas, religious citizens bear an asymmetrical burden in the public sphere: the institutional translation proviso is only a burden for *them*, not for secular citizens. The only way to mitigate this burden, he believes, is for religious citizens to participate in a joint translation process with their religious co-citizens. In this process, they should look actively for truth contents in religious argumentation and attempt to encapsulate these from particular religious doctrines so that they can be included

29 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 134.
30 Ibid., 131.
31 Ibid., 130.
32 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 307.

as reasons in the formal sphere: "a liberal political culture can even expect its secularized citizens to participate in efforts to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a publicly accessible language".[33]

Cristina Lafont, however, argues that this expectation makes excessive demands on non-believers in public deliberation, expecting them to conceal their true opinions about religion, say, their authentic views on the religious opposition to homosexual marriage:

> Let's take the example of the current political debate on gay marriage. It is hard to see why a serious engagement in this debate would require secular citizens to open their minds to the possible truth of religious claims against homosexuality. It seems to me that a perfectly serious way of engaging in that debate is to offer the objections and counter arguments needed to show why the proposed policy is wrong, if one thinks it is. Objecting to the unequal treatment involved in denying the right to marriage to a group of citizens, or appealing to anti-discrimination laws to justify opposition to this policy seem perfectly appropriate ways to participate in such public debate.[34]

I agree with Lafont that it would be utterly unjustified to expect secular citizens to remain 'cognitively open' to particular interpretations of what the Bible or the Quran say about homosexuality, at least if 'open' means that one is expected to look actively for their 'truth content'. It is therefore important to point out that the cognitive openness that is required of non-believers does not imply any duty to take an affirmative or uncritical stance to religious speech as such. The point is rather that there *may* be valuable potentials in religious speech, and that the view that religion has *nothing* to offer an enlightened humanity — "enlightenment fundamentalism"[35] — is therefore false. In a response to Lafont, Habermas therefore stresses that the ethics of citizenship does not repress secular citizens' disbelief in religion, but simply encourages them not to dismiss public speech *merely* because it is religious:

> Secular citizens can meet this obligation [the ethics of citizenship] without denying their own disbelief in any kind of religious teaching. They are only asked not to exclude the possibility that religious speech might contain traces of a lost or repressed, or otherwise unavailable, normative intuition that is compelling and still awaits a saving translation.[36]

33 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 310.
34 Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 239.
35 Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society".
36 Habermas, "Reply to my Critics", 372.

In my view, Lafont's critique is nevertheless important because it points to a weakness in Habermas's understanding of contemporary religion. There is a tendency in Habermas to regard religion as either 'good' or 'bad': Religion is *either* characterized as an intolerant fundamentalism *or* as an inspirational source of meaning, identity and morality. This is probably a meaningful way of describing some religious groups and traditions, but certainly not all. For example, conservative religious views on the nuclear family, abortion, or homosexuality, may neither be fundamentalist nor contain the kind of epistemic insights that Habermas wants secular citizens to look for. The normative requirement of openness can therefore be maintained only in a very abstract sense, as in 'do not dismiss all religious speech simply in virtue of being religious'. It cannot be maintained as a requirement to reflect deeply on the possible truth content of every argument that religious citizens put forward in public discourse, and it certainly cannot imply any duty to refrain from disagreement with religious speech *qua* religious. As McCarthy puts it: "channeling religious views on to an ethical track [by translating them into secular conceptions of the good] does not end disagreement: it opens the field to reasonable disagreements about ethical matters".[37]

II. MODERATE INCLUSIVISM AND PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

This paper sympathizes with Habermas's attempt to integrate the ideals of inclusion and generality in the philosophical debate about religious reasons in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the following sections argue in favor of specific revisions of his approach, beginning with the *full exclusivism* he defends in the domain of parliamentary debate, and advocating instead what I call a *moderate inclusivism*.[38]

I agree with Habermas that religious reasons (as he understands them) have no place in the law, the constitution or the courtroom. However, parliamentary

37 Thomas McCarthy, "The Burdens of Modernized Faith and Postmetaphysical Reason in Habermas's 'Unfinished Project of Modernity'", in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Wiley, 2013), 128.

38 Kjersti Fjørtoft and I outline the basic features of moderate inclusivism in Jonas Jakobsen, Kjersti Fjørtoft, "In Defense of Moderate Inclusivism: Revisiting Rawls and Habermas on Religion in the Public Sphere", in *Etikk i praksis — Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics* 12, no. 2 (2018), 143–157. The present paper develops the position in new directions and takes up different aspects of Habermas's theory.

debate is different because it provides a forum for political contestation and deliberation *before* policies and legislation are given their final form. As Rostbøll argues, there is a principal difference between the reasons we initially bring to a process of political deliberation, and the justifications we settle on when we make decisions.[39] To be sure, this is a very Habermasian point, but the difference is that, within certain limits, I believe that controversial, provocative, and non-shareable reasons should be tolerated also in parliamentary debate and not just in the weak or informal public spheres.[40]

To see why, consider Rawls' point that imposing the duty of civility as a legal constraint would be "incompatible with free speech".[41] This is important because the legitimacy of laws and constitutional principles hinges on the fairness and formal features of the preceding processes of argumentation and counter-argumentation. If these procedures are in any way asymmetrical or biased, the outcome cannot be justified to all parties (say, the losing numerical minority) with reference to the fairness of the democratic process itself. Given that there are many types of non-religious speech that are just as controversial, and just as unintelligible to outsiders, as is religious speech,[42] formally restricting the free speech of religious members of parliament, and only these, is bound to produce distrust in the democratic procedure. If, say, atheists or representatives of non-religious cultural groups are free to articulate their "comprehensive doctrines"[43] in parliamentary debates, why not, say, Christians or Muslims? Why should populist anti-immigration rhetoric be tolerated, but not religiously justified defenses of our duty to alleviate suffering and poverty, or combat climate change? Habermas could of course reply that *all* political justifications that are based on controversial worldviews should be expelled from the domain of parliamentary discourse, but this would lead him down a dangerous road of paternalism and state interference with free speech.

On this background, I reject Habermas's full exclusivism in parliamentary debate. However, my rejection does not entail a full-blown inclusivism

39 Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion, 118.

40 Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, 304–14. My aim in this paper is not to take a position on these limits, but I would certainly not include racist epithets or incitements to violence in the domain tolerable speech.

41 Rawls, Political Liberalism, 445.

42 Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism".

43 Rawls, Political Liberalism, 58.

of the style or Wolterstorff (1997), Eberle (2002) or Cooke (2007), but rather what I call a *moderate inclusivism*. Moderate inclusivism agrees with Habermas that there are normative expectations and duties of civility in parliamentary deliberation, but, in line with Rawls, it conceives these obligations as *ethical*, not legal or institutional.[44] As Rawls puts it in his famous 'proviso', we should be allowed to "introduce into political discussion at any time our comprehensive doctrine, religious or non-religious, provided that, in due course, we give properly public reasons to support the principles and policies our comprehensive doctrine is said to support".[45]

The reason why politicians and lawmakers have an ethical duty to supplement comprehensive arguments with 'properly public' ones is related to the mutual respect they — and the groups they represent — owe each other *qua* free and equal members of the political community. Consider Nussbaums point that "even if governments don't coerce people, the very announcement that a given religion (or antireligion) is the preferred view, is a kind of insult to people who in all conscience cannot share this view and wish to continue to go their own way".[46] If this is true, it follows that there is also something disrespectful about *arguing* that the state should defend a particular faith or controversial worldview. According to moderate inclusivism, therefore, respect for persons qua free and equal should be reflected also in the deliberative process that takes place before majority decisions are made in parliament. Lawmakers, in other words, should (attempt to) state their political positions in terms that all citizens are able to understand and evaluate in virtue of "their common human reason".[47]

Moderate inclusivism, as presented so far, guarantees free speech in a non-arbitrary fashion in parliamentary debate. It also considers religious argumentation as ethically permissible in such debate, as long as it is supplemented 'in due course' with more accessible reasons. However, in order to be fully con-

44 In fact, Rawls characterizes the duty of civility as a "moral duty" (Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 445), not as an ethical one. The reason why I use 'ethical' rather than 'moral' has to with Habermas's distinction between the 'moral' and the 'ethical-political': The first referring to universally binding norms, the second to more context-bound norms and expectations associated with liberal democratic citizenship. My argument in favor of moderate inclusivism in this paper is an ethical-political one and leaves the stronger debate about universal validity aside.

45 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 453.

46 Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (The Belknap Press, 2012), 242–43.

47 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 137.

vincing, my position still needs some further clarifications. Consider the case of a Christian member of parliament — politician X — who appeals to her faith in order to advocate a policy of inclusion and equality, or even neighborly love, in the domain of immigration and asylum policy. Imagine also that neither those who agree, nor those who disagree, with politician X are bothered by her religious language as such. Those who disagree criticize the *policies* she suggests, and those who agree but do not share her religious faith simply translate her religious arguments into secular arguments about human rights, dignity, and moral responsibility, perhaps without even thinking about it. If politician X does not provide a 'proper political argument' in due course, does that mean that she is behaving uncivilized or disrespectfully?

In contrast to both Rawls and Habermas, moderate inclusivism does not hold the strong view that religious argumentation without 'secular supplementation' is *always* uncivil in parliamentary deliberation, regardless of the particular discursive situation in which it emerges. If no participants in a discussion are worried by a specific religious argument, if no one fails to understand it or feels that it blocks the rationality of the discussion, then there is nothing wrong with it, at least not *qua* religious. If, however, the receivers of a religious argument are uncomfortable with it, find it disrespectful, or simply fail to understand its precise content and premises, they have a right to ask for a non-religious equivalent or 'translation' of that argument, and the speaker has a duty to (attempt to) provide one. Put differently, lawmakers have a "right to justification" that respects the criteria of "reciprocity" (what X demands for herself must be equally demanded for everyone else) and "generality" (the reasons she uses must be shareable for all),[48] but they also have the capacity to decide for themselves precisely *when* a religious argument violates these criteria. They do not need a political theorist to decide this for them in advance.

On this basis, I suggest to revise Habermas's 'institutional translation proviso' in the following way. First, as already mentioned, the proviso is ethical rather than legal in the domain of parliamentary debate; otherwise it would be incompatible with a non-arbitrary defense of free speech. Second, lawmakers do not have a duty to come up with non-comprehensive reasons unless they are asked to do so by those they deliberate *with*. Thus, lawmakers may freely refer to their comprehensive religious or non-religious doctrines

48 Rainer Forst, *The Right to Justification* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2011), 6.

in parliamentary debate, and there is no general duty to always supplement religious reasons with non-religious ones, but there is a duty to provide a non-comprehensive translation of political standpoints *if and only if* such a translation is called for by co-discussants. I shall refer to this duty as the *'conversational translation proviso'* (CTP), given that it is triggered *in* conversation, not prescribed as a presupposition *for* conversation.

The CTP solves a problem with Rawls' "idea of public reason"[49] and Habermas's ethics of citizenship, namely that, as Chambers notes, it is often difficult to know whether a specific religious argument is justificatory or not:

> When is quoting from scripture or appealing to Divine powers a justification and when is it simply a rhetorical flourish? When are religious appeals inspirational and motivational and when are they justificatory? When is God-talk part of a set of interlocking, parallel or convergent reasons and when is it the exclusive foundation of a proposal? We need to know these things to be able assess whether an utterance falls outside of public reason.[50]

Justificatory religious arguments (say, 'this law is wrong *because* it goes against what the Bible says') are clearly problematic in political debates because they assume that *all* citizens are bound — not just spiritually and morally but also politically and legally — by the authority of specific doctrines, scriptures, practices or holy figures. However, as Waldron notes,[51] there are many other types of "respectable speech acts" in political deliberation than justificatory ones.[52] To take Waldron's example: When a religious spokesperson takes a public stance against torture, she might want to draw attention to an important topic, to address fellow believers, or simply to *explain her view* to others, without expecting non-believers to be persuaded by the religious premises of her view.[53] A rigid and general exclusion of 'religious arguments' is therefore likely to exclude what was never intended to be a justificatory political argument, but merely, say, an explanation or clarification of a viewpoint. Surely, we cannot expect believers to always make it explicit that 'this is what I believe, but I accept that you believe otherwise'.

49 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 441.

50 Simone Chambers, "Secularism Minus Exclusion: Developing a Religious Friendly Idea of Public Reason", *The Good Society* 19, no. 2 (2010): 16.

51 Also Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 462–66.

52 Waldron, "Two-Way Translation".

53 Ibid., 858.

The CTP solves this problem because it avoids an overly rigid application of Habermas's as well as Rawls' respective provisos. It does not require a translation when no one demands it, and it allows the question of justificatory versus non-justificatory reasons to be settled by discussants themselves: If I am in doubt about the intentions of a religious argument, then I am free to investigate it, asking the speaker to clarify why he or she makes it, and whether it is meant to be justificatory or not.

Finally, given that modern liberal democracies are diverse and multicultural, the likelihood that all members of parliament belong to the same religion (or even identify with a religious tradition) is small, and so is the risk that the CTP is never triggered in practice. However, in order to avoid situations where all lawmakers share the same religious beliefs, justifying the law in religious terms that minorities cannot accept, moderate inclusivism adds a final normative premise, namely that representatives of cultural-religious minorities are regularly consulted, allowing them to trigger the CTP and ask for non-religious justifications. I call this the 'duty of consultation'.

III. THE INFORMAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Having addressed some of the difficulties with Habermas's exclusion of religious argumentation from parliamentary debate and suggested a revised approach called moderate inclusivism, I now proceed to examine whether moderate inclusivism and its CTP is a convincing alternative also for the informal public sphere. I shall argue that it is.

The first argument in favor of moderate inclusivism in the informal sphere is that it preserves an important ethical intuition about equal respect. In the previous section I briefly mentioned that respect between free and equal citizens implies a duty for lawmakers in parliament to supplement comprehensive arguments with non-comprehensive ones, if asked to do so, at least in political controversies over coercive law, institutional design and policy making. But why should this duty apply only to lawmakers and state officials? If a religious spokesperson insists on national television that a particular law should be enacted in accordance with specific Christian or Islamic doctrines, refusing to give any kind of non-religious justification, she also suggests that those who do not share her faith are nevertheless bound by it, and that she is willing to impose her faith on all others through politics and law. This is incompatible with

the kind of basic respect that Habermas himself sees as the essence of a "liberal political culture", namely "symmetrical relations of reciprocal recognition, including those between the members of different identity groups".[54]

So, whereas Habermas "extends *carte blanche* to the religious citizen who wishes to advance religious arguments for political positions",[55] moderate inclusivism expects all citizens to obey the CTP, at least when engaged in political deliberation about legal coercion and basic rights. By this, moderate inclusivism takes seriously Habermas's own claim that free and equal citizens "owe one another good reasons",[56] and it distributes the "normative expectations associated with democratic citizenship"[57] equally to all citizens, including religious ones. Of course, what exactly counts as being 'engaged in deliberation' is a controversial issue that I do not attempt to solve here. I do, however, think that two conditions should be met, namely *publicness* and *consent*. Publicness implies that the place of deliberation is a genuinely public political forum such as radio, television or newspapers. Consent implies that that deliberating parties know and recognize that they are deliberating. On this definition, of course, there are many types of public discourse, and many types of political expressions and statements, that do not count as 'deliberation', meaning that they are not bound by the CTP.

The second argument in favor of moderate inclusivism is a consequentialist one, namely that public deliberation is unlikely to produce the kind of solidarity, mutual understanding and even "constitutional patriotism"[58] that Habermas hopes for, as long as the informal public sphere is permeated by the political use of religious or otherwise sectarian speech. In order to elaborate this point, consider the two main reasons why Habermas believes that the *formal* public sphere must be secular. First, Habermas argues that "by opening parliaments to conflicts over religious certainties, governmental authority can become the agent of a religious majority that imposes its will in violation of the democratic procedure".[59] In parliamentary debate, therefore, majority rule take a repressive form if a religious majority refuses to offer political justifications that the outvoted minority can "follow and evaluate in the

54 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 293.
55 Patrick Neal, "Habermas, Religion, and Citizenship", *Politics and Religion* 7, no. 2 (2014): 324.
56 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 121.
57 Ibid., 136.
58 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 500.
59 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 134.

light of shared standards".[60] Second, in his criticism of Wolterstorff's inclusivism, Habermas argues that the use of religious argumentation in formalized politics introduces a type of conflict into the political system that cannot be solved deliberatively, "at the cognitive level".[61] Following Wolterstorff's model, therefore, would lead to a situation in which the political community would always be in danger of disintegrating into religious antagonism and conflict.[62]

I believe Habermas's is correct in pointing to these risks — the risk of majoritarian domination and the risk of antagonistic conflict — but I do not see why they are not equally present, and, potentially, equally damaging, in the informal spheres. Why should these risks disappear when citizens address conflicts, disagreements or controversial topics in mainstream media, social media or other channels of political communication? It seems uncontroversial to say that the majority's insistence on religious language in political disputes may function as a kind of discursive dominance or provoke a spiral of antagonistic conflicts, also in the broader channels of public communication. Citizens know that the forms of communication that take place in the informal spheres affect institutionalized politics. The insistence on religious justifications by one group is therefore likely to worry other groups or disrupt ties of solidarity and trust in pre-formal discursive contexts. These risks are not really considered by authors who cite Habermas in order to defend the full and unmodified inclusion of religious reasons in the informal public spheres, such as Cecile Laborde (2017, 125), Maeve Cooke[63] and Simone Chambers (2007).

IV. THE SPLIT IDENTITY OBJECTION

The previous section considered an ethical and a consequentialist argument for preferring moderate inclusivism over Habermas's full inclusivism in the informal public spheres. The present section revisits Habermas's 'split identity argument' to see whether it creates a problem for moderate inclusivism. After all, the split identity objection is intended to demonstrate the overly de-

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 135.

62 Ibid.

63 Maeve Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion", *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (2007).

manding and unjust nature of any approach that confronts religious believers with normative expectations in the informal domains of public deliberation.

As mentioned in section 1, the split identity objection pertains to the alleged unfairness of demanding something of religious citizens that is psychologically burdensome for them — and *only* for them. "To date", Habermas argues, "only citizens committed to religious beliefs are required to split up their identities, as it were, into their public and private elements".[64] Given that this asymmetry characterizes the formal public sphere and its institutions, Habermas argues, one way of compensating the religious is to grant them a full and unmodified right to use religious arguments and justifications in the informal spheres, such as public media and other non-governmental fora of deliberation.

By claiming this, Habermas accepts a variant of the so-called "split identity objection"[65] or "integralist objection to political liberalism",[66] as articulated by authors such as Nicholas Wolterstorff and Christopher Eberle. This objection is based on the claim that (some) religious citizens are simply unable to make any kind of distinction between their religious identity and their political viewpoints.[67] As Wolterstorff puts it: "Their religion is not, for them, about something other than their social and political existence".[68]

In fact, however, it is difficult to find a political standpoint that religious citizens or spokespersons want to defend but cannot defend without relying *only* on specific doctrines of faith. Audi, for example, states that controversial issues such as abortion, homosexuality, affirmative action, or periods reserved for prayer or meditation in schools are "easily approached from the points of view of natural law and secular justice".[69] His point is not merely that religiously inspired positions *can* be stated in a secular vocabulary, but also that secular reasons are not necessarily alien or external to the identity of the religious citizen. As Habermas puts it, "religious certainties of faith are interconnected with fallible convictions

64 Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity", 109.

65 Melissa Yates, "Rawls and Habermas on Religion in the Public Sphere", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33, no. 7 (2007): 881.

66 Mark Jensen, "The Integralist Objection to Political Liberalism", *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 2 (2005): 158.

67 Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, 145.

68 Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues", 105.

69 Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Religion in the Public Square* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 127.

of a secular nature",[70] meaning that secular and religious reasons are not antithetical as such, but interwoven *within* the religious worldview.

To further illustrate this point, consider the case of abortion. The religious objection to abortion is regarded by some inclusivists as a paradigm example of a viewpoint that *cannot* be articulated in secular terms. According to Thomassen, for example, "thinking of about abortion according to this distinction between the ethical [or religious] and the political is precisely what the anti-abortionist cannot do. For her, it is not a question of political procedure, but of divine revelation transcending any ethical-political distinction".[71] Is Thomassen right that the anti-abortionist cannot express her authentic cognitive stance in non-religious terms? According to Waldron, Christian opponents of abortion tend *not* to base their arguments on 'divine revelation':

> The argument against abortion, such as it is, is mainly a natural law argument based on the apparent continuity of fetal development and it is perfectly intelligible to a secular moral sensibility. The religious aspect is just the disciplined insistence on taking the continuity of human life (both in and outside the womb) seriously in light of what biblical faith tells us about the preciousness of human life generally.[72]

Something similar can be said about the Islamic position, at least as interpreted by the influential Sunni scholar, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: "Muslim jurists agree unanimously that after the fetus is completely formed and has been given a soul, aborting it is *haram*. (…) it constitutes an offence against a complete, live human being.[73] Qaradawi does not refer to 'divine revelation', but describes an Islamic moral argument about when the human being has a soul — and moral and legal rights as such.[74] As March notes, it is precisely because non-believers do not need to accept particular revelatory claims or the authority of clerical figures that they can understand much of the religious opposition to abortion, torture and euthanasia, and accept it as morally relevant.[75] Arguing that 'life begins at conception' or that 'all human life is sacred' does not

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

71 Thomassen, "Inclusion of the Other?", 444.

72 Waldron, "Two-Way Translation", 855.

73 Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (American Trust Publications, 1994), 201.

74 Please note that I am neither defending nor criticizing standpoints about abortion here, but simply analyzing their alleged 'religious' character.

75 March, "Rethinking Religious Reasons in Public Justification", 529.

count as *religious* argumentation in Habermas's sense: There is no reference to revealed doctrines, holy prophets or sacred scriptures, and there is no appeal to membership in a specific community of faith.

To conclude this section, it seems exaggerated to say that moderate exclusivism and its CTP, when applied to the informal public spheres, imposes an unbearable psychological burden on the religious, and threatens their personal integrity. Sometimes, in some situations, believers who put forward a religious argument in political disputes will be asked to supplement this argument with a less sectarian one, but, for all we know about the complex interrelatedness of religious and secular reasoning, they will hardly be asked to speak a 'foreign' langue that threatens their religious identity.

V. SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS REASONS

In the previous section, I argued that Habermas's split identity argument overstates the burden of translation that confronts believers who are asked to supplement religious with non-religious argumentation. Another counterargument against the split identity objection that I find convincing pertains not so much to the alleged psychological pain involved in translating religious into non-religious argumentation, but to the assertion that *only* believers are burdened by the ethics of citizenship. In short, this argument says that also non-believers may at times find it difficult to use a 'shareable' political vocabulary in public debates. Also comprehensive secular doctrines, so the argument goes, may be too sectarian to count as 'public-political' in the relevant sense. Obeying the ethics of citizens may sometimes be frustrating, but the burden is not *asymmetrically* distributed in favor of non-religious citizens, as Habermas believes.

The reason why Habermas believes that secular citizens are not burdened by the normative expectations of democratic citizenship is that, on his account, secular reasons are per definition public and fallible: "secular reasons can be expressed in a 'public' or generally shared language".[76] However, as Christina Lafont points out, non-religious reasons that are based on different and conflicting conceptions of the good cannot be considered generally

76 Habermas and Taylor, "Dialogue", 61.

shareable just in virtue of being secular.[77] This is also Craig Calhoun's point when stating that both religious and secular orientations to the world depend on strong epistemic and moral commitments that are partly pre-reflexive and pre-rational: "secular reasons are also embedded in culture and belief and not simply matters of fact or reason alone".[78] On this background, moderate inclusivism argues with Rawls that the relevant distinction to draw when outlining a normative ethics of citizenship is not between secular and religious, but between shareable and non-shareable. The distinction between shareable and non-shareable may then be drawn and conceived in different ways, but the important point is to avoid the untenable claim that secular reasons are *always* shareable. In Rawls' words: "we must distinguish public reason from what is sometimes referred to as secular reason and secular values. These are not the same as public reason. For I define secular reasoning in terms of comprehensive nonreligious doctrines".[79]

By abandoning the distinction between 'shareable secular' and 'non-shareable religious' reasons, moderate inclusivism also distances itself from Habermas's generalized distinction between secular and religious 'consciousness':

> [S]ecular consciousness has no difficulty in recognizing that an alien ethos has the same authenticity and the same priority for the other as one's own ethos has for oneself. The situation is different for the believer who draws her ethical self-understanding from religious truths that claim universal validity. As soon as the idea of the correct life takes its orientation from religious paths to salvation or metaphysical conceptions of the good, a divine perspective (or a 'view from nowhere') comes into play which (or from where) other ways of life appear not just different but *mistaken*.[80]

77 Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 232, also Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism".

78 Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere", in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Mark Juergensmeyer (OUP, 2011), 82.

79 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 452. A further (Rawlsian) reason to avoid premising moderate inclusivism on Habermas's overall theory of communicative rationality and 'secular reason', is that, as Thomas McCarthy argues, this theory amounts to a comprehensive philosophy, and is highly controversial as such (McCarthy, "The Burdens of Modernized Faith and Postmetaphysical Reason in Habermas's 'Unfinished Project of Modernity'", 117). That does not mean that the theory is wrong, merely that reasonable persons will disagree about it, and that moderate inclusivism does not need to subscribe to it as a whole to defend itself.

80 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 309.

It is true that secular political *philosophy* prioritizes worldview pluralism above the commitment to a 'correct' way living, but not that all secular *citizens* do. For example, atheists may very well find religious ways of life *mistaken* in the sense that they are based on false claims about the nature of reality, the existence of God, or man's purpose in the world, and this view may lead them into a political struggle against the public influence of religion. Atheists who still want to comply with the ethics of citizenship may therefore face some of the same difficulties as religious citizens, i.e. they may have to admit that the concern with justice requires them to exercise some self-restraint when justifying their political positions to fellow citizens. Habermas might agree with this particular point, and he might argue that my reading of the passage just cited is too rigid. However, he cannot agree with the normative conclusion I draw without revising his position, namely that *as long as both religious and non-religious citizens at times find it difficult to obey the ethics of citizenship, the burden of public deliberation is not* asymmetrically *distributed*.

VI. WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN RELIGIONS?

What I have argued so far is that moderate inclusivism and its CTP is a better and more convincing alternative for the formal and informal public spheres than is Habermas's current formulation of the ethics of citizenship. Also, I have defended moderate inclusivism against Habermas's 'split identity objection', in particular because it relies on an unconvincing claim about the asymmetrical 'burden of translation', as well as on a problematic distinction between secular and religious reasons.

The final section addresses a further issue in Habermas's understanding of religion in the public sphere, namely the distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western' religion, and the normative implications he draws from this distinction. Pace Holst and Molander,[81] Habermas does not regard *all* religious people as devout in a "totalizing sense", incapable of distinguishing between secular morality and specific doctrines of faith. According to Habermas, namely, a distinguishing feature of "Western culture" is the histor-

81 Cathrine Holst and Anders Molander, "Jürgen Habermas on Public Reason and Religion: Do Religious Citizens Suffer an Asymmetrical Cognitive Burden, and Should They be Compensated?", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 18, no. 5 (2015): 553–54.

ical "transformation of religious consciousness," which has enabled religious members of this culture to come to terms with the normative requirements of the secular state and to relate to their own truth claims in a "self-reflexive manner".[82] After all, therefore we *can* expect members of 'Western' Judeo-Christian faith communities to observe the normative expectations associated with democratic citizenship. Habermas is no doubt right that large differences exist with regard to the integration of secular-liberal norms into the doctrines and practices of different religious communities. However, drawing the relevant distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western' leaves the question of Islam and other religions "worryingly unanswered".[83]

Some critics interpret Habermas's remarks about the differences between Western and non-Western religions as Eurocentric and Islamophobic.[84] Jansen, for example, argues that Habermas expresses exactly the kind of downgrading and prejudiced attitude towards Islam and Muslims, which characterizes much islamophobic discourse today.[85] Jansen refers mainly to Habermas's essay "Notes on Post-Secular Society" in which he notes how long it took before Catholicism and Protestantism officially committed themselves to the principles of human rights and democracy: "[t]he Catholic Church first pinned its colors to the mast of liberalism and democracy with second Vaticanum in 1965. And in Germany, the Protestant Church did not act differently".[86] Having observed this, Habermas then goes on to argue that "many Muslim communities still have this painful learning process before them".[87] In the German version of the same text, the claim is not that 'many Muslim communities' have a learning process before them, but that "Islam" has.[88]

82 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 137.

83 Catherine Audard, "Rawls and Habermas on the Place of Religion in the Political Domain", in *Rawls and Habermas: Disputing the Political*, ed. James G. Finlayson and Fabien Freyenhagen (Routledge, 2011), 229.

84 E.g. Luca Mavieli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam: The Secular and the Postsecular* (Routledge, 2012).

85 Yolande Jansen, "Postsecularism, piety and fanaticism: Reflections on Jürgen Habermas's and Saba Mahmood's critiques of secularism", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 9 (2011).

86 Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", 27.

87 Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", 27.

88 Jürgen Habermas, "Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung", *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 53, no. 4 (2008).

What I take Habermas to mean is that mainstream Islamic theology has not made itself compatible with modern egalitarianism (human rights and democracy) to the same *degree* as Christian theology has. We may consider this as a kind of 'critique of Islam' in the sense that Habermas urges Islamic scholars and theologians to make the religion more compatible with these norms: "[t]hey are expected to appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith".[89] According to Jansen, however, Habermas is not just proposing a discursive critique of religion, he also "generalizes about Muslims in terms of how their assumed orthodoxy would determine their identities in a liberal democracy",[90] drawing on "earlier European imaginaries" about the fanaticism of Islam and Muslims:

> Voltaire's *Mahmot ou le fanatisme* is famous in this regard, but it is also important to know that Kant, although he does treat Islam systematically, says some occasional things about it in his anthropology, actually in the part on mental diseases 'Fanaticism [*Schwärmerei*], 'the most dangerous human deceptive screen [*Blendwerk*], leads to extremities such as 'putting Muhammad on the throne'.[91]

This is misleading because Habermas nowhere portrays Islam as *inherently* fanatic, or *essentially* different from other religions. Habermas regards Islam as a world religion from which secular philosophy has learned a lot: "Philosophy has repeatedly learned through its encounters with religious traditions — and also, of course, with Muslim traditions".[92] Furthermore, Habermas explicitly states — rightly or wrongly — that Islam is on the *same* path as European Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, in contrast to islamophobic ideas about Islam as a threat or a fundamental 'other',[93] Habermas emphasizes the *similarities* between Islam and Christianity, suggesting however that Christianity has made greater progress when it comes to integrating liberal democratic norms into its doctrinal core. Jansen therefore goes too far when claiming that Habermas is "spreading prejudice about Islam and Muslims".[94] There is no emphasis in Habermas on Muslims as problems or threats; on the

89 Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", 27.
90 Jansen, "Postsecularism, piety and fanaticism", 990.
91 Ibid.
92 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 142.
93 Mavieli, *Europe's Encounter with Islam*.
94 Jansen, "Postsecularism, piety and fanaticism", 992.

contrary, the general tendency is characterize to Muslims as a *resource*, and to stress the need to include Muslims *as Muslims* in existing political cultures: "Muslim immigrants cannot be integrated into Western society in defiance of their religion but only with it".[95]

However, I am still somewhat uncomfortable with Habermas's use of the term 'Islam' in the German version of the quotation above, and also with his generalized comparison of 'Islam' and 'Christianity'. Habermas should have made it clearer that neither Islam nor Christianity has an essence or stable unity, but consists of a multiplicity of traditions, scriptural interpretations, customs, groups, sects, and so forth, that is, he should have refrained from speaking in evaluative terms about 'Islam' and other religions as such. Recognizing internal diversity in cultural-religious traditions is an epistemic virtue because it makes the discussion more focused: *which* version of Islam are we talking about? It is also a moral virtue because it avoids the stigmatization involved in saying that all versions of Islam — and therefore potentially all Muslims — have a 'learning process' before them.

To sum up, moderate inclusivism agrees with Habermas that the process of separating church and state is much more advanced in Western democracies than in societies in which religious worldviews, institutions, practices etc. plays a dominant structuring role, or did until recently. At the same time, moderate inclusivism is more careful not to compare religions as if they were unified and internally consistent wholes. Also, moderate inclusivism assumes that citizens who support the basic principles of a liberal democratic regime are also able and willing to obey the CTP, that is, to offer to fellow citizens a non-sectarian justification in political disputes, if asked to do so. By this, moderate inclusivism has another advantage over Habermas's own formulation of the ethics of citizenship, namely that it distributes the normative expectations of democratic citizenship equally, rather than premising these expectations on a grand theory about different religions and the ethical competencies associated with their members.[96]

95 Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", 25. I elaborate my refusal of the argument that Habermas's theory is Eurocentric and hostile to Islam in Jonas Jakobsen, "The Claims of Freedom: Habermas's Deliberative Multiculturalism and the Right to Free Speech" (UiT — The Arctic University of Norway, 2017), part V.

96 I discuss the issue of 'Islam in Europe' from a Habermasian perspective in Jonas Jakobsen, "Secularism, Liberal Democracy, and Islam in Europe: A Habermasian Critique of Talal Asad",

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SUPERSESSION OR TRANSLATION OF THE SACRED? JÜRGEN HABERMAS'S TURN TO A "POST-SECULAR SOCIETY"

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Abstract. In this article I place Jürgen Habermas's recent turn to a "post-secular society" in the context of his previous defence of a "postmetaphysical" view of modernity. My argument is that the concept of "postsecular" introduces significant normative tensions for the formal and pragmatic view of reason defended by Habermas in previous works. In particular, the turn to "a post-secular society" threatens the evolutionary narrative that Habermas (following Weber and Hegel) espoused in his major works, according to which modern "communicative" reason dialectically supersedes religion. If this narrative is undermined, I argue, the claim to universality of "communicative" reason is also undermined. Thus, the benefits Habermas seeks to obtain from the recent postsecular project are offset by a destabilization of tenets central to a "postmetaphysical" view of modernity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The article discusses the reflections on faith, reason and secularism that Jürgen Habermas has put forth in his more recent writings, seeking to evaluate them in light of some important theses from previous work.[1] Habermas's recent writings represent a shift away from the narrative of *sublation* of the sacred that dominated all his mature works, from *The Theory of Communicative Action* (vol.1 1981/ vol. 2 1987), to *The Philosophical Disourse of Modernity* (1987), to *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Wedded to an evolutionary perspective of society, this narrative pre-

1 I presented the main argument of this article on various occasions, and I wish to thank here the following people for their comments and support: Simone Chambers, Ronald Beiner, John Harman, David Ingram, Amy Linch, Lucas Swaine, Melissa Williams, Lambert Zuidervaart.

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sented modern secular ("communicative") reason as having successfully superseded religion through a "linguistification of the sacred". Habermas also framed this supersessionist narrative as a transition from metaphysics to "postmetaphysical thinking", a transition to which, as he argues, there is no viable alternative today.

In more recent essays, however, Habermas repositions himself. He now adopts a more cautious position, what I call a position of "containment" of the sacred. In broad lines, this position holds that secular reason must keep religion at a certain distance, while simultaneously being willing to learn from it. No longer cast in the role of a precursor of "communicative reason" (i.e. a prior stage of social evolution that has been overcome by modernity), religion is now portrayed as a domain of meaning independent of secular (communicative) reason, and as a sovereign "intellectual formation" separated from reason by strict borders. The divide between faith and reason cannot be bridged, Habermas claims, as faith contains a core which is opaque to reason. Yet faith and reason cannot be entirely separated either, as the two share a common genealogy. In a "post-secular" society this common heritage could be tapped into, in order to re-open the dialogue between faith and reason.

Jürgen Habermas's recent arguments have touched a raw nerve in our culture, it seems, generating considerable interest in many different scholarly circles, followed by a rapidly swelling secondary literature.

In what follows I propose to move the discussion in a direction less explored in this literature.

I want to place Habermas's recent concept of "postsecular" in the wider context of the "postmetaphysical" thrust of his philosophical project. I argue that Habermas's shift from a position of "linguistification of the sacred" to that of translation of the sacred generates serious normative problems for the procedural, universal and pragmatic view of reason at the core of his project and, consequently, for the entire normative framework of liberal democracy he erected on this view. I contend that whatever the benefits Habermas seeks to obtain from the project of "salvaging" translation of religion, these are offset by some significant normative tensions that this recent project generates for tenets central to "postmetaphysical thinking". In short, I argue that the turn to a "post-secular society" bears implications that threaten to destabilize Habermas's commitment to a "postmetaphysical" definition of modernity.

The article has two parts. In the first part, I outline the broad contours of Habermas's evolutionary view of modernity presented in his major works under the rubric "postmetaphysical thinking", and I retrieve the Weberian and the Hegelian dimensions of this view (sections II and III). Against this background, in the second part, I discuss the concept of "post-secular society" at the heart of his recent writings (section IV), and concentrate on the normative tensions the new conceptual alliance between the "postmetaphysical" and the "postsecular" generates for Habermas's thought (section V).

II. HABERMAS'S EVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF MODERNITY. THE WEBERIAN DIMENSION.

"Postmetaphysical thinking" is an expression used by Habermas as a generic description of his philosophical project.[2] Throughout his writings this expression is found frequently paired with the claim that the "postmetaphysical" mode of thinking has no viable philosophical alternative today. In this section I unpack this claim with a view of bringing into foreground the evolutionary perspective on modern society that underwrites the concept of "postmetaphysical".

Although a complex and multifaceted program, having wide philosophical ramifications, "postmetaphysical thinking" also has an inner core. The heartbeat of the concept of "postmetaphysical" is constituted by the thesis that modern secular reason "sublates" religion through a "linguistification of the sacred". This thesis directly informs Habermas's theory of rationality, as well as his theory of law and democracy and played a major role in his works of the 1980s. To hermeneutically unlock the concept of "postmetaphysical", therefore it is necessary to take a close look at this important thesis.

The term "sublation" (*Aufhebung*) is Hegelian and carries the specific meaning of simultaneous cancelation and preservation. Habermas's use of the term would suggest, at least *prima facie*, that "postmetaphysical thinking" is to be squarely placed within a Hegelian evolutionary perspective on modern society. Although not entirely wrong, this interpretation is ultimately misleading, as Habermas's concept of "postmetaphysical" resists a straightforward Hegelian reading. Hegel's philosophy of history is built on important

2 A succinct treatment can also be found in Melissa Yates, "Postmetaphysical Thinking", in *Jürgen Habermas*: *Key concepts*, ed. Barbara Fultner (Acumen, 2011).

metaphysical concepts (like *Weltgeist,* for instance), which remain deeply entrenched in his view of modernity. Habermas cannot take over these concepts, as they would saddle and eventually sink the idea of a "postmetaphysical" thought; at the same time, it is difficult to see how one can adopt a Hegelian evolutionary perspective without buying into some of these metaphysical assumptions. Neither a Marxist perspective would do justice, properly speaking, to Habermas's "postmetaphysical thinking". Marx's philosophical appropriation of Hegel's dialectics remains fully caught in (a materialist) metaphysics, which explains why Habermas makes serious efforts to distance himself from these two thinkers (Hegel and Marx), whose metaphysical assumptions (most visible in what Habermas calls their "philosophy of the subject") he indicts as potentially fatal to a free and emancipated society.

How are we then to interpret the supersessionist bent Habermas gives to the concept of "postmetaphysical thinking"? What is cancelled and what preserved in the modern linguistification of the sacred?

To answer these questions, we have to go back to Habermas's philosophical roots in the early Frankfurt School thinkers. These thinkers were forced to wrestle with a disturbing fact. All across Eastern Europe (and beyond), the Leninist-Marxist revolutions of the early 20th century invariably and implacably morphed themselves into a bureaucratic totalitarian nightmare and oppressive politics. Despairing of dialectics' healing force, and deeply distrustful of Enlightenment's emancipatory promises, these thinkers turned to Max Weber's theory of rationality to explain a troubled modern condition. Habermas takes heed of this orientation, which makes Weber, rather than Hegel or Marx, his primary source for interpreting social change.[3] The Hegelian-Marxist perspective however is not fully abandoned, and Habermas's stance on modernity can be described as a marriage of Weber's empirical social analyses and Hegel's speculative view of history, whose child is a new theory of rationality with universal ambit. Nowhere is this more evident that in Habermas's interpretation of religion.

3 Weber's theory of modernization, Habermas writes, "still holds out the best prospect of explaining the social pathologies that appeared in the wake of capitalist modernization" (Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II* (Heinemann, 1987), 303). Although Habermas's interpretation of modernity is fed by multiple intellectual sources (Durkheim, Mead, Parsons, Luhmann, and others), here I focus only on Habermas's appropriation of Weber, as this is most relevant to my concern in this article.

I now briefly discuss Weber's theory of rationalization, then explain how Habermas uses this theory as a stepping stone for drawing a universalist view of modern reason.

Weber famously argued that modernization is, in its essence, a process of *rationalization* of society. Rationalization has cultural and social aspects. Culturally, rationalization is co-extensive with a process of "disenchantment" of the world and leads to a differentiation of three "cultural spheres" which develop independently, each following its own "inner logic": the sphere of science, that of morality and, finally, that of arts and aesthetic criticism.[4] Socially, rationalization leads to the differentiation of highly efficient forms of rational domination which are best exemplified by state bureaucracy and the capitalist corporation. Weber thought (and it is this thought that highly resonated with Horkheimer and Adorno and other Frankfurt thinkers) that rationalization as differentiation would eventually lead to nihilism (a generalized lack of meaning) and to a social life highly inimical to individual spontaneity and human flourishing (an oppressive "iron cage").

The moral sphere of modernity, in particular, has been the object of Weber's analysis, and illustrates well the problem of lack of meaning. In modernity, the two cultural spheres of natural sciences and hedonistic art directly collide with the third cultural sphere, the moral sphere, which, under this increasingly powerful twin pressure, would eventually crumble into a perpetual struggle between different ultimate principles, values, ideas. These moral principles no longer commend universal allegiance, a situation that Weber famously described in terms of a neo-pagan struggle between different "gods" and "demons". To simplify what is otherwise a complex and fascinating analysis, Weber thought that disenchantment (secularization) of culture would lead to moral fragmentation, to a proliferation of values embedded in incommensurable frameworks of interpretation which were locked in a perpetual competition for modern citizens' allegiance. In the absence of an overarching normative principle (like in pre-modern metaphysics), it becomes impossible for modern individuals to rationally adjudicate between these different, and often incompatible, values. Yet modern citizens, like any of their counterparts in other times, must act and hence at the very core of a highly rationalized (i.e. disenchanted) society,

4 These three "spheres" loosely correspond to Kant's differentiation of reason in three distinct moments, cognitive, moral and aesthetic.

there opens 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.

In short, if I am permitted to use in this context the words of a poet, in a modern disenchanted world the moral "centre cannot hold" anymore.[5] This could have well been the motto of Weber's overall view.

For Habermas, however, *the centre does hold* and he introduces a new theory of rationality in order to prove it. His "communicative" view of reason safeguards moral universalism and makes modern rationalization appear less self-destructive. Habermas is able to inject a positive meaning into the process of rationalization because, grafted on what is generally a Weberian framework of analysis, he adds a (quasi) Hegelian view of history, that centres on *Aufhebung* of religion as a "learning" process. Let's see how this is supposed to work.

Key to understand Habermas's argument is to closely trace how "validity" is conceptualized. Habermas introduces the notion of "validity claim".[6] He begins with the idea that in any act of communication (with the purpose of reaching common understanding about something in the world) interlocutors raise validity claims. When someone initiates a speech act, he/she also implicitly makes some claims: that what he/she says is true, that he/she is normatively entitled to say that what he/she says, and finally that he/she is sincere in what he says. Three "validity claims", therefore, a claim to "truth", a claim to "rightness" and a claim to "truthfulness", are attached to any speech act (that seeks understanding), forming what Habermas calls the "illocutionary" part of the speech act. This illocutionary part contains a promise (or a warrant) that the initiator of a speech act could bring *reasons*, if challenged, in support of his/her claims. There is a "bonding and binding" connection

5 I use here William Butler Yeats' words from his poem The Second Coming. The relevant stance reads like this: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/ Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,/ The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned;/ The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity." See William B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, revised second edition, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 187.

6 For a good discussion of the concept of "validity claim" see Joseph Heath, "What Is a Validity Claim", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 24, no. 4 (1998).

that, through this warrant, establishes itself in communication, tying all participants together in a process of mutual redeeming of validity claims.[7]

The three "validity claims" Habermas identifies in his program of "formal pragmatics" directly correspond to the three "cultural spheres" from Weber's narrative. Thus, the modern sphere of science thematizes the validity claim to truth, while the distinct moral-legal sphere thematizes the validity claim to rightness; finally, the sphere of arts and ethical conceptions of good life thematizes the validity claim to truthfulness. This thematization takes place in "rational discourse", a process of argumentation whereby interlocutors exchange reasons for and against a position. In this process, participants unavoidably make some pragmatic presuppositions, like equality of rights, inclusion, publicity, and lack of deception and of coercion - Habermas calls them "rules of reason".[8]

In what follows I am concerned less with the details of this analysis and more with pinning down the role "formal pragmatics" plays in Habermas's evolutionary theory of society.

Two novel conceptual tools are now available for Habermas: the concept of "validity claim" and particularly the idea of pairing the three "validity claims" of the "formal pragmatics" with the three "cultural spheres" of Weber's narrative of rationalization. With these tools in his hands, Habermas sets out to achieve two difficult tasks at one stroke: repair Weber's theory of modernization and settle the problem of the universality of modern reason.

It is worthwhile noting that Weber left this problem undecided: while he contended that rationalization should be seen as a *world-wide* process (that is most advanced in the Western World), he was nonetheless reluctant to as-

7 There are two stages of this process "communicative action" and "rational discourse". The latter is the more demanding, reflective version of the first.

8 In addition to the Weberian and Hegelian-Marxist dimensions already mentioned, "formal pragmatics" introduces a (quasi) Kantian dimension to Habermas's thought. The pragmatic presuppositions play a *constitutive* role, in the Kantian sense of being "conditions of possibility" of argumentation. However, these presuppositions also contain certain "idealizations" that have "normative content"; they overshoot or transcend the local context, by pointing toward an "ideally expanded audience" (Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (MIT Press, 1996), 322), or an ideal communication community. A normative projection, a binding anticipation, is present in them, and this projection plays a *regulative* role for argumentation. Although broadly Kantian in inspiration, Habermas's "formal pragmatics" collapses the constitutive and regulative roles played by the forms of intuition and the ideas of reason that Kant kept distinct.

cribe a universal dimension to the Western type of modernization: he held that this process appears to be universal from our (Western) point of view.[9]

Habermas finds this stance ambiguous and not very convincing. He contends (correctly, I would say) that Weber's analysis of modernity is *only* compatible with a universalist reading of the process of rationalization. Weber might have failed to fully embrace the universalist implications of his own theory because, suggests Habermas, he (unjustifiably) narrowed the focus of his analysis of modernity to just one of the three "cultural spheres" mentioned above, the sphere of morality. It is in this sphere that Weber famously identified the ethical ideas of some Protestant communities as powerful motivators for the emergence of capitalism. But it would be hard to deny, Habermas points out, that the other two cultural spheres opened up at the threshold of modernity (the emergence of modern science and modern art) are rather neglected by Weber's analysis of modernity. To use Habermas's own terminology, Weber focused on *just one* of the three "validity claims" differentiated by the modern rationalization (disenchantment) of culture. The theory can be repaired and hence produce a far richer yield, Habermas argues, if its "systematic thrust" was rescued (all three validity claims were attended to).

Expanding the focus of analysis across the entire validity range (science, morality and arts) brings important theoretical benefits for Habermas.[10] The chief one in the context of my discussion here is that the process of mod-

9 The relevant passage reads as follows: "A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (*as we like to think*) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value." Max Weber, *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Routledge, 1992), xxviii, my emphasis.

10 Once the scope of analysis is extended in this way, Weber's view lessens its dark, pessimistic, message. Nihilism and oppression are no longer seen as inscribed in the genetic code of modernity, as Weber thought. These pathological aspects are not generated by the process of rationalization/differentiation of modern culture *per se*. Rather, according to Habermas, they are "side effects" of an *unbalanced* rationalization of culture and society. Habermas calls this skewed, one-sided, rationalization, the "colonization of the lifeworld" by "the system" (where "system" stands for what Weber identified as the most efficient forms of social rationalization, the capitalist corporation and the state bureaucracy). The implication of this view is positive: de-colonization is possible and depends on setting rationalization of society on more balanced tracks (and not by eliminating capitalism, as Marx thought). The scientific-technologic rational discourse, which plays a hegemonic role in contemporary society, must be balanced by the other two moral-practical and aesthetic-ethical discourses.

ernization can be cast in a more irenic light: the world-wide process of disenchantment of the world (as analyzed by Weber) becomes in Habermas a three-stage "learning process".

This idea ushers in the Hegelian dimension of Habermas's view of modernity and my next section concentrates on it.

III. HABERMAS'S EVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF MODERNITY. THE HEGELIAN DIMENSION.

According to Habermas, the history of humankind can be seen as developing in three stages. The first stage is represented by mythological societies. Validity, at this stage, is not yet distinguished from facticity or, to put it differently, norms are not distinct from facts. Being rather inchoate, the concept of validity remains undifferentiated from the flow of every-day events. Myths do have a cognitive function (they provide explanations of the world), but this is rudimentary.

The second stage is represented by traditional societies. Historically, this stage has been achieved in what Habermas (borrowing from Karl Jaspers) calls the Axial Age.[11] Norms are now differentiated from facts, and validity from facticity. For instance, Greek metaphysical systems postulated some ultimate principles as origin and substrate of everyday events. Hence, essence becomes distinct from mere appearance. This distinction has important implications for the social sphere. Norms can be derived from the first principle and thus presented as universal, their validity being grounded in the unconditioned, transcendent and universal nature of the first principle.

The step from myth to logos enables more rational explanations of the world and it therefore represents an important *learning* step: reasons for why a particular state of affairs is (morally) "wrong" can now be adduced, suffering and evil find a rational explanation, and a higher meaning for tragic events in human life can be rationally posited.[12] "Might" can be separated form "right" and theories of justice can be articulated.

11 Between 800 BC and 200 AD. This is the historical epoch when Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism and Greek metaphysics emerged.

12 To take an example: in the story of Job, the validity of Job's just life is not undermined by the tragic losses he suffers; he remains a just person in the eyes of God, even if the events of his life would suggest something else and all his friends unite in condemning him. Health is no longer

The Axial Age is the age of metaphysics and of the great monotheistic religions. An impartial, "God's eye perspective", is differentiated from the flow of everyday events and this, as Habermas stresses, constitutes a tremendously important achievement (a cognitive step forward): it allows us to separate "validity from genesis, truth from health or soundness, guilt from causality, law from violence, and so forth".[13]

However, the advent of modernity brings about another transition, this time from logos to "postmetaphysical thinking". Again, the relevant change regards the concept of validity. The global learning process set off in the metaphysical age continues with another "learning" step: the concept of validity is now untied form the concept of transcendence (from-without-our-world) and freed from whatever metaphysical ballast was attached to it (like abstract/ideal first principle, the absolute, or creator God).[14] This metaphysical background, although it enabled cognitively more complex explanations of the world when compared to mythical thought, is now exposed as illusory[15] and therefore limiting: the metaphysical age entangled scientific claims with moral and ethical claims, and anchored all of them in a first principle/transcendent divinity, which impaires knowledge.

Only when normative validity is split (mainly with Kant, but as a result of a process set off by the nominalist revolution in the 14th and 15th centuries) into the three distinct claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness, and then severed from the metaphysical/religious background that previously sustained it, this tripartite differentiation releases a rational potential that could establish a truly rational, free and emancipated society.

Important for my purpose is to note here is that the step from metaphysical to "postmetaphysical" enables a form of rationality that supersedes the rationality of the metaphysical/religious age (reason inscribed in the structures of the world/nature/cosmos - logocentric reason). "Communicative rational-

coterminous with gods' favour (unlike in mythological societies). A higher viewpoint is now available from where events can be judged in their true light, or in their essence, we could say.

13 Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality* (Polity Press, 2002), 158.

14 This rendition of modernity fits quite well, in my view, what Charles Taylor calls a "subtraction story" of modernity.

15 See, for instance, the following passage: "… chances are fading that we can bring together again, in a posttraditional everyday practice, those moments that, in traditional forms of life, once composed a unity — a diffuse one surely, and one whose religious and metaphysical interpretations were certainly *illusory*" (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 330, my emphasis).

ity" is no longer a substantive reason, it is a procedural view of reason that plays itself out in the argumentative redeeming of validity claims.

At this point I have all the necessary means to clarify the way in which Habermas uses the Hegelian term *Aufhebung* (which was the issue with which I began my discussion) and determine what is cancelled and what preserved form metaphysical/religious thought.

The doctrinal content or the (cognitive) substance of metaphysical systems/positive religion is fed into the process of rational argumentation alongside the three distinct dimensions of validity, and thus critically dissolved in the acid of the specialized rational discourses of science, morality and ethic/aesthetic, where only the "uncoercing force" of the better argument counts. Truth, under "postmetaphysical" conditions, is a "validity claim" redeemed in fallible manner on the basis of empirical evidence and rational argumentation. For Habermas, as for the whole positivist tradition, knowledge of reality (of facts or states of affairs) is public, testable and fallible. Scientific communities of researchers are its proper home.

In the moral sphere, the content of religious doctrines migrates without rest in "discourse ethics", a rational discourse that tests moral principles for their generalizability/universality and thus replaces "the authority of the sacred".[16] For Habermas (as for the entire Kantian tradition) morality revolves around what is "right" (i.e. what is "equally good for all"), distinct from what is "good" (conceptions of the good or exemplary life). The latter belong to the third sphere, the sphere of ethics.

It is in this sphere that religious contents (doctrines) may find quarter in modernity, but devoid of their aspiration to universality. They are accepted only in their ethical aspects, as relevant for this or for that community of believers. Religious doctrines may retain some *limited* relevance in the ethical sphere, due to insights about what constitutes a good or exemplary way of life for this or that community (but not universally). The third sphere thematizes the claim to truthfulness and, in this sense, religion becomes a self-clarification discourse, tied to the identity and authenticity of a community. In other words, insofar as it still survives in modernity, religion is just another type of ethical diversity, no different from any other ethical doctrine (let's say Aristotelian or utilitarian). There is nothing special about religion (or the sacred) anymore.

16 "Only a morality, set communicatively aflow and developed into a discourse ethics can replace the authority of the sacred" (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 92).

To sum up, the *content* of religion/metaphysics is dissolved and critically assimilated in the three rational discourses regulated by "communicative" reason.

However, modern reason preserves the formal features first made possible by metaphysics. Two great accomplishments distinguished metaphysics from mythology: the impartial (God's eye) perspective and the concept of "unconditionality". Impartiality and unconditionality ground the concept of validity, as well as reason's universality. Absent these two features, validity collapses into facticity and reason into power; this holds true for the metaphysical age no less than for the "postmetaphysical" age. Thus, "communicative" reason keeps these two important attributes of validity, while re-constituting them in a "postmetaphysical" manner.[17]

Impartiality is now distilled out of the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation and of the rules of reasons identified by "formal pragmatics".[18] I cannot discuss further this point here, as the other concept, that of unconditionality, is more relevant for my present discussion. This concept takes a post-metaphysical meaning as well. As Habermas argues, although validity claims are held in a fallible manner, they are raised here and now, in a particular context, they cannot be reduced to this context, however. Although always operative within culture, history and nature, communicative reason retains a moment of unconditionality, which enables it to "burst open" any local boundaries.[19]

17 In contrast with Kant's deontological view of reason, "communicative reason" is no longer a "pure" reason. It is a "de-transcendentalized" reason, situated in language, culture and history. Although impure, "communicative reason" preserves however the deontological outlook of Kant`s view. The unconditionality of moral norms is no longer grounded in the timeless structures of a sovereign "subject", but in the pragmatic presuppositions speakers unavoidably make when they seek to reach understanding.

18 Rational argumentation is governed by the following principle of discourse (D): only those norms are valid that could meet with the assent of all affected by them. Moral discourse, in particular, is governed by the following universalization principle (U): "*All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation)" (Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (MIT Press, 1990), 58). (U) embodies the impartial "moral point of view" from which all moral disagreements can be rationally adjudicated.

19 Take the validity claim to truth. As Habermas argues, it is a *pragmatic* feature of how we use language (speech) that when we hold something to be true we do not mean it to be true only for us (for our community, or our cultural, historical, linguistic context). We claim it to be true across all contexts (unconditionally true, that is). However, we are aware, of course, that further arguments, new scientific findings or technological developments, may very well prove

The validity claims implicitly raised in argumentation *point beyond* cultural and historical contexts towards "an ideal speech situation", where the rational redemption of these claims would be complete and universal agreement would be achieved. In other words, there is a "transcendence-from-within" our linguistically constituted world that is built into the process of rational argumentation and that enables modern reason to generate normativity out of its own resources (independent of metaphysical/religious traditions).[20]

I close this part of my article with a brief summary of the main points discussed so far.

In Habermas, the traditional concept of transcendence (from without our world) is replaced by the "transcendence-from-within" of the process of moral argumentation regulated by U, while the unconditionality once attached to some ontological principles (or divine revelation) is transferred over to the unconditionality of validity claims raised in everyday communication. As Habermas puts it, the sacred is linguistified and made into a mundane event, by which he means that the binding/bonding force of validity claims *replaces* the integrative force of religion.[21]

Because "postmetaphysical" reason does not jettison impartiality and unconditional validity, reason's unity, according to Habermas, is not threatened by modern secularization *cum* differentiation, as Weber thought. The erosion of the religious foundations in the process of disenchantment of the world

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our initial claim to be false. Thus, all three validity claims discussed are held in a fallible manner. According to Habermas, the fallible manner in which speakers hold the three validity claims *does not* undermine the unconditional character of these claims. It is this peculiar coupling of unconditionality and fallibilism that is the distinctive mark of Habermas philosophical project. The question whether this combination is really a viable (or even coherent) philosophical project remains, in my view, one of the most important challenges to Habermas's theory of validity claims and, consequently, to his thesis of "linguistification of the sacred".

20 "Communicative" reason achieves thus the normative boot-strapping of modernity. In PDM, Habermas places this view of reason in a line that continues "the dialectic of Enlightenment" set in motion by Kant, Hegel and Marx, who all aimed to offer a rational equivalent to - and thus replace - religion (see, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (MIT Press, 1987), 84). Kant, Hegel and Marx failed to achieve this task, due to faulty philosophical premises (what Habermas calls "philosophy of the subject"). By taking a turn to pragmatism and analytic philosophy, Habermas presents his "postmetaphysical thinking" as succeeding where all other modern philosophers failed.

21 See, for instance: the "spellbinding power of the holy, is sublimated into the binding/bonding force of criticizable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence" (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 77).

does not have to lead to fragmentation of reason and conflict between the three cultural spheres of modernity. No longer guaranteed by a metaphysical/religious principle, the unity of reason resides simply in the procedural conditions of argumentation: *the same procedures* regulate the thematization of validity claims across the fragmented spheres of modernity.[22]

Habermas is able to repair Weber's theory and inject a positive meaning into the process of rationalization of modern society, because he reads into this process a (quasi) Hegelian supersessionist perspective of "learning", in which the concept of "validity claim" does the heavy lifting. He is thus able to flatly deny that disenchantment of the world bogs modernity down in a polytheistic quagmire. Disenchantment is not at all a loss to be bewailed; if anything, the differentiation of science from morality and art is a gain to be celebrated, as it unfetters "communicative" rationality from crippling metaphysical assumptions and thereby brings about an undeniable *increase* in rationality.

The important conclusion I would like to draw from my analysis is that the universality of communicative reason (in its procedural unity across the spectrum of three validity claims) cannot be upheld unless the learning process just mentioned is presupposed. The universality of the (D)/(U) principle is premised on this narrative of replacement: one cannot claim universality for "discourse ethics" if one does not also claim that religion has been already replaced/superseded by "communicative reason". "Communicative reason" develops its full potential *only when* the three aspects of validity (truth, rightness and truthfulness) are splintered in distinct "validity claims", removed

22 The argumentative redemption of the claim to "truth" in the scientific sphere is structurally similar to the argumentative redemption of the validity claim to "rightness" in the moral-practical sphere, and similar to the argumentative redemption of the claim to "truthfulness" in the ethic/aesthetic sphere. It is worthwhile noting though that the third sphere poses problems for Habermas's argument. Moral discourse is "analogous" to scientific discourse, according to Habermas, while the third discourse does not fit neatly this tripartite architectonic. Insofar as the claim to truthfulness pertains to the inner world of the speaker "as the totality of the experiences of the speaker to which he has privileged access" (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action I*, 309), the analogy with the other two claims is somehow wobbly. I thank here the anonymous reviewer of EJPR for raising this point, which deserves a more detailed discussion than I could possibly make here. Part of the problem, it seems to me, is that in the third sphere Habermas lumps together aesthetic conceptions, ethical doctrines of "good life" and speaker's subjective experiences. In any case, Habermas saw religion's survival into modernity as relevant under its ethical aspects. Only with his recent writings, religion becomes a "special case" of ethical diversity.

from their pre-modern anchoring in a transcendent God, and gradually institutionalized in three distinct cultural spheres of science, moral-legal discourse and ethical/aesthetic discourse.

The universality of Habermas's view of reason is inextricably linked to and essentially depends on this evolutionary narrative. "No universality of reason without *Aufhebung* (supersession) of religion", this could well summarize my discussion in this section.

IV. THE RETURN OF THE SACRED. RECALIBRATING THE RELATION BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON IN A "POST-SECULAR SOCIETY".

Habermas's latter writings, after the "Faith and Knowledge" speech delivered in Frankfurt's main cathedral, closely after the terrorist attacks from 9/11/2001, alter quite significantly the picture of "postmetaphysical modernity" I reconstituted above. As Habermas now argues, reason and faith must be seen as two independent domains of meaning which are separated by strict borders. The philosophical perspectives centered on faith and reason cannot be bridged. Despite the presence of these borders, however, faith and reason have a "common genealogy"; hence, they must be seen as complementary rather than opposed "intellectual formations". The relationship between these two formations must be one of dialogue and reciprocal learning in a "post-secular" society, a learning process which is guided by a clear *primacy* of "communicative reason" vis-à-vis religion and by a project of "salvaging" *translation*.

I argue that this new picture, dominated by the idea of clear borders between faith and reason, delivers a fatal blow to the supersessionist view previously endorsed by Habermas. The idea of strict borders implies quite clearly that "communicative reason" *will never be able* to replace religion. This implication raises, in my view, serious normative challenges to the "postmetaphysical" project of modernity.

To bring these tensions fully into light, a good start is to look at the points of disjuncture between the old and the new picture. One important such point regards the status of the religious/metaphysical traditions surviving into modernity.

In the old picture, which assumed an accomplished supersession of religion, religious traditions must be seen as remnants of a by-gone era whose persistence into the "postmetaphysical" stage is barren of normative implica-

tions. The empirical presence of these traditions in contemporary societies was seen a *transitory* fact, awaiting their full demise under the sun of "communicative reason", and raised no cognitive challenge to Habermas's "postmetaphysical" view of modernity. To better understand this point, I would like to take the risk of giving it some historical sense. What Habermas had in mind, it seems, was a little bit like the situation towards the end of the Roman empire, when rulers still clung to a mythological worldview although Christianity has already taken over as source of normative legitimacy. Although pagan ideas and values might have still floated around, they have already been superseded as source of normative legitimacy by a global learning process that has moved forward. Something similar must be assumed for the transition from (pre-modern) metaphysical age into modernity: metaphysical ideas might still be with us for a while, however they have already lost power to legitimize normative behaviour. As these transformations are of *longue durée*, the continuing presence of these ideas in a "postmetaphysical" age is not a source of concern. Habermas shared, like so many social theorists of the second half of the 20th century, the main expectation of the so-called "secularization theory", that religion will one day wither away.

The first crack in this supersessionist picture appears a few years after the publication of the massive *Theory of Communicative Action*. Habermas lessens a bit the grip of the suppersesionist interpretation and partially retreats from the view that religion is an illusory view of the world. *TCA* gave religion a "one-sided, functionalist description", he accepts.[23] He also raises some doubts about the supersessionist narrative he espoused so far: *TCA* suggested too quickly an affirmative answer to the question whether discourse ethics can inherit the mantle of religion. "…It could turn out", Habermas writes, "that monotheistic traditions have at their disposal a language whose semantic potential is not yet exhausted". Therefore, whether religious truths migrate without remainder in "discourse ethics" should be seen rather as an open question.[24] In *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992) Habermas coins the ambigu-

23 The world-religions in traditional societies, Habermas now accepts, "do *not* function *exclusively* as a legitimation of governmental authority". As he writes, quoting David Tracy, at their core they are often protest movements that "attempt to ground other ways for human beings to relate to one another and to reality as a whole" (Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 79).

24 "Whether then from religious truths, after the religious world views have collapsed, nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of a universalistic ethics of

ous phrase "abstemious coexistence" to describe the relationship between faith and reason.[25]

These doubts, however, are not strong enough to put a serious dent into the supersessionist narrative, which continues to dominate Habermas's thought in this period. He warns against attempts to return to a metaphysical unification of truth, morality and the good, which he regards as implausible. "Insights cannot be forgotten at will", he remarks; the learning process leading to "postmetaphysical thinking" cannot be rolled back.[26] Frankly speaking, in the 1980s Habermas was concerned less about the challenge posed to "postmetaphysical thinking" by religious traditions, and more about the threats to this project coming from postmodernist quarters. It was Nietzsche, rather than Christ, that he worried about at the time. The complete rejection of metaphysics (rather than the survival of metaphysics) was the "regressive tendency"[27] he feared. Such rejection would be equivalent to a return to a mythological stance, which would collapse validity into facticity and reason into power. Under modern conditions, this is highly dangerous, to say the least.

This picture changes only after 2001. In his writings after this year, Habermas signals quite clearly that the empirical persistence of religion in contemporary society must be interpreted in a different key. Religious traditions, he now writes, ought not to be seen as "archaic relics of premodern societies persisting into the present".[28] The presence of religion in modernity no longer reflects a temporary circumstance that one day will vanish under pressure

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responsibility can be salvaged, and this means: can be accepted for good reasons, on the basis of insight" - this is an open question (Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 79).

25 "Communicative reason does not make its appearance in an aestheticized theory as the colorless negative of a religion that provides consolation. It neither announces the absence of consolation in a world forsaken by God, nor does it take it upon itself to provide any consolation. It does without exclusivity as well. As long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse, it will even coexist abstemiously with the former, neither supporting it nor combating it" (Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (MIT Press, 1992), 145). Observe, however, that this position of "abstemious" coexistence does not imply a serious reconsideration of the supersessionist view of modernity, because it expresses just a temporary inability: for *as long as* no better words can be found for what religion has to say, is the later accepted in this non-combat relation. It may very well happen that right words will be found one day. The same idea in Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 51.

26 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 84.

27 Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 159.

28 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008), 138.

from the structural differentiation of modernity. A "post-secular society", he writes, must *adapt* "to the fact that religious communities continue to exist in a context of ongoing secularization".[29]

As Habermas now concedes, the empirical persistence of religion raises a "cognitive challenge" to philosophy.[30]

This point is important. What it really says is that the empirical persistence of religion in late modernity carries normative import and demands therefore some sort of theoretical self-correction. One obvious way to go about this, is to try to disassociate the "postmetaphysical" framework of modernity from the problematic assumptions of the secularization theory. And indeed, Habermas abandons now the thesis that "communicative reason" is able to supersede religion, replacing this thesis with the idea of a common genealogy between reason and faith and with a project of "salvaging" translation of religion. Accordingly, the thesis of linguistification of the sacred is reformulated as translation of the sacred: "For philosophy, 'linguistification' can only mean discovering the still vital semantic potentials in religious traditions and translating them into a general language that is accessible beyond the boundaries of particular religious communities - and thereby introducing them into the discursive play of public reasons".[31]

V. "POSTMETAPHYSICAL" OR "POSTSECULAR" MODERNITY?

Unlike the thesis of "linguistification" of the sacred, the project of translation of the sacred no longer aims to replace religion. "Postmetaphysical thinking", seen now as translation of the sacred, fosters a "non-destructive" secularization. Translation is the mode of non-destructive secularization, writes Habermas. Philosophy must renounce the rationalist presumption that reason can determine what is true and false in religion. Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, all shared this presumption and tried to force the demise of religion (while rescuing its rational kernel). Habermas's "postmetaphysical thinking" is no

29 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003), 104.

30 Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll* (Polity Press, 2017), 143. Religion is no longer seen exclusively as part of the ethical domain (the third sphere) of modernity. Religion is now a "special case" of ethical diversity. Rainer Forst debates this point.

31 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll,* xiv.

longer animated by such a "take-over" intention, and insists on the importance of keeping strict boundaries between religion and secular philosophy.[32]

Moreover, there might be some important normative benefits secular reason could accrue from restructuring its relationship with faith in a post-secular direction. In fact, Habermas warns us, it would be wise for late modernity to re-open the dialogue between faith and reason.

This dialogue, he suggests, could *strengthen* secular ("communicative") reason which is now confronted with unprecedented challenges; among these challenges he includes the corrosive influence of a radical postmodern critique of modern rationalism with its "defeatist" undertones; he also includes the unbridled expansion of capitalism at a planetary level and the massive social and moral problems caused by it; finally, reason may need the resources of meaning preserved by religious communities in order to counteract some tendencies that stem from a blind faith in science (what he calls a scient-*istic* naturalism) and that carry disturbing moral implications (liberal eugenics[33] is an instance of such tendencies). In all these areas, by translating religious insights into its own language, "communicative reason" could regenerate itself.

Habermas's recent writings draw a picture that insists on borders between faith and reason, presents religion as a "complementary formation", and concedes an independent sovereignty for the religious realm, which is rooted in religious language's unmatched power to disclose meaning.

What this new picture suggests, it seems to me, is something like a new diplomacy. Habermas is telling a tale of two cities: reason and faith are like two cities facing one another, with their own borders, domains and citizens; these two cities have a common ancestry and have been at war with one another many times in their tumultuous history. Borrowing from Leo Strauss, we could call these two cities Athens and Jerusalem. However, for Habermas, the relation between Athens and Jerusalem is not fully dialogical and reciprocal. This relation is a project of "salvaging" translation: moral intuitions which still lay buried deeply within this heritage must be extracted from their dogmatic shell and translated into the universally accessible language of rea-

32 "Here I want to distinguish between *rationalist* approaches that (in the Hegelian tradition) *subsume* [*aufheben*] the substance of faith into the philosophical concept, from *dialogical* approaches that (following Karl Jaspers) adopt a critical attitude toward religious traditions while at the same time being open to *learning* from them" (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 245).

33 Interventions at the level of human genome in order to improve its make-up.

son. What we have here is more like one city, Athens, scouting out the other city's territory for rational content that has to be "salvaged" and brought back where it *de facto* belongs: within the walls of the rational city. This looks more like incursions into foreign (rather hostile) territory rather than dialogue from equal positions. It looks as if secular reason seeks to plunder religion of much needed normative resources, only to contain it to a rather *subordinate* position. For there is a certain asymmetry in the relation between the two cities: secular reason holds priority over religion.

This is most visible in the constraining conditions religion must accept in a "post-secular society". As Habermas writes, religious consciousness must first "come to terms with the cognitive dissonance of encountering other denominations and religion. It must, second, adapt to the authority of the sciences which hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge".[34] Finally, "religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the *priority* that secular reasons also enjoy in the political arena. This can succeed only to the extent that they embed the egalitarian individualism of modern natural law and *universalistic* morality in a convincing way in the context of their comprehensive doctrines".[35]

As this last passage suggests, Habermas seems to think that the idea of translation can do the same work for "postmetaphysical" modernity as the idea of replacement (*Aufhebung*) did, namely to sustain the universality of the moral theory; in addition, there is a bonus: more room for a legitimate presence of religion in modernity.

This point is not at all obvious, however. If my interpretation from the first part of this article is correct, Habermas's theory of modernity posited a rather strong link between the idea of a dialectical supersession of religion and the claim to universality of communicative reason. The latter depended

34 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 104.

35 Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 137, my emphasis. See also: religious consciousness must "relate itself to competing religions in a reasonable way; leaves decisions concerning mundane knowledge to the institutionalized sciences, and makes the egalitarian premises of the morality o human rights compatible with its own articles of faith" (Jürgen Habermas, ""The Political": The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology", in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Columbia Univ. Press, 2011), 26–27).

on the first. Therefore, a retreat from the superssesionist narrative is bound to have destabilizing effects on the theory of communicative reason.

I argue that the thesis of "priority" of reason over religion, unlike the thesis of "supersession" of religion by reason, is not strong enough to uphold modern reason's universality anymore. Habermas's shift from *Aufhebung* of religion to the idea of priority of reason over religion comes with a price: the price is weakening the claim to universality of communicative reason.

For how universal "communicative reason" (and the "ethics of discourse") can be said to be, if religion is accepted as an "intellectual formation" *complementary* to communicative reason and separated by strict borders from the latter? If reason cannot determine anymore what is true and what is false in religion, it means that reason has reached some limits. Outside these limits there remains a domain (the religious domain) that is not simply irrational or devoid of meaning. Although religion becomes extraterritorial to reason, there are moral intuitions buried in its domain that await to be "salvaged" and put into the accessible language of reason.

I contend that once the *Aufhebung* narrative is dropped and replaced by the narrative of translation and "priority" of communicative reason over religion, the universality of communicative reason comes under threat. Reason's universality depends now on the *success* of translation. The universality of "communicative reason" stands or falls with the project of "salvaging" translation: if translation can be said to be successful, that is if the moral intuitions buried in religious tradition/language are successfully extracted from the religious shell, then indeed "communicative" reason can save its claim to universality (even in the absence of an *Aufhebung* of religion). Translation becomes in Habermas's recent writings the linchpin that holds together the old project of "postmetaphysical" modernity and the new project of "a post-secular society".

However, 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? This question becomes especially troubling in light of Habermas's own arguments regarding the existence of a core of religion which remains "opaque" to secular reason.[36]

36 See the following passage: "At best, philosophy circumscribes the opaque core of religious experience when it reflects on the specific character of religious language and on the intrinsic

At a more general level, the problem is that criteria for what constitutes a "successful" translation of religion need to be specified. It is not very clear, after all, what exactly makes an act of philosophical translation successful or not.

This point, in my view, cuts deep, as one can question to what extent "postmetaphysical thinking" is a successful translation of the sacred, as Habermas seems to assume.

To give some flesh to the tentative argument I am pressing here, let's take, for instance, Heidegger's philosophy of Being, and in particular Heidegger's philosophy after the *Kehre,* which reads as a quasi-religious philosophy. Why would not this be a successful "salvaging" translation of the sacred? Or, to take another example, why can not Derrida's reflections on *archewriting* be seen as successful translation of the cognitive content of Judaism, for instance? Especially as Habermas himself points out that Derrida's philosophy nourishes itself from Jewish religious sources and agrees with the interpretation of Derrida's critique of metaphysics as a "program of scriptural scholarship".[37] Why is a program of scriptural scholarship (if this is indeed what Derrida is doing) less successful in translating religion into the language of reason than what Habermas means by "postmetaphysical thinking"?

Habermas remains critical of these philosophical translations. He implies that Heidegger's philosophy of Being "smuggles in", illegitimately as it were, religious motifs into the rational language of philosophy. However, how one is to decide what is an illegitimate and what is a legitimate transfer of meaning in translation remains unspecified. Against Heidegger, Habermas holds that reason should not "borrow the authority, and the air of a sacred that has been deprived of its core and become anonymous". He writes: "there is no insight to be gained by having the day of the Last Judgement evaporate to an undetermined event in the history of being".[38] One could totally agree with Habermas on this score (as I do), and yet feel tempted to turn this question to Habermas himself: have we really gained much by having the day of the Last Judgement evaporate to principles like (D)/(U) and a very elusive Ideal Speech Situation? One could argue that the "idealizing presuppositions" of

meaning of faith. This core remains profoundly alien to discursive thought as the hermetic core of aesthetic experience, which likewise can be at best circumscribed, but not penetrated, by philosophical reflection" (Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 143).

37 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 165.

38 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 335.

communicative action also deprive the sacred of its core and make it anonymous. Particularly as Habermas considered these idealizations to have a clear and marked anti-metaphysical effect: "only with this residue of metaphysics can we do battle against the transfiguration of the world through metaphysical truths - the last trace of "*Nihil contra Deum nisi Deus ipse*", he once wrote.[39]

VI. CONCLUSION

In his recent writings Habermas abandons the supersessionist narrative that played a central role in *The Theory of Communicative Action* and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and adopts a more modest philosophical position. From the idea that "postmetaphysical thinking" replaces religion, Habermas has retreated to a more restrained position that affirms the *priority* of "postmetaphysical thinking" over religion. This position accounts better for the empirical evidence of the persistence of religion in late modernity having also the advantage that it may bring modern reason some important normative benefits. Through translation, religious traditions could provide secular reason with normative insights in reason's fight against the damages inflicted to its normative claims by "scientistic" naturalism, on one side, and by the postmodern radical critique of reason, on the other.

I argue in this article that by coupling the two concepts, "post-metaphysical" and "post-secular", Habermas walks down a path fraught with serious philosophical tensions. Whatever advantages switching to a post-secular stance may create, they are offset by important normative tensions this stance creates for the "postmetaphysical" framework of modernity defended by Habermas over the years. My analysis suggests that the secularist (supersessionist) narrative was more central to this framework than Habermas seems to admit. Therefore, it is not possible to drop this narrative and move to a "post-secular" view without thereby weakening the very concept of "post-metaphysical".

39 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 144.

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JÜRGEN HABERMAS ON THE WAY TO A POSTMETAPHYSICAL READING OF KIERKEGAARD

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Abstract. Habermas's postmetaphysical reading of Kierkegaard is paradigmatic for his understanding of religion. It shows why Habermas reduces religion to fideism. Therefore the paper reconstructs Habermas's reception of Kierkegaard and compares it with the accounts of Dieter Henrich and Michael Theunissen. Furthermore it demonstrates how Habermas makes use of Kierkegaard's dialectics of existence to formulate his postmetaphysical thesis of a cooperative venture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Of course, Jürgen Habermas, to whom this special issue is dedicated, is really not well known as a Kierkegaardian scholar. Indeed, from time to time, Habermas is strongly referring to the Danish mastermind in order to point out what human selfhood can mean. In an interview with Martin J. Matustik from 1991, Habermas admitted that he is working on a "secular reading of Kierkegaard".[1] Although Habermas never finished this project, it is paradigmatic for his rethinking of religion between the 1980ies and the millennium. In my paper, I will try to explain why Habermas still supports a fideistic understanding of religion. As I see it, in his reading of Kierkegaard, Habermas does not distinguish between Religiousness A and B. Furthermore, he connects religion immediately to the fideistic description of Religiousness B. Therefore I divide my paper into two main parts: In the light of the critiques against the model of representation (2.1), I show how Habermas refers to Kierkegaard in his debate with Dieter Henrich in the early 1990ies (2.2) and how Kierkegaard supports

1 Martin B. Matuštík, "Habermas's Reading of Kierkegaard: Notes From a Conversation", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 17, no. 4 (1991): 318

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Habermas in his debate about genetic enhancement at the end of the decade (2.3). In a second step, I point out how Habermas makes use of Kierkegaard's dialectics of existence for translating religious validity claims to a secular audience (3). My thesis is: Because Habermas confuses Religiousness A and B with each other, he immediately links religion to the fideistic paradigm of Religiousness B, which is characteristic for his view on religion as well.

II. FROM TIME TO TIME: HABERMAS AS A SECULAR READER OF KIERKEGAARD

One of the first contexts wherein Habermas refers to Kierkegaard in a systematical manner is his reply to Dieter Henrich entitled "Metaphysics after Kant" (1987).[2] The discussion between Henrich and Habermas deals with the question which type of philosophy is adequate with regard to the ongoing critique of reason by postmodernity (e.g. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard) and relativism by theory of science (e.g. Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and in particular Paul Feyerabend).[3] Habermas already dedicates his foregoing monograph *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) to this topic: "The new Critique of reason suppresses that almost the 200-year-old counter-discourse inherent in modernity itself which I am trying to recall."[4] Habermas seems to be astonished that Henrich can pass over these forms of critique and continue in his argumentation. Habermas characterizes Henrich's philosophy as a form of metaphysical thinking, which ignores the problems of the model of reflection: This model refers to a theory of representation, which is based on a distinction of a subject, wherein a subject has to split itself into a reflecting or representing (and thereby "subjective") and a reflected or represented (and thereby "objective") part, in order to identify itself *as* itself.[5]

2 Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (MIT Press, 1992), 10-27.

3 Cf. Volker Gerhardt, "Metaphysik und ihre Kritik: Zur Metaphysikdebatte zwischen Jürgen Habermas und Dieter Henrich", *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 42, no. 1 (1988); Placidus Heider, *Jürgen Habermas und Dieter Henrich: Neue Perspektiven auf Identität und Wirklichkeit* (Alber, 1999); Klaus Müller, "Habermas und die neuen Metaphysiker: Konvergenz und Divergenz mit Dieter Henrich und Michael Theunissen", in *Habermas und die Religion*: *Zweite, erweiterte Auflage*, ed. Klaus Viertbauer and Franz Gruber (Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2019).

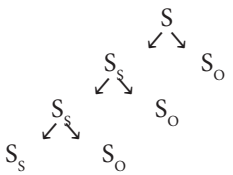
4 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (MIT Press, 1987), 302.

5 Cf. Manfred Frank, "Fragmente einer Geschichte der Selbstbewußtseins-Theorie von Kant bis Sartre", in *Selbstbewußtseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre*, ed. Manfred Frank (Suhrkamp

II.1 Three problems

The model of representation is confronted with at least three critiques: (i) the infinite regress, (ii) its timeless character and (iii) the interpretation of the subject as a *causa sui*.

Ad i: The use of the model of representation leads into an infinite regress. This critique is sparked by the distinction of the subject into a reflecting or representing (S_S) and a reflected or represented (S_O) part.[6]



By doing so and making use of the representation paradigm, a subject S will never grasp itself in a whole as a pure subject, but only a part of it (namely S_S). Although S_S tends towards 0 and S_O towards 1, in any case will $S_S = 0$ or $S_O = 1$.

Ad ii: The second critique adds the timeless character to this argument. The act of reflection or representation, by which S distinguishes itself into S_S and S_O, cannot be synthesized in a single moment. Furthermore, the distinction takes some time, which can be illustrated by the difference of a time t_1 before and a time t_2 after the act of reflection or representation.

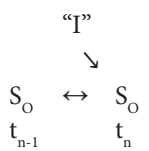
Behind every nomination, a gap between the word and the object labeled by the word is concealed.[7] In our case, the gap appears between the word "I"

Verlag, 1991), 433-435.

6 The romantic philosophers mainly expressed this critique against their idealistic counterparts, especially in the quarrel between Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Hölderlin. In his *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* Fichte tries to defend — against this critique by Hölderlin in *Urtheil und Seyn* — his insight from the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 that the identity "I = I" embodies the first principle of thinking which cannot be gone behind: There is no infinite regress, so Fichte, because "the thinking subject and the object one is thinking of, the thinker and the thought, are here one and the same. […] The concept or thought of the I arises when the I acts upon itself, and the act of acting upon oneself produces the thought of the I and no other thought." Johann G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo 1796/99)*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 111 f.

7 Jacques Derrida coins the difference between t_1 and t_2 *différance*. But Derrida's *différrance* is much more than a simple period of time. It stands for an ontological difference between becoming aware of something and being something. Although prima facie *S* seems to become aware of itself in *tn* , there is a *différrance* between *S* (in t_{n-1}) and the awareness of *S* (in t_n). Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).

and the self-consciousness structure as its corresponding object. In the performative act of saying "I" at t_n, we refer to a temporal forgoing t_{n-1} structure of self-consciousness, which is not the same as in t_n.



For this reason, the model of reflection or representation is unable to grasp one and the same self-consciousness by saying "I".

Ad iii: The third critique focuses on the interpretation of the subject as a *causa sui*. In traditional ontology a *causa sui* embodies the highest principle. Therefore, especially in Christian theology, God is often characterized in this way.[8] By referring the *causa sui* to the subject, we try to explain how we are able to grasp ourselves by saying "I" in spite of the above mentioned problems. But this strategy goes hand in hand with some serious problems: In particular the relation between the subject, the world and other subjects becomes asymmetric. If a subject is defined as a *causa sui*, it has not only to be the reason for itself, but for the world, God and all other subjects as well.

II.2 Three accounts: Habermas, Henrich, and Kierkegaard

Both Henrich[9] and Habermas[10] refer to these critiques in their works: While Henrich does it in his examination of post-Kantian philosophy, Habermas combines a Hegelian reading with the insights of ordinary language philosophy. Thereby Habermas not only tries to cope with these critiques, but rather offers a solution, adequate in his eyes, with his theory of communicative action. In his own words:

8 Cf. Pierre Hadot, "Causa sui", in *Historisches Wörterbuch für Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter et al. (Schwabe, 1971).

9 Cf. Dieter Henrich, *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht* (Klostermann, 1966); Dieter Henrich, *Fluchtlinien* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982); Dieter Henrich, *Selbstverhältnisse* (Reclam, 1982); Dieter Henrich, "Was ist Metaphysik was Moderne? Thesen gegen Jürgen Habermas", *Merkur* 40, no. 448 (1986); Dieter Henrich, "Die Anfänge der Theorie des Subjekts (1790)", in *Zwischenbetrachtungen*, ed. Axel Honneth (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989); Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewusstsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken* (Klett-Cotta, 1992).

10 Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Heinemann, 1984); Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Chap. I, II, XI and XII; Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*.

> A different, less dramatic, but step-by-step testable critique of the Western emphasis on logos starts from an attack on the abstractions surrounding logos itself, as free of language, as universalist, and as disembodied. It conceives of intersubjective understanding as the telos inscribed into communication in ordinary language, and of the logocentrism of western thought, heightened by the philosophy of consciousness as a systematic *foreshortening* and *distortion* of a potential always already operative in the communicative practice of everyday life, but only selectively exploited.[11]

At the very end of the above-mentioned paper, Habermas links Henrich's position to Kierkegaard.[12] Habermas thus tries to diagnose a paradigm shift by Henrich from philosophy back to metaphysics. By arguing so, Habermas identifies two concepts of a self in Kierkegaard's masterpiece *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and applies the *first* concept to the model of reflection and its problem of distinguishing a self into a subjective and an objective part.[13] He argues that a self in the sense of a performative action is unable to fill the gap: "The subject that relates itself to itself cognitively comes across the self, which it grasps as an object, under this category as something already derived, and not as it-itself in its originality, as the author of spontaneous self-relation."[14] This concept of a self is based on two premises: The first one claims that a self is only accessible within self-consciousness. By arguing that way, "it is impossible to go behind this self-relation in reflection", because "the self of subjectivity is only the relation that relates itself to itself."[15] This insight leads immediately to the second one, which adds that such a self "must either have posited itself or have been posited by something else."[16] By choosing the first path, you will end in an infinite regress. Therefore Henrich hand in hand with Kierkegaard tries the second one and grounds the self in an "other":

> This other that precedes the self of self-consciousness is, for Kierkegaard, the Christian God of Redemption, while for Henrich it is the prereflexively

11 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 311.

12 This is remarkable, because Henrich himself hardly referred to Kierkgaard before and never linked Kierkegaard to the tradition of romantic philosophy. Cf. Klaus Viertbauer, *Gott am Grund des Bewusstseins?* (Pustet, 2017), 15-21.

13 Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (Penguin, 1989), 43 f.

14 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 24: "Kierkegaard adopted this problem from Fichte by way of Schelling and made it into the starting point for a meditation that propels whoever existentially reflects upon himself into the 'Sickness unto Death.'"

15 Ibid., 25.

16 Ibid.

> familiar anonym of conscious life, which is open to Buddhistic as well as Platonistic interpretations. […] Both interpretations refer to a religious dimension and thereby to a language that may be derived from the old metaphysics but also transcends the modern position of consciousness.[17]

On the one hand, as the quote indicates, Habermas refuses any metaphysical postulates, but, on the other hand, he tries to reinterpret the "other" through "language":

> If, namely, the self is part of a relation-to-self that is performatively established when the speaker takes up the second-person perspective of a hearer toward the speaker, then this self is not introduced as an object, as it is in a relation of reflection, but as a subject that forms itself through participation in linguistic interaction and expresses itself in the capacity for speech and action. […] 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.[18]

In line with Henrich and Kierkegaard, Habermas chooses the second way of grounding a self in an "other"; but in contrast to them, he identifies the "other" neither with "God", nor with a "prereflexively familiar anonym of conscious life", but with "language".

II.3 An intensification: How to deal with unborn life?

But what is to be done if a person is not yet born and therefore unable to participate in social contexts in order to develop an identity in the interactive process of socialization? Against this backdrop, Habermas focuses on the discussion about genetic engineering and liberal eugenics, which reaches Germany at the end of the 1990ies.[19] A heavy debate in the German *Bundestag* aims to overthrow the *Embryonenschutzgesetz* and to legalize pre-implantation diagnostics.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Of course, there is not enough space left, to refer in a serious sense to the fine-grained and overwhelming discussion in the Anglo-Saxon world. Cf. Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (Vintage Books, 1994); Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (Picador, 2003), Chap. 5; Michael J. Sandel, *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic*

The political discussion is framed by an intellectual dispute in the *Feuilletons* of the leading newspapers, like *Die Zeit*[20] or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*[21]. In this discussion, Jürgen Habermas plays a significant role: On the one hand, Habermas truly fights for keeping the *Embryonenschutzgesetz* as a kind of protection for unborn life. On the other hand, he cannot do this by referring to the embryo's state of consciousness like others do, without making a paradigm shift back to metaphysical thinking and thereby contradicting himself. But, so Habermas's strong conviction, a human being is an end in itself, and this means much more than just being a bearer of certain qualities, e.g. self-consciousness or intelligence: "How we deal with human life before birth […] touches on our self-understanding as members of the species. And this self-understanding as members of the species is closely interwoven with our self-understanding as moral persons."[22] Against this backdrop, Habermas focuses on the relation between the unborn life and its parents. In this relation, birth marks an important caesura: "For a person to be himself, a point of reference is required which go back beyond the lines of tradition and the contexts of interaction which constitute the formation through which personal identity is molded in the course of a life history."[23] Parents or even teachers might initiate a certain interest, like making children learn to play an instrument or do some kind of sport. When grown up, the child has the opportunity to judge for himself if this interest belongs to his identity or not and to dissociate himself from it if he wants to. This opportunity is not given, so Habermas, if the interest is devised prenatally in the form of a genetic enhancement, by which the genome of the child is going to be modified in a way which enables him to do things much better than under ordinary circumstances, e.g. perfect pitch, a muscular physique etc. Therefore Habermas argues:

Engineering (Belknap Press, 2009); Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), Chap. 6 and many others more.

20 Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, "Die kritische Theorie ist Tod: Peter Sloterdijk schreibt an Assheuer und Habermas", *Die Zeit*, no. 37 (1999); Peter Sloterdijk, "Regeln für den Menschenpark", *Die Zeit*, no. 38 (1999); Jürgen Habermas, "Post vom bösen Geist", *Die Zeit*, no. 38 (1999); Manfred Frank, "Geschweife und Geschwefel", *Die Zeit*, no. 39 (1999); Ernst Tugendhat, "Es gibt keine Gene für die Moral", *Die Zeit*, no. 39 (1999).

21 All papers are collected in Christian Geyer, ed., *Biopolitik. Die Positionen* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001); cf. Sigrid Graumann, ed., *Die Genkontroverse* (Herder Verlag, 2001).

22 Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003), 66.

23 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 59.

> A previously unheard-of interpersonal relationship arises when a person makes an irreversible decision about the natural traits of another person. This new type of relationship offends our moral sensibility because it constitutes a foreign body in the legally institutionalized relation of recognition in modern societies. […] When one person makes an irreversible decision that deeply intervenes in another's organic disposition, the fundamental symmetry of responsibility that exists among free and equal persons is restricted.[24]

To solve this problem, Habermas strongly refers to Kierkegaard in his book *The Future of Human Nature* (2002). This also marks a milestone within the discussion about Habermas's Kierkegaard reception. Especially the first essay, entitled "Are There Postmetaphysical Answers to the Question: What is the 'Good Life'?" turns out to be a treasure trove for Habermas's understanding of Kierkegaard. Aforesaid paper consists of three parts, with a focus on Kierkegaard in the second and third sections. There Habermas deals with the question whether there is a postmetaphysical answer to the question of a good life. With respect to Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951), Habermas is critical of such an answer: "Ethics has now regressed […] and become the 'melancholy science', because it allows, at best, only scattered, aphoristic 'reflections from damaged life.'"[25] Against the backdrop of social changes beginning in the mid of 19th century which go hand in hand with an acceleration of individualization, ethics can no longer provide a theory of the good life. Furthermore, as John Rawls points out, "the 'just society' ought to leave it to individuals to choose how it is that they want to 'spend the time they have for living.'"[26] This development, so Habermas fears, opens the door to a more and more egotist society, in which the law is abused as a weapon to push through one's very own interests against others and the society.[27] This path of argumentation starts from Kant up to modern moral philosophy: "Deontological theories after Kant may be very good at explaining *how* to ground and

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 2. — Allthough in the common discussion "morality" stands for norms, values or principles and "ethics" for a philosophical reflection on them, Habermas separats "ethics" and "morality" in a different manner, so that in many cases "ethics" focuses exclusively on the detailed question of an individual life stage or "good life" and "morality" on the broader question of grounding norms and justice.

27 Cf. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (Ignatius Press, 2006), 19-52.

apply moral norms; but they still are unable to answer the question of *why* we should be moral *at all*."[28]

In this essay, Habermas refers to Kierkegaard as a counterweight to the banning of the question of the good life from moral philosophy: "Kierkegaard was the first philosopher who answered the basic ethical question regarding the success or failure of one's own life with a postmetaphysical concept of 'being-able-to-be-oneself'."[29] Especially in the confrontation of the aesthetical and ethical life stages in his monograph *Either/Or* (1844), Kierkegaard demonstrates that, in order to regain autonomy as his original freedom, the individual has to pull himself out of the scattered, anonymous life of the aesthetical life stage. Within the ethical life stage, the individual orientates his interests not to pleasure, but to values and norms. This turn from aesthetical to ethical life stage goes along with the shift from freedom of choice to autonomy. According to Habermas, the self of the ethical life stage embodies a basis for a postmetaphysical grounding of the good life:

> Rather, all his attention is on the structure of the ability to be oneself, that is, on the form of an ethical self-reflection and self-choice that is determined by the infinite interest in the success of one's own life-project. With a view toward future possibilities of action, the individual self-critically appropriates the past of her factually given, concretely re-presented life history. Only then does she make herself into a person who speaks for herself, an irreplaceable individual.[30]

The only way to stabilize the self of the ethical life stage, so Habermas's reading of Kierkegaards late work *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), is to ground it in God. This has less to do with a "deficit in *knowledge* but of a corruption of *will*."[31] Habermas identifies the grounding in God a hinge between "an unconditionally demanding morality and care for oneself."[32] The good life as an undespairing state of an authentic being-oneself can only reached by accepting, that the self itself depends on something other. Whereas Kierkegaard connects the other with God in the religious life stage, Habermas tries to connect it with language:

> The linguistic turn permits a deflationary interpretation of the 'wholly other.' As historical and social beings we find ourselves always already in a

28 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 4. (Italics by K.V.)
29 Ibid., 5.
30 Ibid., 6 f.
31 Ibid., 8.
32 Ibid.

> linguistically structured lifeworld. In the form of communication through which we reach an understanding with one another about something in the world and about ourselves, we encounter a transcending power. […] The *logos* of language embodies the power of the intersubjective, which precedes and grounds the subjectivity of speakers.[33]

In other words: In line with Kierkegaard, Habermas identifies the dependence of the self on the other. But while Kierkegaard interprets it as "God" within the religious life stage, Habermas connects it immediately to "language". Habermas's shift from "God" to "language" is founded in the linguistic turn from metaphysics to philosophy of language:

> The logos of language escapes our control, and yet we are the ones, the subjects capable of speech and action, who reach an understanding with one another in this medium. […] From this perspective, what makes our being-ourselves possible appears more as a transsubjective power than an absolute one.[34]

Like in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, Habermas makes use of Kierkegaard's modes of being-able-to-be-oneself in a postmetaphyscial sense also in *The Future of Human Nature*. The change from "God" to "language" goes hand in hand with his change from "metaphysics" to "philosophy of language".

II.4. Current results

Summing up, all three — Habermas, Henrich and Kierkegaard — cope with the above-mentioned problems:

Ad i: All three avoid the infinite regress by deducing the link between "I" and "self-consciousness", which constitutes identity, no longer immediately from the "I", but from another authority: "language" (Habermas), "prereflexively familiar anonym of conscious life" (Henrich) or "God" (Kierkegaard).

Ad ii: Henrich and Kierkegaard avoid the "gap of time"-problem by transcending the constellation in a timeless, prereflexive sphere. Habermas, on the other hand, separates the self of a person, following Georg Herbert Mead[35], in an "I" and a "me": While the "me" stands for the objective reflected forms of a self and its socialization in different contexts of life, like family, hobby or work, the "I" stands for the subjective instance which coordinates

33 Ibid., 10 f.

34 Ibid., 11.

35 George H. Mead, *Mind, Self & Society* (Chicago Univ. Press, 2015); — Cf. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Chap. V; Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 149-204.

and assembles them to a person. By this separation of "I" and "me", Habermas is able to ward off the critique.

Ad iii: By joining the second self-model, all three do not encounter the *causa sui* aporia.

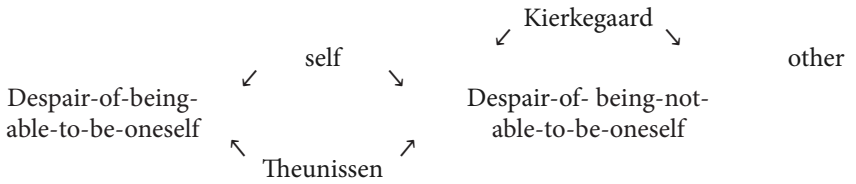
In a nutshell: The difference between Habermas and the metaphysical frameworks of Henrich and Kierkegaard consists in his interpretation of the "other" as "language". By doing so, Habermas combines a secular with a post-metaphysical reading. He opens an originally metaphysical (Henrich) or even religious (Kierkegaard) discussion to social science: It is no longer God or a certain state of consciousness, but the description of the social and communicative interaction between persons that explains the nature of a self.

EXCURSUS: MICHAEL THEUNISSEN'S SECULAR RELECTURE OF KIERKEGAARD

The task of a secular reading of Kierkegaard is first and foremost connected with the late work of the German philosopher Michael Theunissen (1932-2015). Theunissen, who has worked on Kierkegaard since his doctoral thesis *Der Begriff Ernst bei Søren Kierkegaard* (1958), is recognized as an expert on Kierkegaard not only in Germany.[36] After doing studies in the fields of German idealism, social philosophy and philosophical psychology, Theunissen refers again to the Danish mastermind in his late work. But he no longer offers a historical reconstruction. Rather, he is working on a relecture of Kierkegaard in the form of correcting his main premises in order to open his insights for a secular audience.[37] Theunissen's goal consists in a separation of the dialectic of despair and the dialectic of existence between "self" and "other".

36 Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Der Begriff Ernst bei Søren Kierkegaard* (Alber, 1958); Michael Theunissen and Winfried Greve, eds., *Materialien zur Philosophie Søre Kierkegaards* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979).

37 Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Das Selbst auf dem Grund der Verzweiflung* (Anton Hain, 1991); Michael Theunissen, *Der Begriff der Verzweiflung: Korrekturen an Kierkegaard* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991) and especially his detailed discussion Michael Theunissen, "Für einen rationaleren Kierkegaard", with Niels J. Cappelørn, "Am Anfang steht die Verzweiflung des Spießbürgers"; Hermann Deuser, "Grundsätzliches zur Interpretation der Krankheit zum Tode"; Arne Grøn, "Der Bergriff Verzweiflung"; Arne Grøn, "Kierkegaards Phänomenologie"; Alastair Hannay, "Basic Despair in The Sickness Unto Death"; Heiko Schulz, "To Believe is to Be" all collected in the *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* of 1996 or the later critique of Marius G.



According to Theunissen, the dialectic of existence is only reasonable in reference to theological premises. If there is no other — which is only a cipher for God[38] — then the self has to cope with his despair alone. Against this backdrop, Theunissen changes the original question of the relation of a self to the other in how a self has to deal with despair in his daily life. Thereby Theunissen makes use of Kierkegaard's dialectics of despair and tries to synthesize it with his insights of social philosophy to a paradigm of negativism.[39] In his eyes, Kierkegaard provides an analysis of despair which is not only detailed, but also still fruitful for the topical systematic debate today. Although we are confronted with despair in our daily life, we are able to develop an idea how a despairless life has to look like. In contrast to Kierkegaard, Theunissen argues, that we can develop such an idea even without the ideal of "God" or an "other". In his argumentation, Theunissen isolates the dialectics of despair from the Kierkegaardian self-concept in an eclectic way and reimports it in his own theory. Let us face Theunissen's proposal with the three critiques above: (i) the infinite regress, (ii) its timeless character and (iii) the interpretation of the subject as a *causa sui*.

Ad i: In Theunissen's account a self interprets itself by oscillating between the despair-of-being-able-to-be-oneself and the despair-of-being-not-able-to-be-oneself. By doing so, he gets entangled in the regresses and circles of the model of representation: A self relates to itself and thereby to the relation and thereby to the relation of the relation and so on ad infinitum.

Ad ii: Hand in hand with the first critique, a self cannot cope with the timeless character of identity. In every act of the infinite self-reflection a gap

Mjaaland, "Alterität und Textur in Kierkegaards »Krankheit zum Tode«", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 47, no. 1 (2005).

38 Theunissen brings the proof that Kierkegaard substitutes "God" through "other" in the final version of *The Sickness Unto Death*. Cf. Theunissen, *Das Selbst auf dem Grund der Verzweiflung*, 36.

39 Cf. Axel Honneth, "Unverfügbarkeiten des Dialogs: Zum Lebenswerk von Michael Theunissen", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 64, no. 1 (2016).

of time appears, which can be interpreted as a *différance* and therefore as an ontological difference. In other words: A self tries to grasp itself in every act of reflection, but fails because the reflecting self (tn-1) is not identical with the reflected self (tn). A closer look shows that the outlined difference of time is an ontological difference, like Derrida's *différance*.

Ad iii: Due to the fact that Theunissen — in opposition to Habermas, Henrich and Kierkegaard — links the self to the first model, he sketches the self as a *causa sui*. There is no other instance on which it depends, so that it has to be its own reason. Against this backdrop, Theunissen's self also is confronted with the questions of how to describe the relation to others and the world.

Summing up, in contrast to Habermas, Henrich and Kierkegaard, Theunissen's account has serious problems to deal with the above-mentioned critiques. Therefore it does not seem to be an alternative for a secular relecture of Kierkegaard.

III. A POSTSECULAR, NOT A METAPHYSICAL TURN

As we have seen, Henrich tries a metaphysic way, Kierkegaard chooses a religious one and Theunissen follows a secular relecture. In this second step I want to demonstrate how Habermas combines a religious with a postmetaphysical reading and how Kierkegaard influences him. Therefore Habermas separates "moral" from "ethical" and links religion to the second instance. In contrast to the mainstream of moral philosophy, Habermas identifies the ethical as a narrow discourse about the question what makes a good life. Thereby he fears, that people more and more lose their motivation for orientating their lives according to moral virtues and principles. He sees the upcoming debates of genetic enhancement, cloning and designer babies at the end of the 1990ies as paradigmatic for a more and more egoistic society.[40] Against this backdrop Habermas intensifies his communication with religious communities, in which he thinks something is conserved which is on the one hand "opaque" for postmetaphysical thinking, but on the other hand neces-

40 A short glance at the ongoing debates on "transhumanism" and "moral enhancement" — which Habermas never directly faces — offer a different picture. Cf. Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016); Ingmar Person and Julian Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future?* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014); John Harris, *How to be Good?* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).

sary to motivate the members of society to live a moral life. Religion contains a driving force which Habermas labels "an awareness of what is missing".[41] Although Habermas refuses the metaphysical or ontological grounding of religion, he is strongly interested to salvage its "semantic potential" and transform it for postmetaphysical thinking.

III.1 A cooperative venture

In this context, Habermas's Friedenspreisrede *Faith and Knowledge* (2001) is discussed as the turning point from secularization to a so-called "postsecular society".[42] In this paper Habermas formulates three principles, how religious insights can be translated into validity claims:

> First of all, the religious conscience must handle the encounter with other confessions and other religions cognitively (1). Second, it must accede to the authority of science, which holds a social monopoly on knowledge (2). Finally, it must participate in the premises of a constitutional state, which is based on a non-sacred concept of morality (3).[43]

By arguing that way, Habermas finally breaks with the idea of secularization, but still continues with the postmetaphysical line of his argumentation: In the public sphere, religious semantics have to be translated into a secular language, not only by believers, but also by agnostics and atheists. Habermas names this process a "cooperative venture"[44] for both sides — religious and secular people: "Democratically enlightened common sense is not a singularity, but is instead the mental constitution of a public with many different voices."[45] But, as the quote above indicates, even at this stage, Habermas still distinguishes religious insights from secular ones. I refer directly to Habermas's demands:

Ad 1: In order to include religion in the process of building a public common sense, different religions, like Christianity and Islam have to respect and get along with each other in daily life. Thereby their theological claims of absoluteness cannot be an obstacle or a disruptive element for democracy.

41 Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Polity Press, 2010), 15-23.

42 Cf. Klaus Viertbauer, "Einleitung", in *Habermas und die Religion*: *Zweite, erweiterte Auflage*, ed. Klaus Viertbauer and Franz Gruber (Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2019).

43 Jürgen Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge (Acceptance Speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2001)" (2001), 3.

44 Ibid., 5.

45 Ibid.

Against this backdrop they have to find ways how to esteem religious (including agnostic and atheistic) convictions of others.

Ad 2: According to Habermas, there is a strict distinction in the competence of religion and science. Religions have to accept the insights of science and include them in their own worldviews. This demand is immediately connected with Habermas's idea of a postmetaphysical thinking: Worldviews are based solely on the insights of science, like the paradigm of evolution, and cannot be challenged or even interpreted by religious or metaphysical theories.[46] Against this backdrop, Habermas seems to be extremely reserved against the ongoing debates in the field of Philosophy of Mind. This rigid attitude causes serious problems in his debates on free will and its consequences for the responsibility of human action.[47]

Ad 3: The constitutional state embodies the basis and forum to which every instance — both religious and secular — have strictly to refer. In this point Habermas makes clear that the frame of the discourse is set by the secular state and its constitution. In other words: No religious authority can ever question the constitution and has therefore to subordinate its own claims under its demands. Especially this aspect of Habermas triggered a heavy discussion in political philosophy. It revealed, so the critiques, Habermas's implicit prejudice (still affected by the theory of secularization) which is his understanding of religion as a premodern instance.[48]

46 As Julian Nida-Rümelin, *Unaufgeregter Realismus: Eine Streitschrift* (Mentis, 2018), 38 f. fleshes it out, Habermas splits his early view on metaphysic insofar that in his later writings, he no longer connects science to a theory of consensus, but to a paradigm of realism. — Cf. the early critique of Ansgar Beckermann, "Die realistischen Voraussetzungen der Konsenstheorie von J. Habermas", *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie* 3, no. 1 (1972).

47 Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008).

48 This critique includes the proposals of somewhat different thinkers like Maeve Cooke, Francis Fiorenza or Jonas Jakobsen. — Cf. e.g. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Church of a Community of Interpretation: Political Theology Between Discourse Ethics and Hermeneutical Reconstruction", in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Crossroad, 1992) or the papers of Maeve Cooke, "Transcendence in Postmetaphysical Thinking", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 4 (2019) and Jonas Jakobsen, "Moderate Inclusivism and the Conversational Translation", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 4 (2019).

III.2 The role of Kierkegaard

As we have seen, except the first claim, Habermas's demands of the *Friedenspreisrede* are exposed to serious critiques. These critiques object that Habermas is neither able to deal with the topical questions of metaphysics (like free will), nor can he sketch a suitable picture of religions (like Christianity or Islam). Against this backdrop, I want to sum up my paper by showing how Habermas tries to interpret religion as a form of ethics by referring to Kierkegaard.

As we have already mentioned, Habermas connects ethics to the comparatively narrow question of what makes a good life. He sees Kierkegaard's dialectics of existence, especially his explanations in *Either/Or* (1844), as a suitable framework for this. In this masterpiece, Kierkegaard sketches characters who disagree about the principles of a good life. By doing so, Kierkegaard depicts three different forms of life which he labels as an aesthetical, an ethical and a religious existence.[49] The relations of these stages or forms of existence are dialectally structured.

The *aesthetical* existence marks the lowest level of self-understanding. Therein Kierkegaard sketches a self as someone who interprets himself by the values of pleasure and love. Love is understood in a widespread sense. In the first section, entitled "Diapsalmata", love is characterized in form of aphorisms as a mixture of vague feelings like boredom, melancholy, cheerlessness, sadness, or loneliness.[50] The second part of the aesthetical existence sketches a picture of love in form of the awakening of desire against the background of the main characters of Mozart's operas Cherubino (in *Le nozze di Figaro*), Papageno (in *Die Zauberflöte*), and Don Juan (in *Don Giovanni*). According to Kierkegaard these characters are paradigmatic for a more and more intense or reflected form of love. Cherubino marks the lowest level of the awareness

49 In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard lies the focus especially on the difference of an aesthetical and an ethical stage. The religious stage is separated in his Climacus-Writings (one of his pseudonyms) in *Religiousness A* and *Religiousness B*. While *Religiousness A* marks a self which becomes aware of its existential contingency, *Religiousness B* describes a self which has an immediate relation to God — like Abraham, Mary or Jesus.

50 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A fragment of Life* (Penguin, 1992), 39-57: "My reflection on life altogether lacks meaning. I take it some evil spirit has put a pair of spectacles on my nose, one glass of which magnifies to an enormous degree, while the other reduces to the same degree. […] What is to come? What does the future hold? I don't know, I have no idea." (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 46).

of desire. Love is still vague and without any object.[51] Papageno on the second stage finds his concrete object of desire in Papagena and, finally, Don Juan at the third stage does not love a concrete girl, but is attracted by womanhood.[52] In the third section, labeled "The Seducer's Diary", Kierkegaard draws the picture of a Dandy as a counterpart to Don Juan: While Don Juan is regarded as an "extensive seducer", who tries to seduce as many girls as possible, the author of the diary is regarded as an "intensive seducer". His aim consist of seducing a girl to seduce him.[53]

The *ethical* existence is constructed in opposition to the aesthetical. Freedom does not mean freedom of choice in order to expand the range or intensity of one's desires, but to coordinate one's actions autonomously. Autonomy stands for a self-orientation of one's actions according to self-chosen norms. Against this distinction, Habermas focuses on the ethical existence:

> The self which is the aim is not just a personal self, but a social, a civic self. So he has himself as a task for an activity through which, as this determinate personal being, he intervenes in the affairs of life. Here his task is not to mould himself, but to exert an influence, and yet he does at the same time mould himself, for, as I remarked above, the way in which the ethical individual lives is by constantly translating himself from one stage to another. Unless

51 "The sensual awakens, though not to movement but to motionless rest, not to joy and gladness but to deep melancholy. Desire is not yet awake, it is moodily hinted at. In desire there is always the desired which rises out of it and comes to view in a bewildering twilight. […] Desire possesses what will become its object but does so without having desired it, and in that way does not posses it." (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 85).

52 "Desire awakens, and as one always first realizes one has been dreaming at the moment of waking, so here too the dream is over. This arousal in which desire awakens, this tremor, separates desire and its object, gives the desire an object." (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or,* 89); "The contradiction in the first stage lay in the fact that desire could acquire no object, but was in possession of its object without having desired it, and therefore could not reach the point of desiring. In the second stage, the object appears on its multiplicity, but since desire seeks its object in this multiplicity, in a deeper sense it still has no object, it is not yet specified as desire. In *Don Giovanni,* on the other hand, desire is specified absolutely as desire, is connotationally and extensionally the immediate unity of the two preceding stages." (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 93).

53 "Most men enjoy a young girl as they do a glass champagne, in a single frothing moment. […] But here there is more. […] No, when one brings matters to the point where a girl has just one task to accomplish for her freedom, to surrender herself, when she feels her whole bliss depends on that, when she almost begs to submit an d yet is free, the for the first time there is enjoyment, but it always depends on a spiritual influence."(Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 282).

> the individual has originally apprehended himself as a concrete personality in continuity, he will not acquire this later continuity either.[54]

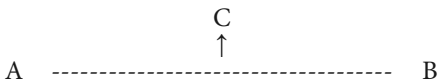
Habermas immediately refers to this civic self when he sketches a self which

> in the social dimension […] can assume responsibility for his or her own actions and can enter into binding commitments with others [...] concern for oneself makes one conscious of the historicity of an existence that is realized in the simultaneously interpenetrating horizons of future and past.55

According to Habermas "such an individual regrets the reproachable aspects of his past life and resolves to continue only in those ways of acting in which he can recognize himself without shame."[56] As the quotation indicates, the aesthetical as well as the ethical point of view are immediately connected with the question how the structure of a self looks like. This question arises in Kierkegaard's book *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849):

> The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relation to itself. A human being is a synthesis [… and] a synthesis is a relation between two terms.[57]

According to Kierkegaard, a relation consists of at least three elements: Two terms (A, B) and a line (C) in between which connects them.



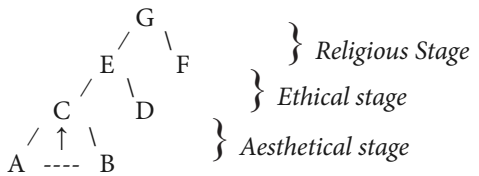
The main question is how C shall be interpreted. There are — as Habermas already mentioned in his discussion with Henrich — two options:

First: If C is interpreted as unconsciousness, then the relation of A-B is dichotomic. In this case the relation of A-B is the relation of A and ¬A. Such a relation is indicated in Kierkegaard's examples of a synthesis like "the infinite and the finite", "the temporal and the eternal", or "freedom and necessity".[58]

Second: If C is interpreted as consciousness, then the relation of A-B is trichotomic. In this case C is "interested" in a double sense: On the one hand, "interest" stands for "being in between" (from the Latin "inter-esse") A and B; on the other hand, it stands for being conscious of its relation to the terms.

54 *Kierkegaard, Either/Or,* 553.
55 Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 6.
56 Ibid., 7.
57 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 43.
58 Ibid.

Kierkegaard refers to both, the first and second interpretations: The unconscious relation builds the basis of the aesthetical existence like he describes it in the Diapsalmata of *Either/Or.* But, as we have seen, even within the aesthetical stage of existence the self becomes aware and conscious of itself, when desire awakes. According to Kierkegaard, the state and intensity of consciousness becomes more and more fine-grained in moving on from the aesthetical to the ethical to the religious stage of existence.



Kierkegaard describes this in the form of a Hegelian dialectic with its principle of *Aufhebung*. The German noun *Aufhebung* combines the seemingly contradictory meanings of the Latin words *tollere*, *conservare* and *elevare*. Hegel is playing with this ambivalence: The verb "tollere" expresses that in C, A and B are nullified; "conservare", that A and B are conserved; and "elevare", that A and B are reformulated in a broader sense.

III.3 Habermas's reference to the "civic self"

Against this backdrop it is interesting to see that Habermas focuses by no means on the religious, but on the ethical self. This is remarkable, because, on the one hand, the ethical self is connected to the model of representation and cannot cope with the three problems mentioned above. On the other hand, in his foregoing book *Postmetaphysical Thinking,* Habermas offers a postmetaphysical reading of the religious self. Therein Habermas links the "other" to "language" and shows how a postmetaphysical interpretation of the self can look like. How can these two divergent arguments be brought in line with each other? In some foregoing papers, I argued that Habermas is making a category error and mixes up the ethical with the religious existence — which is maybe caused by a too superficial reading of Kierkegaard.[59]

59 Klaus Viertbauer, "Monophone Polyphonie? Kritische Anmerkungen zu Jürgen Habermas's Variation des Religiösen", in *Religion in postsäkularer Gesellschaft*: *Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl and Sigrid Rettenbacher (Peter Lang, 2013); Klaus Viertbauer, "Authentizität und Selbst-Bestimmung: Die Aporetik des 'ethischen Selbst' bei Habermas mit einem Seitenblick auf Taylor", in *Authentizität — Modewort, Leitbild, Konzept*: *Theologische und*

In this paper, I want to go a step further and state my original hypothesis more precisely: The difference is not between ethical and religious existence, but within the religious stage, namely between Religiousness A and B. In my opinion, Habermas chooses the civic self only because he identifies the religious self with Religiousness B.

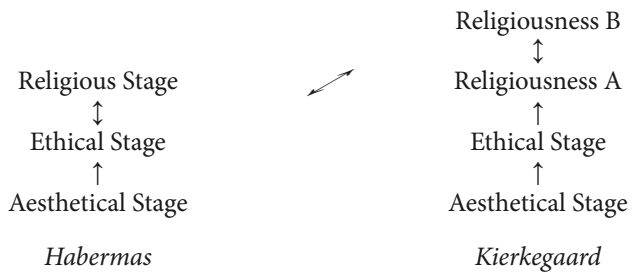
But what exactly is the difference between Religiousness A and B? There are two definitions which are not absolutely congruent. The first definition Kierkegaard develops in his book *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), and the second he works out in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846). According to the first book, Religiousness A stands for a general or universal religious feeling which is open for interpretation by all religions and worldviews. It describes a human being who becomes aware of his or her existential contingency and realizes that his existence appeals to an indefinite instance of an "other". Religiousness B, by contrast, refers to Christianity as the ultimate form of religion. In his *Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard keeps the definition of Religiousness A, but narrows Religiousness B down to a fideistic paradigm of faith. Therein the relation of a believer and God is described as immediate which is only possible for religious figures like Abraham (so Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*), Mary or Jesus (so in *Philosophical Fragments*).[60] Against this backdrop,

humanwissenschaftliche Erkundungen zu einer schillernden Kategorie, ed. Ansgar Kreutzer and Christoph Niemand (Pustet, 2016); Klaus Viertbauer, "Zwischen Natur und Sozialisierung: Jürgen Habermas und die Begründung des moralischen Status des Embryos", in *Jahrbuch für Praktische Philosophie in globaler Perspektive 2*, (Alber, 2018); Klaus Viertbauer, "Ist Religion Opak? Zu einer missverständlichen Formulierung von Jürgen Habermas", *Cahiers d'Études Germaniques*, no. 74 (2018); Klaus Viertbauer, "Jürgen Habermas und der Versuch, den moralischen Status des Embryos diskursethisch zu begründen", in *Habermas und die Religion*, ed. Klaus Viertbauer and Franz Gruber (Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2019).

60 Of course, Kierkegaard's account is faced with many theological problems, like the rising questions of religious fundamentalism or the ontological difference between Abraham and Mary — on the one hand — and Jesus as God — on the other. Cf. Adam T. Diderichsen, "On the Teleological Suspense of the Ethical", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 7 (2002); Elmer H. Duncan, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of the Ethical: A Study of Exception-Cases", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (1963); Michael Olesen, "The Climacean Alphabet: Reflxions on Religiousness A and B from the Perspective of Edifying", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 10 (2005); Thomas Pepper, "Abraham: Who Could Possibly Understand Him?", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1 (1996); Ettore Rocca, "If Abraham is not a Human Being", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 7 (2002); Brian Söderquist, "The Religious 'Suspension of the Ethical' and the Ironic 'Suspension of the Ethical': The Problem of Actuality in Fear and Treamblin", *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 7 (2002).

Religiousness B is not an existential stage, but a regulative ideal which demonstrates the power of faith.[61]

As it appears, Habermas is not aware of the distinction of Religiousness A and B and for this reason identifies the religious existence directly with Religiousness B. This leads to an asymmetry between Kierkegaard's dialectic of existence and Habermas's reading of it.



Owing to the fact that Habermas is not aware of Religiousness A, he immediately refers religious speech to the fideistic paradigm of Religiousness B. Against this backdrop religion always has a strong fideistic structure for Habermas. He marks the relation between a secular discourse (independent whether from an aesthetical or ethical point of view) and a religious one as "opaque" and labels this as a form of "dialectic".[62] It is obvious that this "dialectic" can no longer the dialectic of *Aufhebung* which integrates the aesthetical and ethical stage into a religious one. Furthermore Habermas postulates — for the ontological discussion — an insuperably dualistic basis of the relation between faith and reason:

> If we want to avoid the latter two presuppositions must be fulfilled: the religious side must accept the authority of natural reason as the fallible results of the institutionalized sciences and the basic principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality. Conversely, secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith, even though in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally accessible, discourse.[63]

Habermas's idea of a translation refers exclusively to the subordinated epistemic discussion which is embedded in the ontological framework. In this

61 According to the doctrine of original sin, mankind only can reach Religiousness A and admire the faith of such figures like Abraham or Mary.

62 Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing*, 15.

63 Ibid., 16.

sense, "secularization functions less as a *filter* separating out the contents of traditions", so Habermas, "than as a *transformer* which redirects the flow of tradition."[64] By arguing so, Habermas connects every form of religion to Religiousness B, which is regarded as fideistic.

IV. CONCLUSION

Habermas draws a fideistic picture of religion. In my paper, I argued that Kierkegaard plays an important role in this process: On the one hand, Kierkegaard offers a postidealistic account of self-consciousness that is able to cope with the problems of modernity (2.1) and even genetic enhancement (2.3); on the other hand, Kierkegaard's dialectic is suitable to overcome Habermas's difference of moral and ethics as well as to deal with the question of a good life (3.2). But, with all due respect to Habermas, he oversimplifies Kierkegaard's account, by reducing religion to Religiousness B. Against this backdrop we have seen that Habermas's does not refer to Kierkegaard's religious, but to the civic self. Thereby Habermas's understanding of religion as fideistic becomes apparent. He still thinks of religion as a premodern cult or rite. If Habermas becomes aware of Kierkegaard's Religiousness A, so my thesis, he has to reformulate his idea of religion completely.

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64 Ibid., 17.

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RITUALS AND ALGORITHMS: GENEALOGY OF REFLECTIVE FAITH AND POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING

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Abstract. What happens when mindless symbols of algorithmic AI encounter mindful performative rituals? I return to my criticisms of Habermas's secularising reading of Kierkegaard's ethics. Next, I lay out Habermas's claim that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the ur-origins of postmetaphysical thinking and reflective faith. If reflective faith shares with ritual same origins as does communicative interaction, how do we access these archaic ritual sources of human solidarity in the age of AI?

> [W]hat we, the moderns, might learn from the workings of ritual: namely, the making of social solidarity on the one hand, and a specific kind of reflexivity on the other.[1]

Ritual and Myth

In his culminating critical theory of religion, Habermas[2] launches a hypothesis that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the dual origins of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking. Secularization of rituals engenders myths. Ritual and myth represent a stubbornly irreducible asymmetry. The knot binding languages to presymbolic rituals is not untied by reducing the rationality differentials between sacred and profane domains. Because

1 Massimo Rosati, "The Archaic and Us: Ritual, Myth, the Sacred and Modernity", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 4–5 (2014): 364.

2 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008); Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll* (Polity Press, 2017); 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.* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019).

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cognitive evolution does not yield a full reduction of rituals to symbols,[3] some of our shared human ritual prehistory survives all linguistification into the present. Ritual origins punctuate the first emergence of *Homo Sapiens* some 200,000 years B.P.[4]

In human prehistory, ritual interaction foregrounds linguistic interaction. This phylogenetic origin is retained in ontogenesis of the species. As translated into myths, archaic rituals evolve with communicative competencies. Because they retain a link to prelinguistic ritual performances, contemporary liturgies of great religions hold keys to the sacred complex. Established sacred performances never stopped translating ritual solidarities into symbolic structures. Human civilizations emerge from the translation of rituals to myth as our species undergoes the first Cognitive Revolution at 70,000 B.P. Imaginative and communicative competencies have been *Sapiens'* hallmark on Earth.

Rituals and Algorithms

The dialectic of rituals and algorithms opens a new chapter of the Anthropocene and the Axial Age at the threshold of the Second Cognitive Revolution. Our new hallmark on Earth is becoming dataism, on the side of postmetaphysical thinking, [*Habermas critiques it!]* and mindful ritual awareness on the side of reflective faith. How do we access archaic presymbolic ritual origins of human solidarity with that mindfulness which is requisite for our survival as recognisably human in the postsecular age of cybernetic singularity between artificial intelligence (AI) and life? What happens when mindless symbols of algorithmic AI encounter mindful performative rituals?

I return to my criticisms of Habermas's secularising reading of Kierkegaard's ethics (1). Next, I lay out Habermas's claim that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the ur-origins of postmetaphysical thinking and

3 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xi.

4 Yovel N. Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (HarperCollins, 2015), chart, "Timeline of History". On rituals and their transformed place in modernity, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1995); Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999); Massimo Rosati, *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self* (Ashgate, 2009); Massimo Rosati, "Kinds of Ritual and the Place of Transcendence", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2010); Rosati, "The Archaic and Us"; Adam. B. Seligman, *Modernity's Wager* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000); Adam. B. Seligman, "A reply to my critics", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2010).

reflective faith (2). If reflective faith shares with ritual same origins as does communicative interaction, how do we access these archaic ritual sources of human solidarity in the age of artificial intelligence (3)?

I. HABERMAS'S SECULARISING TRANSLATION OF KIERKEGAARD REVISITED

Habermas[5] has been developing an innovative reading of Kierkegaard's post-conventional ethics.[6] I have been preoccupied with Habermas's 1987 Copenhagen question addressed to Kierkegaard: How are we to integrate socially that improbable existential individual whose postconventionally reflective faith has survived disenchanted Christendom? I revisit his question in order to tease out why in his most recent work he thinks that we need to recover ritual performatives through the cultic liturgical remnants of the First Axial religions. A rebirth of mindful values may be required for a more lasting access to the human ritual origins if we are to correct for the domination of "the data religion".[7] I ask why Habermas doesn't allow for a viable Second Axial Age or "Anthropocenic future".[8]

Habermas values Kierkegaard not only as a reflective religious thinker but also as a Socratic gadfly and postmetaphysical thinker. After Kierkegaard, Habermas holds, we either must translate all religious claims to one of the validity spheres of secular culture or we must demythologize them.

5 Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (MIT Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (MIT Press, 1993).

6 See on "affinity with the existentialist, i.e. the Marcusean, variant of Critical Theory" (Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London: Verso, 1986), 150 and 190); on interest in Kierkegaard in general (Habermas, *The New Conservatism*); on the communicative rendition of Kierkegaard's ethical stage under the category of "ethical-existential discourse" and postconventional ethics (Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity", in *The Moral Domain*: *Essays in the Ongoing Discussion Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, ed. Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, Thomas E. Wren and Wolfgang Edelstein (MIT Press, 1990); Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (MIT Press, 1990); Habermas, *Justification and Application*.)

7 Yovel N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (HarperCollins, 2016), chap. 11.

8 Bryan S. Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene", *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no. 1 (2017): 142.

As an observer of the existential appropriation of ethical and religious stages of existence, Habermas affirms that we can no longer turn Kierkegaardian clocks back to precritical or forward to fundamentalist religiosity. Following Kant's demotion of proofs for G-d's existence and adopting weaker moral postulates, Kierkegaard does not bother with classical moves to shore up religious beliefs. Theological dogmatics, philosophical apologetics, religious and political theodicy alike, and fundamentalist revivals all but destroy reflective faith. Kierkegaard's religious life catapults him out of safe liturgical spaces of the Lutheran Church. The earnest singular individual becomes a subjective and subjunctive thinker of possibilities that are G-d. One stands alone trying to become faithful in modernity.[9]

I.1 Copenhagen Question to Kierkegaard Answered in Ethical-Existential Discourses

Habermas shares two positions with Kierkegaard. One, the posttraditional individual is a fruit of western modernity marked by postmetaphysical thinking. Kierkegaard does not conflate faith claims with beliefs. Faith is not framed by the differentiated value spheres of modernity — science, morality and law, and culture. Two, individualization transpires through socialization: I become a self in an ongoing paradoxical choice of who I am and want to be. The existential individual is not an acosmic, asocial category, rather posttraditional, postconventional, and postmetaphysical singularity is a pivot of potential social dissent. Kierkegaard's ethical-religious reflexivity allows for Habermas's robust criticism of religious as well as secular fundamentalism.[10]

Leaving Kierkegaard's religious activism aside, Habermas focuses on the ethical stage of existence. He translates Kierkegaard's imputed religious beliefs into criticizable validity claims.

With his unrevised linguistification thesis, Habermas models human social evolution on the linear trajectory from one kind of sacred towards one

9 Note how Sartre is becoming atheist in seculardom or de Beauvoir a woman among womankind.

10 After his early confrontation with Heidegger, the Historians' Debate marks Habermas's (Habermas, *The New Conservatism*) turns to existential categories. Here he unmasks nationalist identity-formation behind historical revisionism. In his latest work (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*; 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.*), he confronts "Enlightenment fundamentalism".

kind of profane. Linguistification here yields total rationalization of the sacred, i.e., reduction of the sacred contents into profane vernaculars.[11] Following this version of the thesis, translations should achieve a thorough reduction of gaps between the sacred and profane forms of understanding. In existential terms, Aristotelian virtues are transformed by post-Kantian emphasis on deontic freedom. As with Kant's monological categorical imperative, when Habermas adopts a Kierkegaardian framework, he integrates individual singularity into ethical-existential discourse. The individualizing self's earnest questioning must be grasped at the same time as one's socialization. First Kierkegaard, then also Habermas reinterprets Aristotle's questions of the good life through Hegelian lenses of ethical life with emphasis on open society. And both thinkers invert Hegel's privileging of *Sittlichkeit* (ethos of peoples) by prioritizing Kant's *Moralität* (the moral point of view). Habermas merely anchors Kierkegaard's deontic inversion in communicative discourse.

Kierkegaard teleologically suspends communitarian ethics (what the priests know best theologically may not be best for reflective faith) in favour of the concretely existing individual. Kierkegaard's singular individual is self-questioning. If individualization is always already also socialization (pace Habermas's adoption of Mead), then self-choice implies teleological suspension of received traditions, conventions, and social institutions. Habermas merely anchors Kierkegaard's ethical-existential questioning in normative moral performatives.

I.2 Ambiguity of Translating the Religious Kierkegaard as a Religious Critic of Religious Institutions

When Habermas searches for a posttraditional social world that would stabilise a risky identity-formation of postmetaphysically unsettled modern individuals, he generates ambiguity about the scope of translation. This very ambiguity resurfaces in Habermas's thinking about sources of the postsecular access-points to archaic ritual life.

The Kierkegaardian self is not a given, e.g., one is not a Christian just because one is born in Christendom. Becoming human is an existential task of self-becoming. Becoming a self is that modal category of reflective dissent whereby one's individualisation via socialisation and one's competence

11 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communivative Action* (Heinemann, 1987).

to raise and evaluate validity claims enable a critical relation to history and lived lifeworld. Kierkegaard teleologically suspends any immediate access to the archaic sacred complex available through Christendom, i.e., the First Axial values. The great masters of suspicion, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Douglass, Dostoyevsky, and Kierkegaard variously proclaim the death of the first Axial G-d(s). So how do we access rituals after the death of G-d?

In his unrevised rationalisation thesis, Habermas depicted all "religiosity" under the rubrics of metaphysics and sacred culture. As forms of understanding, all religions would be therefore ideologies. Religiosity as ideology is that form of understanding which "systematically limits possibility of communication owing to its failure to differentiate sufficiently among the various validity claims".[12] Habermas reviewed the sequence of the forms of understanding according to the rationality differential between the sacred and profane domains. In figure 28, he curiously left the bottom two areas blank. As if postmetaphysical thinking, before he revised his take on religion, purportedly could or should reduce all rationality differentials, reaching a transparent form of understanding capable of evaluating all contents of culture strictly under criticisable validity claims.

Even in this unrevised thesis of linguistification, Habermas retains a phantom limb of a post-formal form of understanding. Those limbs are the blank areas in figure 28 where one could implant a postmetaphysical access to archaic rituals. But must this access come only via institutionally received First Axial values? Kierkegaard's performance of existential singularity is one candidate for extra-institutionalized ritual implants.[13] Why not learn from the world-variety of new ritual performances and the "Anthropocenic future"[14] as

12 Habermas, *The Theory of Communivative Action*, 189–191 and figure 28.

13 We could do the same with Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values or Ken Wilber, "An integral Theory of Consciousness", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 1 (1997); Ken Wilber, "On the Nature of a Postmetaphysical Spirituality: Response to Habermas and Weis", accessed August 6, http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/misc/habermas/index.cfm/; Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Shambhala, 2006); Martin B. Matuštík, "Stages, States, and Modes of Existence in Integral Critical Theory", in *Dancing with Sophia*: *Integral Philosophy on the Verge*, ed. Michael Schwartz and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (State Univ. of New York Press, 2019) integral spirituality.

14 Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene", 142.

so many orphaned rituals bereft of the First Axial religions? New rituals are begotten to solve new challenges of the Second Cognitive Revolution.

> Habermas's view seems to be 'disenchanted' and even 'nostalgic': the echo of the archaic is still here, and religious people are those who have a privileged access to it, while 'we' — as modern unbelievers — can just take note of this. … [W]hen it comes to religions and the sacred, we have to be ready to think about those myths that think us, in order to play our part, as citizens and human beings, in making those new and more humane myths that are needed to replace the old ones.[15]

Habermas accepts now the sharp distinction between beliefs and faith. He detects but does not take seriously emerging unchurched spiritualities and new faith communities, perhaps because their rituals are institutionally homeless. In the process of rationalisation, myths, beliefs, and theologies are distilled into one of the value spheres of modernity. If religious beliefs do not form a distinct value sphere of modernity, how is reflective faith transmitted in lived rituals? Worldviews and values constitute "the *proprium* of religion" only in the participant's perspective as a faith-witness — not in the observer's perspective on religious beliefs.[16]

So why does not Habermas enlist Kierkegaard's religiosity among the postsecular ways whereby one can access an archaic ritual core of humanity? He intentionally considers only the received liturgical-ritual resources of mainstream Axial religions, hoping they are not yet exhausted to provide the faithful with a participatory access to the sacred complex.

> The sacred complex has not disintegrated and religious traditions have preserved their vitality in their symbiosis with the liturgical practices of worldwide religious communities. Their members can even lay claim to a privilege. Religious communities, in performing their rituals, have preserved the access to an archaic experience — and to a source of solidarity — from which the unbelieving sons and daughters of modernity are excluded.[17]

15 Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 364, 366.

16 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* cited in Eduardo Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", *Critical Research on Religion* 6, no. 3 (2018): 301. See my entry on Kierkegaard in Martin B. Matuštík, "Kierkegaard", in *The Habermas Lexicon*, ed. Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019).

17 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 56.

As if phantoms implants of new Axial forms of understanding had no mouths and ears capable of delivering and receiving articulable communicative modalities. Habermas vouches for tolerance of resurgent religious discourses in modernity (depicted in the frame of the postsecular condition). He warns of the spectre of "Enlightenment fundamentalism".[18] He accuses rationalisation laying one-sided burdens on those who nonetheless wish to articulate intuitions that survived secularisation. Habermas concedes that secularisation is not identical with secularism; scientism should not define all conditions of validity.

But what must have been true of the archaic appearance of rituals (i.e., that they allowed for coordination of intersubjectively shared worlds before their linguistification) may very well be true for their resurgence in the age dominated by AI. I venture a hypothesis that existential singularity (a new modal access to the archaic sacred human complex) contravenes the arrival of techno-bio singularity (a possibly total obliteration of human capacity for ritual awareness by smart but mindless algorithms). Rituals, G-d, mind, or meditation cannot be algorithmized. But could we lose our competence to reinvent ourselves by performing them? This is a core "climactic" question faced by *Homo Sapiens*.

I think, Habermas would update his Copenhagen question as follows: Kierkegaard's critique of the established Protestant Christianity closed access to rituals of his established religious community. How is such a non-institutional "practice in Christianity" to survive when it leaves singular existence without public liturgies empowering human solidarity? Kierkegaard once wanted to be a minister, but he rejected all sacraments, even marriage, and on his death bed he refused communion and burial by the church. How can one communicate this exceptional religious experience without participating in the living faith of a religious community? How can one be understood by the secular age that, like self-mocking Habermas, became spiritually tone-deaf?[19]

This is how his Copenhagen question makes full sense once we absorb the force of Habermas's revisions in philosophy of religion: When Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical — the ethos of the peoples and nations — is secularized, its appeal is no longer the sacred. The existential individual,

18 Ibid., xiv; chap. 10: IV.

19 As recent as after the Twin Towers attack in 2001, Habermas calls himself religiously tone-deaf (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 76; also Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003).

when linguistified, becomes the regulative ideal of a communication community. Just as Kierkegaard's reflective and postmetaphysical move to existential singularity, so also Habermas's communicative ideality teleologically suspends religious and cultural nationalism (Christendom), received traditions, religious and secular fundamentalist beliefs. Habermas worries about recovering some minimal communicative normativity in a social setting. Relativization of conventions leaves dissenting individuals in a postsecular condition that renders them motivationally weak and cognitively uncertain. Kierkegaard's individual, just as law, is suspended between facts and norms.

And from the vantage point of a genealogy of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking, the Copenhagen question can be rephrased as follows: We know now that the sacred complex of ritual and myth saves the archaic source of the First Axial *Sapiential* solidarities. 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.? This is how I have attempted to broaden Habermas's continuing preoccupations in the Anthropocene.[20]

II.THE SACRED COMPLEX: UR-ORIGINS OF REFLECTIVE FAITH AND POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING

The revised thesis of linguistification affirms the human ur-origins in ritual and myth.

> The unmistakably archaic character of ritual practices and their need for translation raise the question of whether rites and myths developed simultaneously with the emergence of Homo [S]apiens endowed with the ability to speak, or whether ritual behaviour is an even earlier phenomenon than the evolutionary threshold represented by the development of a grammatical language.[21]

20 Derrida recognized in Kierkegaard's Abrahamic fear and trembling no longer some political or irrational exception attributed to the Dane's presumed decisionism and irrationalism. Fear and trembling are daily occurrences in which the wholly other is every other sacrificed in the application of universal norms (cf. Martin B. Matuštík, "Derrida and Habermas on the Aporia of the Politics of Identity and Difference: Towards Radical Democratic Multiculturalism", *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 1, no. 3 (1995)).

21 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, no. 45.

Habermas seeks access to what once gave rise to the archaic rituals when *Sapiens* generated human coordination and stabilized solidarity. Are there ritual spaces accessible to us today, what are they or where should we seek them? Must they be sought phylogenetically as remainders of the archaic rituals under the postsecular conditions? Or is that very search necessarily a great spiritual accelerator of the Second Axial Age?

II.1 Rituals in the Genealogy of Reflective Faith and Postmetaphysical Thinking

We need to deepen Habermas's revision and decouple the sacred complex from rationalization altogether: "naive theories of secularization can be criticized not only by taking into account the place of the religious sacred and religious communities in a post-secular horizon, but also from the point of view of a host of secular forms of the sacred"[22] distinguishes "liturgical" from "cognitive" and "postmodern reflectivity." Rosati differentiates "two classes of rituals": the "mystical postmodern rituals" are "ritual-like performances"; and "liturgical rituals" are conserved over time in mainstream received "ritualistic religious traditions."[23] Habermas[24] identifies only the latter class of rituals pertaining to the great monotheistic traditions as "the proprium of religion" as such that has not yet been exhausted by the rationalization of sacred myths and worldviews. Emerging spiritualities of the Second Axial Age are nowhere on Habermas's ritual bucket list. When we move beyond the Christian Protestant proprium that seems to frame Habermas's window into all things religious, then with interfaith pluralism and transvaluation of received monotheistic values, "ritualized practices and memories are almost everything, while theology and beliefs are frequently an almost residual dimension".[25]

With Habermas's revision of the secularising linguistification of the lifeworld, my particular return to Kierkegaard's existential mode of communication gains a new urgency. I pointed out that a secularizing linguistification of a Kierkegaardian inward mode of communication into validity domains closed off Habermas from accessing the performative-ritual dimension of Ki-

22 Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 365,367.

23 Rosati, "Kinds of Ritual and the Place of Transcendence", 46.

24 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* cited in Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", 301

25 Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 366.

erkegaard's existence-communication.[26] Because he admits to be religiously tone-deaf, Habermas is less flexible or more conservative in how or where he can hear the surviving entry of secular modernity into the ritual mind today. It is true that "ritual survives in the communal cult practices of world religions"; that "religions do not survive without the cultic practices of a congregation"; and that without ritual life, religions become just so many ethical forms of life and normative systems of values. But it is not so that "in modernity, … [the First Axial Age religions] are the only configuration of spirit or intellectual formation that still has access to the world of experience of ritual in the strict sense".[27]

If we affirm that rituals founded the myth and then in turn underwrote the First Axial Age religions, then *Homo Ritualis*, some 300–100,000 B.P.,[28] antedates the First Cognitive Revolution and origins of fictive languages defining the *Sapiens* in 70,000 B.P. Is not the archaic ritual origin of the *Homo Sapiens,* as it undergirds phylogenetically the First Cognitive Revolution, also a precursor to any institutionalized religious formations that follow the emergence of myth, fictive languages, and the Agricultural Revolution? But then there were no established institutional religions prior to the First Axial Age. Humans were able to access the ritual mind by inventing and practicing rituals, then translating them into mythical stories, enacting them in new beliefs, and building scaffolding for architectures of theories.

If the First Axial religions and their value systems are now under pressures of another Cognitive Revolution, must we not allow *in principle* that there be new rituals emerging from the transvaluation of these dying established cultic practices? Why must Habermas[29] mock new spiritual movements as mere "Californian gimcrackery" marred by "syncretism" that they share with "the

26 See Martin B. Matuštík, "Habermas's Reading of Kierkegaard: Notes from a Conversation", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 17, no. 4 (1993); Martin B. Matuštík, "Kierkegaard as Socio-Political Thinker and Activist", *Man and World* 27, no. 2 (1994); Matuštík, "Derrida and Habermas on the Aporia of the Politics of Identity and Difference"; Martin B. Matuštík, *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Martin B. Matuštík, *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (New Critical Theory, 2013), 92–97, 103, 116–126. Martin B. Matuštík and Merold Westphal, eds., *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Indiana Unive. Press, 1995), 245–253.

27 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 65.

28 Ibid., 45, 64.

29 Ibid., 156.

Evangelicals" and many a world-wide sect in "a de-institutionalized form of religious observance"?[30] What is so precious about institutionalized religions, particularly the Protestant largely deritualized form Habermas privileges, when it comes to accessing the archaic ritual mind at this time of Axial transitions? Would not translations of rituals to myths to theory be *by definition* what the First Axial Age accomplished without any established religious institutions? Must not our need for Axial rebirths not only recover the old but also nurture the new to life again? If we envision that our time is undergoing a new Cognitive Revolution, would not this evolution break the bounds of received religions? Wouldn't we be reinventing human origins while sparring with the algorithmic revolution we are experiencing now?[31]

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, among others, as I now understand their nineteenth century hermeneutics of suspicion and genealogy of values, are the early prophets announcing a new Axial Age. Viable rituals will not be found necessarily in religious houses and established congregations that have become so many sepulchres of gods, nor will they succeed as undertakers digging up dead gods and devalued values for fundamentalist resurrections. Our modern civilizations have been killing and burying classical revelations and inherited traditions. The new values and human solidarities are already being invented and performed in counterpoints to the algorithms of the self-hacking *Homo Deus*.[32]

With Habermas's turn to the ritual archaic dimension of speech, we come to appreciate not only Kierkegaard's rethinking of myth and theology, but also the general place of new rituals in contemporary returns of the "spiritual but not religious." My earlier criticism of Habermas's translation-linguistification

30 Habermas holds this prejudice consistently, reserving the meaning of religion only for major cults and judging new social movements against the received dominant institutionalized religions of the First Axial Age (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 43 125, 156, 160 n. 86, 212.).

31 See Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas, eds., *The Axial Age and its consequences* (Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2012); Alex Blasdel, "Reckoning for Our Species: [Timothy Morton] the Philosopher Prophet of the Anthropocene", *The Guardian*, 2017 June 15; Karl Jasper, "The Axial Age of Human History: A Base for the Unity of Mankind", *Commentary*, no. 6 (1948); Yves Lambert, "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?", *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999); Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness"; Eduardo Mendieta, "The Postsecular Condition and the Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking", in *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*, ed. Justin Beaumont (Routledge, 2019).

32 Harari, *Homo Deus*.

model was rooted in phenomenological evidence whereby Kierkegaard offers insights into an inward mode of communication. Kierkegaard, too, translates religious myths and beliefs but he achieves this with a nonreductionist dual outcome of reflective faith and existential mode of speech acts. Habermas's 1987 Copenhagen question to Kierkegaard can no longer be primarily about posttraditional identity and deliberative institutions safeguarding individual singularity. It is a query about what in the postsecular condition takes the place of rituals in relation to reflective faith and in sync with postmetaphysical thinking.

That so many people in the West and globally call themselves "spiritual but not religious" indicates not merely something sociological, that we live in the postsecular condition, but also something foundational about *Homo Sapiens:* If ritual and myth form two ur-origins of communicative action, then spiritualities are never just distilled from a linguistified sacred, e.g., the First Axial values. To desire a drink of pure absinth of postmetaphysical thinking has been the secularist and scientist dream rightly exposed by Habermas's postsecular turn. To imagine that reflective faith dwells in received cults of established Axial religions as a static placeholder for accessing untamed resources of ritual and myth, this too is tone-deafness or "Enlightenment fundamentalism".[33]

II.2 Single Sacred Complex, Plural Cognitive Revolutions, and Inverse Singularities

Habermas[34] proposes that an archaic ritual formation of the *Sapiens* antedates the first Cognitive Revolution that gave birth to communicative competencies. This thesis underscores what is at stake in what may be our Second Cognitive Revolution. At stake is human "nature" in the age of singularity when data (infotech) interfaces with will to power (biotech).

Habermas claims that ritual and myth form the *Sapiens*' archaic sacred complex. As co-origins of the linguistic competencies and human cooperation that emerge, due most likely to a minor mutation around 70,000 B.P., this sacred complex survives in our social evolutionary make up to the present. If this hypothesis about human genesis can be confirmed reconstructively, then

33 Cf. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 218.

34 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.*

neither the biological (e.g., emotional) nor the cybernetic (e.g., the AI that translates emotions into emoticons) algorithms are the sole vanishing event-horizons of *Sapiens*' social evolution. The other event-horizons are ritual practices. "With ritual practice we associate the meaning of warding off danger and surmounting crises, including the existential experience of death".[35]

Habermas reframes how to think about the linguistification of sacred. Before (1987) linguistification equalled one-sided rationalization yielding a thorough secularization:

> [Now] "linguistification" can only mean discovering the still vital semantic potentials in religious traditions and translating them into a general language that is accessible beyond the boundaries of particular religious communities — and thereby introducing them into the discursive play of public reasons. But that which is not translated from within [by rituals or liturgical practices] provides a different access to reflective faith.[36]

We can replace dialectic of myth and enlightenment with genealogy of faith and metaphysical knowledge[37]: "Can we know whether the linguistification of the sacred, which took place over the millennia in the work on myth, religion and metaphysics, has run its course and has come to a close"?[38] One branch of this genealogical root leads to postmetaphysical thinking that differentiates the background lifeworlds into worldviews and translates the sacred complex into validity domains of communication. The other branch yields reflective faith that is "continuing the 'theological' linguistification of the sacred".[39] *Sapiens* constituted its archaic intersubjective worlds through the motor coordination of communal activity. But with first articulations of rituals in art, fictive languages, and myth, humans created their initial shared symbolic worlds. Reconstructing a single receding archaic sacred complex of *Homo Sapiens*, Habermas hopes to verify the primacy of communicative over instrumental, functional, and algorithmic rationality. The bio-infotech singularity must retain this communicative primacy to remain decidedly human.

The two branches of genealogy join in a singular root metaphysics and monotheism, under the sacred myth-ritual complex. This common root forks

35 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 45.
36 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xiv.
37 Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", 291f.
38 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xiii, 66.
39 Ibid., xiv.

out through universalist theory to postmetaphysical thinking and through the First Axial religions to reflective faith. This analysis points to the sui generis role of rituals in human origins as well as in the human future.

III. WHICH AXIAL AGE, WHOSE RITUALS?

Habermas admits now that reflective faith, and not just reason, is responsible for the specific "theological" linguistification of the sacred. Yet curiously, while theorizing a genealogy with one common root and two parallel and nonreducible branches of reason and faith, Habermas does not take seriously Jaspers[40] and others who anticipate the Second Axial Age.[41] Instead he harkens to archaic rituals preserved in cultic practices, witness, and faith of our contemporaries practicing the First Axial religions.

Given that ritual practices phylogenetically underwrite the emergence of linguistic intersubjectivity, how can the secularized *Sapiens* access that phylogenetic evolution in the living performatives today? Or will not tone-deafness afflict not merely Habermas but also new atheists and then every *Homo Deus*? To become *a religiously tone-deaf human g-d*, I only need to produce and consume mindless algorithms generated by AI *that*, not a *who*, no longer needs human solidarity with the bedrock access to ritual pathos of love and death. "These experiences remain closed to those of us who are tone deaf when it comes to religion".[42]

Habermas refuses to become defeatist about the Anthropocene: We can access the archaic origins in communicative interaction. We can access those ritual-dimensions ontogenetically in the living cultic practices of the First Axial religionists. He argues against his own declared and our threatened tone-deafness: "[R]itual practice has survived, albeit in a transformed

40 Jasper, "The Axial Age of Human History".

41 Lambert, "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age"; See sequel to this paper, Martin Matustik, "Which Axial Age, Whose Rituals? Habermas and Jaspers on the 'Spiritual' Situation of the Present Age." Forthcoming in http://folia-eap.uni.lodz.pl/en/home/; Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness"; Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene"; Bronislaw Szerszynski, "From the Anthropocene Epoch to a new Axial Age: Using Theory-Fictions to Explore Geo-Spiritual Realities", in *Religion in the Anthropocene*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (Cascade Books, 2017).

42 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 76.

guise".[43] There is soft naturalism implied in the irreducible sacred complex of ritual and myth. It reappears in the linkages of First Axial theologies and rationalized theory, then again, we encounter it today in the two surviving branches of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking. Yet soft naturalism is not entirely at the disposal of rational translation. This is because in that translation of sacred traditions to profane validity domains, there appear no residues. Secularisation is seemingly complete. And if secularization could become fully decoupled from the lifeworld, the vanishing point would be secularism of AI.

Habermas holds out for contemporary rituals and liturgies as the participatory, first-person performative media, whereby the semantic contents that inform our ethical life and moral thinking are regenerated and made available.[44] Postmetaphysical thinking and major religions of the First Axial Age share archaic genealogy that is not accessible from within the observer's perspective and its secularist frame.[45] Habermas appeals to "a form of religion that preserves its vitality even under the changed cognitive constellation of modernity" because this vitality alone, he says, provides our times with a lived access to the archaic sacred complex.[46] Thus, the secular citizens must not only tolerate and respect such centres of old cultic practices, faith witness, and ritual vitality. They must also allow for the possibility that "'modernizing' self-enlightenment of religious consciousness" can find resources to translate and communicate *Sapiens'* human ur-origins from within the "sacred complex" we have inherited, yet not exhausted. The translations must become not only postmetaphysically "reflexive" (as if only observed through secularist windows) but also "still the 'true' faith" for those who participate and performatively access archaic ritual reality.[47]

"This complementarity establishes a contemporaneity between the two intellectual formations which precludes the devaluation of religion".[48] In the situation of the present age, if we became socially integrated without residue by the algorithms of AI, would we not lose this access to archaic sources of

43 Ibid., 56.
44 Mendieta, "The Postsecular Condition and the Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking".
45 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 78.
46 Ibid., 124.
47 Ibid., 133.
48 Ibid., 81.

social solidarity? Said differently, would we know ourselves mindfully as human? "I am convinced that human forms of civilised social life can neither be established nor maintained without this kind of self-transcendence that creates distance from occurrences in the world".[49]

The dialectical character of the human origins in ritual and myth perhaps safeguards us from outsourcing our aware intersubjective intelligence to supraintelligent algorithms *that, not a who,* no longer know nor require ritual coordination of data. "But without an appeal to revelation or to some form of contact of the believer with the divine, be it through prayer, ascetic practice or meditation, 'faith' would lose its specific character, namely, its rootedness in religious modes of dealing with 'Heil' and 'Unheil'".[50]

III.1 Remainders and Boundaries of the Human in the Age of AI

Our future search must articulate a dialectic of rituals and algorithms in order to discover remainders and boundaries of the human event that are not reducible to or exhausted by algorithms. AI increasingly claims to know us better than we know ourselves. We can reconstruct what AI cannot know only if *one is* human and *it* is not. That which remains or resists algorithms as their boundary are so many resources of our mindfulness. Among these are the ritual, meditative, creative, aware mind. We will not read these remainders and boundaries necessarily off the forms of understanding in myths, theologies, and postmodern thought-formations, as these too will be hacked by human evolving intelligent designers. Hackers of minds also become data devoured in the memory banks of new algorithms. We need to focus on the ritual, meditative, creative, aware mind as our contemporary ur-origins.

The question to ask is not about complementing a postconventional singular individual with secular political institutions and the mainstream First Axial cults. Rather, following through Habermas's doors, it behoves us to examine how linguistification of traditions opens two parallel paths: postmetaphysical thinking and reflective faith. Once through that door, recognizing the parallel branches of secularization and critical religiosity, we are ready to inquire whether and how reflective faith in its experimental stages creates "the Anthropocenic" rituals for new theologies and philosophies of the Second Axial Age.

49 Ibid., 82.
50 Ibid., 116.

Questions before us are some of the following:

- How do we access the performative-ritual dimension of existence-communication (one of the ur-origins of communicative interaction) that has been barred by one-sided secularism and overdetermined by claims of rationalisation and linguistification?
- What postsecular rituals are viable and necessary to secure human communicative interaction and solidarity at the time of the Second Cognitive Revolution?
- What is the role of reflective faith, "religion without religion," in articulating and enabling the translation of new rituals into the Second Axial Age myths and theories?
- What are the future vanishing points of the genealogy of the sacred complex whereby postmetaphysical thinking and prereflective postsecular rituals continue to rationalize reflective faith as well as nourish critical theory?

THE HUMAN EVENT **FUTURE**

. . . A N T H R O P O C E N E . . .
12,500. H O L O C E N E

SECOND COGNITIVE REVOLUTION
SINGULARITY: INTELLIGENT DESIGN = EVOLUTION
A.I.: INFOTECH & BIOTECH / THE GREAT ACCELERATION
BIG DATA & ALGORITHMS
GENETIC CODE & CLONING
1945 A.D. TRINITY TEST
1900s A.D. – DARWIN, HEGEL, MARX
1781 A.D. STEAM ENGINE
1609 A.D. TELESCOPE

2nd AXIAL AGE? HOMO DEUS?[1]
NEW RITUALS
INTEGRAL MIND
EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE
REFLECTIVE INTERFAITH
POSTSECULAR & ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES
POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING[2]

MODERN REVOLUTIONS
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM
INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM
FRENCH & AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
INDUSTRIAL
SCIENTIFIC

1st AXIAL AGE: HOMO IMAGO DEI
MONOTHEISMS
HEBREW PROPHETS
BUDDHISM
TAOISM
CONFUCIUS
GREEK PHILOSOPHY
ETHICAL UNIVERSALISM & LAW

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION
SAPIENS SUPREME
NEANDERTHAL & SAPIENS
COGNITIVE REVOLUTION
HOMO RITUALIS[3] HOMO SAPIENS

[1] Harari 2016.
[2] Habermas 2019.
[3] Habermas 2017, 64.

300,000/ 200,00/ 70,000/ 30,000,/ 13,000,/ 12,500/ 2,800 - 2,200/ 500/ 300/ 200/ 100/
13.5. BIL/ 4.5 BIL / 10,000 YEARS BEFORE NOW
BIG BANG/ EARTH CREATIONIST YOUNG EARTH

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY: SOME IDEAS ON DRAWING THE DEMARCATION

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Abstract. In this paper I consider two books by Vladimir Shokhin, a distinguished philosopher in Russia, on philosophy of religion (2010) and philosophical theology (2018) as one project aimed at drawing the demarcation between these two disciplines. In what follows I will present Shokhin's project and show briefly how it fits in with the current discussion on the topic, then, draw some consequences from his position, and make some critical notes, and at the end I will briefly present some my views on the problem of drawing clear lines of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology on the basis of the following questions: (1) what is the topic of the disciplines, (2) what are their methods, (3) what are their guiding lines, and (4) who may exercise them?

I. INTRODUCTION

In the mid of 2018 appeared a new book by Vladimir Shokhin, a distinguished professor of philosophy in Russia, *Philosophical Theology: the Canon and the Variability*[1]. This was a remarkable event for the Russian philosophical community for two, as I see it, reasons. First, theology makes a comeback in both intellectual and educational spheres in Russia. Theology became a separate branch of sciences a couple of years ago in Russia, which means that secular universities may open theological departments. Hence it became possible to open postgraduate courses on theology, write dissertations and get secular, i.e. state, candidates and doctorate degrees[2] in theology. It was a revolutionary move, since

1 Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology: The Canon and the Variability* (Nestor-history, 2018).

2 There is a two-level system of scientific and scholar degrees in Russia: candidate and doctorate. The former is a following step after MA and might be received only after finishing

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traditionally theology was taught at spiritual seminaries and academies. So, formally speaking, theology became a respected branch of humanities and sciences as philosophy, history, biology, physics etc. Second, this book is the first systematic attempt to consider the curriculum of philosophical theology since the times of the Russian Empire. Thus, the book is an endeavour in constituting and promoting theology as a branch of humanities, not only as an intellectual puzzle.

In 2010 professor Shokhin published another book entitled *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (from Antiquity to the end of the Eighteenth Century)*[3]. It is a massive critical research (of 784 pages), first, on the subject matter of philosophy of religion both in analytic and continental thought (Shokhin through this analysis identifies initial subject-matter and primary goals of philosophy of religion), and, second, on its origins in the history of the European thought (in the light of this identification Shokhin reconstructs the history of Philosophy of religion from Xenophanes of Colophon up to Friedrich Schleiemacher's *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* and its critics by Göthe, Schelling and Friedrich Samuel Gottfried Sack).

In what follows I will consider both books as one big project, which main aim is to introduce philosophy of religion and philosophical theology into the Russian philosophical community and distinguish their discourses. The task, I ought to state this distinctly, is of vital importance for Russia, since philosophy of religion became a part of the curriculum at philosophical departments only a decade ago and theology, as I mentioned, entered recently the curriculum in secular universities. However, the papers might be of some interest for analytic philosophers of religion and theologians, since with the advent of analytic philosophical theology the self-reflection of both philosophers and theologians on questions about the differences of their disciplines is growing. So, the paper consists of three main parts. In section II I will present Shokhin's project and show briefly how it fits in with the current discussion on the topic, then (section III) draw some consequences from his position, and make some critical notes, and at the end (section IV) I will briefly present some of my views on the problem of drawing clear lines of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.

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a post-graduate course, the latter is usually necessary to get a senior position (the head of department, for instance) in a university or academic institution.

3 Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)* (Alpha-M, 2010).

II. VLADIMIR SHOKHIN ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

II.1 Philosophy of religion

I will not devote much time here for clarifying professor Shokhin's ideas about the subject-matter of philosophy of religion, as I have already presented them in comparison with other approaches within contemporary Russian thought[4]. Below are the most important points related to the present discussion.

(1) Shokhin considers philosophy of religion as a form of *Genetiv Philosophie*, which means that:"…its object should be neither God nor even "God", nor the logical verification of religious beliefs (general or particular), but rather religion that it has to study by non-empirical methods".[5]

(2) As I said Shokhin stresses the fact that a philosopher of religion studies religion in a different way than a theologian or someone specializing in an area of religious studies does, since philosophers rely on purely philosophical (which means for him, nonempirical) methods.

(3) Based on this understanding Shokhin distinguishes 13 tasks of philosophy of religion. Here are those important for the present discussion. (a) Philosophy of religion has to study the phenomenon of religiosity based on Rudolph Otto's phenomenology of religion. This also includes the questions of whether or not religiosity can be reduced to other sides of human existence and experience, and of the genesis of religion. From this follows that (b) philosophy of religion examines the generic concept of *religion*, and (c) its essential properties. (d) The last task requires taking a further issue into account — establishing religious universals, such as "deity", "cult", "community", etc., there are also universals pertaining to the worldviews of a given religion such as "creation", "emanation", "fall from grace", "salvation." etc. (e) A philosopher of religion should clarify such characteristics of religious worldviews as "theism", "pantheism", "panentheism" and "polythe-

4 K. V. Karpov and T. V. Malevich, "Philosophy of Religion and Religious Studies in Modern-Day Russia", *Studies in East European Thought* 66, no. 3–4 (2014). See 227–235.

5 Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)*, 210–211.

ism" and "atheism". (f) Philosophy of religion also deals with "meta-theoretical questions" related to theology and religious studies.

II.2 Philosophical theology

The recently published book *Philosophical Theology: the Canon and the Variability* consists of *Introduction* (7–17), *History of the Notion* (18–30) and two Sections — *I. Focal Perspective* (31–340), and *II. Inverted Perspective* (341–470), *Bibliography* (471–489) and *Index of names* (490–495). The canon in the title relates to analytic philosophical theology, which Shokhin considers as the most viable form of philosophical theology.[6] The first section is descriptive; it depicts the development of analytic (Anglo-American) philosophical theology. In the second section Shokhin evaluates the basic lines indicated in the first section and gives his own reflections on arguments for the existence of God, atheism as a part of philosophy of religion, problem of evil and Revelation. So, the most part of the book is an analysis of the questions what analytic philosophical theology in particular is and what philosophical theology as such is.

What is the proper subject-matter of philosophical theology according to professor Shokhin? The core of the answer is a scheme of competences of *theistic reason*. A believing person has three sources of beliefs, which directly corresponds to the three levels of competence of the reason in religious matters. (A) *Through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition*, we may acquire such dogma as that God is Triune. Here reason is not able to attain such truths by itself but may try to find proper analogies in order to grasp and interpret such deliverances of faith. (B) When *Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition is accompanied by reason* in the questions of nature of Revelation, atonement. (C) *Reason along* may deduce important religious beliefs, such as of God's existence and omnipotence for instance, from its 'natural light'[7]. Hence philosophical theology has three functions.

(1) It is a function on grounding and explaining beliefs which is traditionally associated with systematic theology.

6 Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology*, 7.
7 Ibid., 344–49.

(2) It is a role of a guard from competing systems of beliefs, which realized in apologetics. These two functions are related to levels B and C of the scheme of the competence of reason and sources of beliefs.

(3) Finally, there is a special function of self-reflection. Theological self-reflection of the human reason is the capacity to exercise introspection in the light of the revealed 'truths-above-the-reason' in order to find the natural boundaries of the reason in the matters of faith and religious beliefs. This capacity totally corresponds to the level A and is a distinctive trait of the philosophical theology distinguishing it from other forms of reason's activities in religion such as revealed and natural theology.

Let's summarize professor Shokhin's position on the proper subject-maters of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology by introducing in the argument his analogy, applied to all *Genetiv Philosophien*. Shokhin distinguishes two possible relations between philosophy and religion — *philosophy-on-religion* and *philosophy-in-religion*[8]. He presents his idea through the analogy to the philosophy of science. Philosophy of science is concerned with the foundations, methods, and implications of science studying the criteria of what could be counted as scientific theory, the reliability of scientific theories, the change of the paradigms in scientific theories and the ultimate purpose(s) of science. Hence philosophy-on-science is distinct from concrete scientific disciplines like physics and mathematics. It would be desirable if a philosopher of science were involved in studying and solving concrete scientific problems or participating in scientific inquiry, but this is not a necessary condition for being a philosopher of science. The same concerns philosophy of religion. Philosopher of religion seeks how the religion in general works, what the differences between different forms of religious consciousness are, but does not solve the concrete problems within religions which is a task for theologians. Philosophical theology along with natural theology and religious philosophy belongs to the domain of philosophy-in-religion. It concerns both traditional topics (such arguments for the existence of God), thus performing functions 2 and 3, and evaluating topics (such as comparison of these arguments, evaluation of theodicies and defenses), thus performing function 3 which is, as I mentioned, according to

8 Shokhin, *Philosophy of Religion and its Historical Forms (Antiquity — the End of XVIII Century)*, 204; Shokhin, *Philosophical Theology*, 350–51.

Shokhin is a unique and proper function of philosophical theology. Hence, philosophy of religion and philosophical theology seem to be two completely distinct disciplines. Their subject-matters, their role with respect to religion, their goals are completely different.

III. CONSEQUENCES

To my mind, from this approach follow some results so revolutionary and extremely shocking for the philosophy of religion to which one would hardly assent.

First, as we saw, Vladimir Shokhin asserts that philosophy of religion is something which is done from *a priori* presuppositions. This means that I am totally justified in holding any conception of religion and its development in the history of human society regardless any empirical data from anthropology, cognitive and (or) religious studies. The examples of such approach are famous enough — the 'original theism' (*Urmonotheismus*) conception or Humean idea of 'flux and reflux', that is religion started as polytheistic and polytheism through fear gives way to monotheism. However, I wonder if it is possible in contemporary world to cover oneself from any empirical science data? Shall we consider such covering as an absolute advantage of a research program? Philosophy of religion may come into conflict with results of empirical researches, since it carries out the function of metatheory for religious studies, it may well occur that the initial accepted theory is not proved by empirical data, what actually occurred with *Urmonotheismus*-theory. It seems that concordance of nonempirical and empirical methods, deduction a theory of religion based on empirical data aligns much better with that goal of philosophy of religion. I should admit that this is exactly what was suggested by the founders of 'science of religion' — Cornelis Tiele and Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye[9].

Second, if we continue reasoning along the lines of the first consequence, we will admit philosophy of religion to be a part of religious studies being both dependent and independent of the latter. It is independent, because any study of religion requires an antecedent worldview, such as materialism, theism, phenomenology, pragmatism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics etc. It is

9 Cornelis Petrus Tiele, Georg Gehrich, *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft: Eine kurzgefasste Einführung in das Studium der Religion und ihrer Geschichte* (Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 1904), 3–5; Chantepie de la Saussaye, Pierre Daniel, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 1897), 5.

dependent, because it should construct a metatheory of religion on the basis of data provided by religious studies. As far as I understand Shokhin's point of view, he admits only independent role. If we, following Shokhin, assume that philosophy of religion is an independent to religious studies and that philosophy of religion presupposes one or the other worldview, we should ask if philosophy of religion (and, which is more important, even religious studies) is possible at all in the sense of not being a product of more broad philosophical system?

Third, analytic philosophical theology is often considered as an outgrowth of analytic philosophy of religion and both terms are often used interchangeably indicating thus the resemblance of their research programs. What is more important, it is extremely difficult to see how analytic philosophy of religion differs from analytic philosophical theology in an important way. I think that the fact of coincidence of the topics usually considered within both disciplines is a consequence of this difficulty. Shokhin in order to escape such a mixture suggests a very precise method to draw the demarcation. However, the result of the procedure is surprising in that traditional topics of philosophy of religion, such as epistemology of religious beliefs, analysis of arguments for the existence of God, problem of evil, religious diversity move to the domain of philosophical theology. However, such a move could be justified only if those questions considered in both disciplines from the same points of view applying the same methods. Is it so in reality? And, which is more important, is it so according to Shokhin's view? This leads us to the following questions — Who may exercise philosophy of religion and philosophical theology? And how she is supposed to do so in both cases?

Fourth, it is explicitly stated in recent publications that the clear demarcation between philosophy or religion and philosophical theology could be made on the basis who is involved in developing each of the discourses or in what manner one is involved. The distinction is clear: philosopher of religion investigates questions related to religion as a worldview (e.g. to theism) in the general or secular way whereas theologian investigates questions related to specific religious tradition (e.g. Christianity) as a worldview[10]. Or put it another way, following Gerald O'Collins SJ, exercising theology "entails personally sharing in

10 Max Baker-Hytch, "Analytic Theology and Analytic Philosophy of Religion: What's the difference?", *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4, no. 1 (2016), 350.

faith and seeking to understand it… Exponents of the philosophy of religion, however, know *about* faith and theology, but do not necessarily share the vision of faith"[11]. Philosophers apply to logic, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, whereas theologians add to this list Scripture and Sacred Tradition, restricting the former to the later, as it is philosophy that is a handmaiden of theology and not v.v. And that is what exactly states Shokhin when he is speaking about three competences of the reason within theology. Theologian in position (A) is fully relies on supernatural revelation, in position (B) it co-works with revealed truth in order to explain them, and, finally, in position (C) it may produce truth on its own that are in concordance or coincide with revealed ones. And here we come to the point of which Shokhin is not completely precise: he admits that apologetics is one of the functions of philosophical theology, but philosophers of religion do not develop atheistic critics anymore according to his views, as they are work on the general notion of religion. So, I wonder, what is the person who is proposing atheistic critics? To what domain should we ascribe atheistic ideas of Mackie, Rowe, Schellenberg? Clearly, if they are not philosophers, they must be theologians. However, I suppose most of our colleagues will not call them so. Moreover, I believe Shokhin wouldn't call them theologians either, since theological reason, according to his scheme, is directed by faith, Scripture and Tradition, and if he considers Mackie's famous atheistic argument from evil to be theological work, then he has to admit that this work is written in accordance with faith, Scripture and Tradition.

The next point against confessional approach to demarcation is that argumentative discussion between a believer (theist) and an atheist, or sceptic, would not be possible on the questions of the arguments for the existence of God or justification of religious beliefs. This is so because they are initially involved in different scholar practices, or disciplines. What is the sense of such a discussion?

Finally, fifth, I am not sure in the correctness of the analogy that philosophy of religion relates to religion(s) as philosophy of science to sciences. The proposed relation has two parts: the subject (i.e. philosophy) and object (i.e. the subject-matter of corresponding 'philosophy'). What Shokhin and O'Collins suggest is focused, to my mind, on the subject, since both philosophers underline the role philosophy bears to its possible object (science, literature and edu-

11 Gerald G. O'Collins, "Review Article: Philosophical Theology, Philosophy of Religion, and Fundamental Theology", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2010), 223.

cation, we may add also law, art, history). However, a true proportion requires not only the similarity in the first part (subject), but also in the second (object of inquiry). And my point is that there is no parity of the objects of inquiry in the *Genetiv Philosophien* in general, and between religion and science in particular. I do not have here a lot of space for a broad and explicit discussion of these differences, however some points should be stated. First, obviously, 'science' and 'religion' are not eternally unchanging terms with unambiguous meanings, their meanings vary through times and cultures. And, hence, second, 'science' and 'religion' could hardly be defined, so that the discussion of what is 'science' in general and what is 'religion' in general may be meaningless. That is why we may sensibly discuss only a specific claim of a particular religion (such as Islamic understandings of divine providence or Buddhist views of the dharma). When the two conditions of the proportion ('philosophy' and 'religion') are met, we will see that 'philosophy of religion' discusses 'religion' in general relying on particular statements. If one accepts the proposed brief analysis of the proportion, she will see that philosophy of religion may analyze the central religious concepts and may establish or modify theological statements in the light of philosophy[12].

Obviously, this correction to the Shokhin's views do not exclude or substitute in any other way that philosophy of religion should be a general 'theory of religion'.

IV. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I will introduce my view on the essence of philosophy or religion and its relation to philosophical theology. Here is the thesis, Philosophy of religion is a discourse on nature and rationality of religious belief of both secular and religious perspectives, whereas Philosophical theology is an approach to clarification on the tenets of a particular religion, developed mainly from the perspective of a believer[13]. In order to provide a precise demarcation

12 I am aware of this approach to be widespread among analytic philosophers of religion. Here I would like to relate to analysis of demarcation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology by Andrew Moore in his review on Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* and Marshall's *Trinity and Truth*: Andrew Moore, "Philosophy of Religion or Philosophical Theology?", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3, no. 3 (2001). See his thesis on p. 310.

13 Philosophical theology is not necessarily done by believers. However, I do not see any substantial reason why an atheist, or a sceptic, should be interested in developing the dogma of a particular

between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, we have to concentrate on four questions: (1) what is the topic of the disciplines, (2) what are their methods, (3) what are their guiding lines, and (4) who may exercise them?

(1) The main motif of philosophy of religion is analysis of consistency and reasonableness of religious belief, in general, and theism, if we consider the European religious traditions. Indeed, let's have a look at one of the first treatises dealing with the analysis of religious beliefs — Cicero's *De natura deorum*. The whole book is organized around presentation, critics and defenses of stoic, epicurean and platonic religious views. Even the famous Cicero's definition of religion is given within this discussion. I do not have enough space here to analyze numerous examples provided by history of philosophy and theology, nevertheless I insist that the topics concerning arguments for and against God's existence, atheistic critics from the problem of evil and religious diversity, are related to the question of consistency and reasonableness of religious belief. Thus, I see philosophy of religion as a long-time project of origin, development, critics, defenses and modifications of theistic worldview. I also insist that the various attempts to provide a definition for the phenomenon of religion, to find its core, or minimum, are lying within the context of building the versions of philosophical theism. Hence, philosophy of religion deals primarily with establishing, critics and further developing of theism.

(2) What are the methods of this philosophical endeavor? They could be various actually. Initially, main methods of such understood philosophy of religion are of the following sort: reasoning by analogy, analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, refining analysis by counterexamples. All these methods are included among typical methods of analytic philosophers. In this regard analytic philosophers of religion tend to see such historical figures as Anselm, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham, Descartes, Lock, Hume, Reid, Leibniz, Kant as their predecessors and they look to their writings as a source of arguments and theories for advancement of contemporary debates. Contemporary analytic philosophers of religion add to this methodology those

religion (of the doctrine that Christ is one person who possesses two natures, for instance).

of analytic metaphysics and epistemology — thought experiments, appealing to possible worlds and sets, analysis of probabilities, using predicate and modal logics[14]. Then, beginning, perhaps, with Schleiermacher, and beyond any doubt with Rudolf Otto, we see how phenomenological analysis may contribute to the analysis of both the core of religious belief and important components of it (e.g. prayer).

(3) From (2) it is quite clear that the guiding line for philosophy of religion is reason. Here is the principle difference with philosophical theology, since for the later the guiding line are Scripture (or Revelation, generally speaking), Tradition. Here I am fully agreeing with Shokhin, and since it was said enough in sec. II, I will not explicate it any further.

(4) The answer to the last question is obvious either. Philosophical theology may be exercised only by believers, or put it more precisely, by one from the standpoint of belief and faith in Revelation. Philosophers of religion, on the contrary, occupy philosophical position, which means that they are inclined to analyze arguments being directed by the reason along. To put it simpler, philosophers of religion are philosophers, whereas those who exercise philosophical theology are theologians.

At the very end I should consider the one obvious argument against my account. I will call it "Warranted Christian belief-objection"; it may be formulated as follows. Philosophy of religion considers the topic of justification of religious beliefs, in accordance with that Plantinga's project belongs to philosophy of religion. However, philosophy of religion is not a confessional, but philosophical theology is exercised within that or other confession. Hence, Plantinga's project simultaneously belongs to philosophy of religion and does not belong to it. Moreover, it seems to be a project of philosophical theology.

This short objection highlights an important feature of the interaction between philosophical theology and philosophy of religion — namely, their overlapping to a considerable degree. That means, it is extremely difficult to draw a clear demarcation between them in every particular case. However, I believe that my try of demarcation solves the problem with considerably low losses. When Plantinga considers the reasonableness of theistic beliefs, refutes objections *de jure* and *de facto*, and even when he is proposing his fa-

14 Baker-Hytch, "Analytic Theology and Analytic Philosophy of Religion", 348–49.

mous conception of the *sensus divinitatis* he is clearly doing philosophy, since he is concerned with question of how religious knowledge could me possible at all. This is philosophical question from the domain of epistemology applied to religious matters. When Plantinga proposes the Aquinas/Calvin model to ground the possibility the knowledge of God and reasonableness of theistic beliefs, he is involved in philosophical theology, since he is using the resources of a concrete religion, namely, Christianity, and arguing in favour of Christian system of beliefs. So that the difference in accordance with (1) is decisive one. To sum up, philosophy speaks about theism in general, whereas theology develops conceptions from the name of specific religious tradition.

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"VISNU THE GREATER" AND "VISNU THE SMALLER", OR ON THE CONTINUED WIDENING OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION'S ZONE

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It was in 1800 when Immanuel Berger published his *History of Philosophy of Religion, or Teachings and Opinions of the Most Original Thinkers of All Times of God and Religion, Historically Expounded*, which turned to become the first attempt at historical exposition of philosophy of religion in history of philosophy. The author was only a beginner in Evangelical theology, and now only a few German experts are acquainted with his work, but his work has become a very important hall-mark. It is true that in 1772 the Austrian Jesuit Sigmund von Storchenau introduced the term *philosophy of religion* (in German) into philosophical circulation and in 1774 another member of the same Society of Jesus, François Para du Phanjas, reintroduced it (in French) in their books under this title[1], and then the term under discussion was "handicapped" and worked on by the Kantians (beginning with Karl Reinhold and up to earlier Fichte) but when a history of some discipline is being published it means already its starting recognition in a competent community. But this very fact, however significant on its own, was not an only remarkable trait of Berger's book. In his introduction he expressed strong reluctance to define his subject because of his misgivings about immediate criticisms from those of different opinions of its content, inasmuch as there was no consensus on it among the main authorities[2]. It is only natural that such a consensus is still

1 For more details see: Vladimir K. Shokhin, "The Pioneering Appearances of Philosophy of Religion in Europe: François Para du Phanjas on the Nature of Religion", *Open Theology* 1, no. 1 (2015).

2 Immanuel Berger, *Geschichte der Religionsphilosophie, oder Lehren und Meinungen der originellsten Denker aller Zeiten. Über Gott und Religion: Historisch dargestellt.* (Verlag der Langischen Buchhandlung, 1800), II.

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less obtainable more then two hundred years after Berger's pioneering book when innumerable authorities have worked on the field and hold to different understandings of its subject matter. Especially as there are no legitimate reasons to "foul out" main players.

Indeed, as all other designations of philosophies of *X* (I call them "philosophies of the genitive case"), like philosophy of science, philosophy of history, philosophy of law, philosophy of education and so on, "philosophy of religion" can be construed from the grammatical point of view in three ways, i.e. as the cases of *genitivus subjectivus*, *genitivus objectivus* and of both. My way of dividing of this meanings, as Kirill Karpov correctly interprets me, is to differ between (1) philosophy-*in*-religion, (2) philosophy-*on*-religion and (3) the eclectic model. I stress it again that from the linguistic point all these interpretations are legal and no one has right to say that any of them is wrong, and the same would be the case also with other philosophies of *X*. We can study science, art, education etc. as multidimensional phenomena of human culture, with their languages, evolution and developments, can (and even ought) give them definitions or at least an account why these definitions cannot be good, correlate them with other areas of culture etc., or can be interested in philosophical intuitions, evident or concealed influences on or sympathies and antipathies of outstanding scientists, artists, teachers, or combine the first studies with second ones and call all these mixtures philosophies of science, art and education without transgressions of the grammer in connection with these terms. So we have to do with informal criteria of preferences among these models of understanding of formally equal rights.

Model (3) has been most popular among historians of philosophy of religion from Berger's times up to these days because it permits one to sit on all chairs at the same time. In short, it is the same as to combine the study of God, Religion and Theology under one umbrella, and that seems comfortable. There is a difference between analytic and continental varieties of this approach inasmuch as Anglo-American philosophers of religion consider in general arguments for the existence of God, study of Divine attributes, the Providence, the problem of evil, afterlife and other theological topics the core of their discipline and the languages of religion, as well as interreligious relations or correlations between religion and other areas of culture as secondary increments to this core, while with the most part of their German-speaking collegues we have usually theological studies in the expressed religiological

context[3]. As I look after the literature on the subject, I cannot avoid impression that continental influence on analytic philosophy of religion becomes progressively stronger, for even such topics as definitions of religion begin to have access into analytic anthologies and other genres of texts on the subject, formerly ignored there[4]. This trend seems reasonable and progressive in my eyes, because, to give a parallel example, it is much more suitable for philosophers of history to concentrate their efforts today more on the significance or possible purposes of the historical process and the factors foundamentally responsible for histotical development, the measure of objectivity in historical writings or kinds of truth acceptable in historical accounts of events (i.e. philosophy-*on*-history) than on, e.g., investigation of Napoleon's concealed philosophical tastes or the measure of authentic influence of Voltaire on the minds of Friedrich the Great, Catherine the Great and other less significant characters (i.e. philosophy-*in*-history) or directly on Seven Years War, establishing of Declaration of independence and so on. But still more reasonable would be in our time of progressive specialization of knowledge to avoid such confusion of topics in principle. Philosophy of religion is one of the most popular disciplines of philosophy having much wider appeal to the public than philosophy of science and it would be more educative for a wide audi-

3 To give only a few examples, such an authority as Bernhard Welte stressed that it is the question what religion is in its essence as a form of human existence that is the starting point of philosophy of religion and only thereafter one is adviced to come to God as the principle of religion, cf. Bernhard Welte, *Religionsphilosophie*, ed. Klaus Kienzler and Bernhard Casper, Gesammelte Schriften /Schriften zur Philosophie der Religion (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1997), 54–55. With Richard Schaeffler philosophy of religion is methodologically constituted by transcendental teaching of God, analysis of religious language (the language of prayer in the first place) and phenomenology of religion, cf. Richard Schaeffler, *Religionsphilosophie* (Alber, 1983), 217. Wilhelm Trilhaas introduced philosophy of religion into the system of disciplines of *Religionswissenschaft*, defined its first task as understanding religions in their own meaningfulness without their reduction to science, art, morality and other forms of culture, and emphasized its critique of religion in the sense of "collating" its empirical body with its essence, cf. Wolfgang Trillhaas, *Religionsphilosophie* (de Gruyter, 1972), 15–19.

4 One could refer here to (as to a noticeable example) William Wainwright's *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* wherin topics of religious (in)tolerance, comparison of different religious traditions and even problems with definition of religion are introduced along with Divine attributes, arguments for the existence of God, validity of mystical experience. The editor himself connects the future of philosophy of religion with progressing dialogue between Anglo-American and Continental discourses, cf. William J. Wainwright, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 10.

ence had it not undoubtfiul similarities with that idol seen by Nabuchadnezzar the King whose head was made of gold, chest and arms of silver, legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay (Daniel 2: 32–33).

Model (1) wherein philosophy of religion is understood consistently as philosophy-in-religion is rarely presented these days in its pure version inasmuch as the eclectic model (3) is getting popular. But it by no means has taken a back seat because its roots are deep. And here we really have one important difference from philosophy of science, though I believe it is not of that character which is stressed by Karpov. These roots are of pragmatic type. While philosophizing on science has never had a need to prove its right for existence, the rationale behind publishing theological books under the cover of philosophy of religion has been (beginning with the very first steps made by Storchenau and Para du Phanjas) to come into dialogue with and receive a positive resonance in the secular society, and now, when philosophical theology has not still succeded to obtain the official philosophical status in the progressively secularizing society (including philosophical society[5]), it seems much more safe to present it as a pure academic discipline. This real reason of why the whole or partial equation philosophical theology = philosophy of religion stirs up understanding and sympathy but it leads to methodological puzzles. It is much more popular in analytic than in continental tradition, and in my latest book dealing with philosophical theology and referred to by Karpov I differ varieties of this model of interpretation. In position (1) we have verbal identification of philosophy of religion as philosophical theology[6], in (2) this identification is not verbalized but actually acknowledged

5 It is of significance that we have no chance to find out in spite of very swift growth of anthologies and collection of papers entitled as and dedicated to the discipline under this name, an entry called "Philosophical Theology" in Anglo-American philosophical encyclopedies. For example, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* only "Philosophy of Religion" and "Philosophy and Christian Theology" are admitted (it is silently but very clearly presumpted in the second case that there is no such theology which can be regarded a philosophical discipline). Still of more importance is that there is no chance to find out this unit also in an American index of philosophical disciplines , be it core areas or even applied philosophy (where business ethics, medical ethics, organizational ethics etc. are accepted).

6 So, according to William Alston, "the philosophy of religion comprises any philosophical discussion of questions arising from religion" William P. Alston, "Religion, History of Philosophy", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: *Vol 8*, ed. Edward Craig (Routledge, 1998), 238. The identity of the contents of two areas of pohilosophy was emphasized also in William J. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion* (Wadsworth, 1988), XI.

according to the very subject matters of this discipline[7], in (3) philosophical theology is regarded as a subdivision of general philosophy of religion, the latter being responsible for more general topics (such as arguments for the existence of God) and the former for more special ones (as the Christian dogmas in detail[8]), while (4) presupposes that difference is by no means in subject matters but only in personal attitudes to it [9]. My colleague Karpov sympathizes with both two latter positions and it is his absolutely lawful right to do it, but what about justifications of all this approach?

Usually, analytic philosophers of religion don't charge themselves with core methodological issues, the best example being provided by many-volume *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion* by Graham Oppy[10] who in the introduction disclosed that he took as an example Russel's *History of Western Phi-*

7 Examples are innumerable. To give an impression what it is like, one can recommend to look in one introduction to philosophy of religion where the author, having recognized that it is not too easy to define what this field is (at least it is much more difficult, in his words, than to demarcate chemistry from needlework) embarked without further comment on presenting its subjects wherefrom he isolated (as the most important ones) "the discourse on God", the problem of evil, three (not more) arguments for the existence of God, the real substance of religious experience and Divine attributes (omniscience and eternity are singled out without explanation why the other are omitted). See: Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

8 A good and very authoritative example of this approach is provided by *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology,* where it is stated outright that philosophical theology is regarded (as something self-evident) as a part of a more general discipline, i.e. philosophy of religion. In so doing the editors coordinate their project with another one, i.e. Wainwright's *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion.* So they declare that they paid more detailed attention to the problem of evil and theodicy because in Wainwright's anthology these matters were only touched. See Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 3–4. But I also inferred from this correlation that arguments for the existence of God were excluded from the handbook of philosophical theology up and down because they were discussed in detail in the mentioned handbook of philosophy of religion (see: Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 80–138). And this is at least one (but robust) reason for excluding this topic from all anthologies on philosophical theology met by me.

9 See already John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian theology* (Charles Scribner's sons, 1966), 39–40. From the latest supports of this approach I'd single out Gerald G. O'Collins, "The Philosophical Theology of Stephen Davis: Does It Coincide with Fundamental Theology?", in *Christian Philosophy of Religion*: *Essays in Honor of Stephen T. Davis*, ed. C. P. Ruloff and Stephen T. Davis (Notre Dame Univ. Press, 2015), 346.

10 Graham R. Oppy and Nick Trakakis, eds., *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

losophy without any mention *why* he presented his series as history of rational theology from the Greeks up to the present time. And here we have a typical case. It is of great concern these days to compare differences between analytic and continental styles in philosophy in order to establish a dialogue between them, and some detailed apologies of analytic philosophizing on religion in the face of continental challenges emerge now[11]. But I believe that not so much apology as understanding is needful. One of main difference is, in my opinion, that analytic philosophizing is much less interested in methodology than in results of investigation (as it goes with natural sciences), while, e.g., philosophical phenomenology is centered just on methodology being much more indifferent to concrete results. Whether a bridge between these philosophical traditions in general is possible is not too clear, but I'll try to show in the most general terms below how the very "philosophical practice" on the terrain of philosophy of religion could contribute to their meeting.

In general, differences are willingly emphasized, often without substantiation. One of such remarks deserving attention was presented by Richard Swinburne (by the way in Russian) when he differed analytic and continental attitudes in such a manner that in the latter case (he referred to the 19th and 20th centuries) *philosophy of religion* was used for "full description of experiences, beliefs and practices of different religions of the world", i.e. did not differ from mere empirical religious studies, while his interest (as of an analytic philosopher) lies in quite different area of interpretations and justifications of the basic religious (i.e. theistic) propositions[12]. An implied upshot is clear: the continental tradition does not meet our expectations when we are talking about philosophy in connection with religion because the real task of philosophy in this context is to to justify theistic claims. Swinburne, certainly, ignored that beginning with Fichte's and Hegel's understanding of philosophy of religion "in the Continent" had nothing to do with empirical studies of religion (the dialogue between two main areas of philosophy is rendered difficult also by mutual conscious ignorance of the other side). But there is also another difficulty with the whole model under discussion: the identification of philosophy of religion as

11 One of them deserving attention is presented by Michael Rea in Oliver Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 1–25.

12 Richard Swinburne, "Philosophy of Religion in Anglo-American Tradition", in *Philosophy of Religion*: *An Almanac (in Russian)*, ed. Vladimir K. Shokhin (Nauka, 2006–2007), 95.

philosophical theology goes against the patterns of rationality, one of them being William Ockham's principle of parsimony according to which there is no need to multiply essences without necessity. And here we just multiply such an essence as philosophiucal theology without any theoretical necessity (about practical one see above), and in the modern version of it very sympathized by Karpov we have also an Oriental parallel, this time with the Hindu model of trimûrti ("the three forms" of Divinity, called often "Hindu trinity") when Viṣṇuits, e.g., identify Brahman as the greater Viṣṇu (cf. theological philosophy of religion in general) whose subordinates are Brahmā, Śiva and just the smaller Viṣṇu (cf. philosophical theology)[13].

This "multiplying of Viṣṇu" leads to many logical gaps, one of them being that the Divine attributes are separated from arguments for the existence of God (which are simply omitted) in all anthologies worth of mention on analytic philosophical theology (see above), in contradiction to both rationality (these arguments and attributes being dependent on each other) and historicity (with both Aquinas and the second, i.e. normative, scholasticism of the 16th — 17th centuries attributes were discussed strictly after the arguments). Puzzling is also Karpov's offer (this time it is his own invention) that even defining of religion is a task not of a mere philosophical theology but even of Christian philosophical theology. According to my knowledge, all undertakings entitled as "philosophical theology" and "Christian philosophical theology" are dealing first and formost with Christian doctrines (the Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement, Ressurection, resurrection of the dead and sometimes some others, like the Fall and Eucharist), and I haven't seen any collection of papers under this title where dealing with religion (including its definitions) took place. And why just Christian philosophical theology (and not any other[14]) should be charged

13 One of the earliest mentions of the three highest gods of Hindu pantheon as manifestations of Brahman is presented in the *Maitrî Upanishad* (V.2), that is in the beginning of the 1st millennium A.D., while "sectarian" interpretations of this model were elaborated only in the Purānic, i.e. medieval Hinduism.

14 Elsewhere I mentioned such a difference between natural theology and philosophical theology that the latter can be found out everywhere when philosophical justification and interpretation of religious propositions takes place, while the former may be suitable only in the Christian tradition where epistemic gap between verities acceptable for reason and those which can be received only by faith in Revelation was much deeper than in all other religious traditions. See: Vladimir K. Shokhin, "Natural Theology, Philosophical Theology and Illustrative Argumentation", *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016), 807–808.

with such a burdensome obedience as to cope with such a pure "secular" task as counting which from numerous types of types definitions of religion (genus-differentia definitions, extensial, ostensive, essential, functional and etc. ones) are more correct than others? So my collegue's argument for further widening of philosophical theology's sunject matter curriculum according to his advice could most likely be only "Why not?".

I believe that model (2) advocated by me is lacking transgression of logic and rationality of the aforementioned types and, in addition, continues efforts to put in order correlations of philosophical fields dating back already to two heirs of Plato, Xenocrates and Aristotle[15]. It does not enforce different sciences of religion and "sciences of spirit" (John Stewart Mill) crowd under the same umbrella without necessity. It leaves philosophical investigations of religion on its proper place without intermingling it with metaphysics on the one side and confessional theology on the other. It really should have critical analysis of definitions of religion in its logical core in agreement with rationality (just as definitions of art, culture or law are situated in the corresponding "philosophies of *X*"), and this job is enormous inasmuch as there are whole families of such identifications up to this time[16], but this does not mean that it is the only thing this disciplines has to do with religion (as Karpov seems to interprete me). Elaborations of classification of the main types of religious world-outlook (classical theism, non-classical types of theism, pan(en)theism, acosmism etc.), of religious attitudes (designated usually as exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, relativism and their mixtures), of different types of correlations between religion and society (clericalism, laicism, secularism,

15 The first one proved to become the founder of the horizontal scheme of philosophical fields (logic, physics and ethics, the scheme elaborated later by the Stoics in detail), the latter of the vertical scheme (ethics and politics were erected above poetics and rhetoric, theoretical disciplines above ethics and politics, and the first philosophy (later metaphysics) above the other theoretical ones).

16 One of helpful contemporary classification of this families (religious, philosophical, socio-economoc, sociological and psychological approaches to the phenomenon of religion) is presented in Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993), 79–203. An authoritative criticism of most prominent definitions of religion along with appeal to use Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblances" instead of definitions in the proper sense is presented in Victoria S. Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2006), without, it should be acknowledged, analysis of difficulties connected also with implementation of Wittgensteins's model.

"postsecularism" etc.), of different conceptions of religious experience (essentialism, constructivism, cognitivistic "attributionism"), such are only some subjects of this discipline according to this model. As the reader can judge, here classical procedures of *analytic* philosophizing (critical testing of definitions and classifications in the first place) are presupposed without theoretically unreasonable invasion on the territories of other philosophical and theological disciplines in accordance to "*continental* core belief" that philosophy of religion should be about religion. In such a manner "practical dialogue" of two big philosophical traditions can be accomplished on the ground of at least one philosophical field (see above).

To conclude discussion of correlation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology I'd stress again that their main differences have to do only with their subject matters and not world-outlooks. Karpov acknowledges my recognition of such an option that a philosopher of religion *could be* also a person having personal access to religious experience and in theology without damage for his speciality. I say more: it would be *preferable* for him (her) to be such a person in the same measure as for philosopher of science to be even a little bit a scientist, for a philosopher of law a lawyer, for philosopher of literature to have some experience in belle-lettres etc., inasmuch as one working on philosophy of *X* has to be competent in *X* in order to be qualified in his (her) specialization field [17]. But if someone who writes, say, a history of literary criticsm in England in the 18th century would include in his volume also the contents of novels by Fielding, Stern, Swift and other writers right up front, he could scarcely be acknowledged as a person competent in his tasks and understanding of his work.

Where Karpov is right it is in his recognition of difficulties in landmarking of philosophy of religion and religious studies, inasmuch, I'm sure, as the first competency is much closer to the second one than to theology. I don't agree that *Religionswissenschaft* can provide sufficient disproves of the conception of

17 It is a long-standing stereotype (very popular also in Russia) that to be a competent professor of religious studies one has to hold to the position of "methodological atheism", which means the presumption of exclusion of any transcendental agency within the causes related to the origin and development of religion. I cannot realize why a person who regards a human being only a product of blind natural forces and mechanisms of evolution (unexplainable on their own) has undisputed priviledges in understanding of even primitive religions which are manifestations of human spiritual nature and needs.

pramonotheism because the primordial state of human religious consciousness is beyond evidences from artefacts[18]. Nonetheless, it is true that empirical data provided by religious studies can influence inferences of philosophers of religion as, by the way, the latter can and I dare to say even ought to organize the "interpreting milieu" for these data[19]. There are also areas where a philosopher of religion and religious studies professor have common terraine, e.g. in demarcation between the world religions (more species are being classified under this category today than yesterday) and national or ethnic religions or between traditional religions and new cults wherein both definitions of religion and empirical criteria are needful. But here we have the same case as with demarcation of competences between epistemology and cognitive sciences, philosophy of law and theories of law, philosophy of education and methodologies of education and so on. Our time is the time of speedfully progressive specialization of knowledge, conditioned by both theoretical and practical interests, and attempts of philosophies (that also multiply swiftly) to retain their positions besides and together with adjacent disciplines. And here, it is true, many metaphilosophical and metascientific methodological efforts are needful to balance competative and mutually dependent competences.

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18 As Karpov appeals to theology I'd like to recall St. John Damascene's understanding of Eden as both physical (as the garden) and spiritual reality, in the second case the world of contemplations (Exp.fid. II.11). According to this discourse the first human beings, having been much more perfected than their descendents scarcely needed physical artefacts for their communion with God, which is, in line with Lactantius' etymology of *religio,* at least a religious (see footnote 16) definition of religion.

19 To give a very fresh example I'd refer only to work of one postgraduate of my university who uses Hegelian scheme of development of religion for understanding the evolution of ancient cults in ancient Anatolia where the primitive crude and evil chtonic deities developed into bright and benevolent ones in accordance with development of their personal aspect.

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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Guy Axtell, *Problems of Religious Luck: Assessing the Limits of Reasonable Religious Disagreement*, Lexington, 2019, 280pp.

Guy Axtell argues that (a lot of) religious belief suffers from luck and that this has consequences for reasonable religious disagreement. Below, I critically discuss the main claims in Axtell's book.

In the first chapter, Axtell distinguishes no less than 6 kinds of religious luck. *Resultant religious luck* is "the (bad/ good) luck of being harmed or benefitted in consequence of an event, action, or decision/ judgment, under conditions of close gaps among persons (…) [w]hen the harm or benefit involves the judgment or interventions of a supernatural being." (p. 11). Examples are found in theologies that posit a strong dichotomy between people destined for heaven or for hell.

A second kind is *criterial religious luck.* This kind of luck occurs when divine judgment is made on the basis of criteria that are whimsical, or not consistently employed across like cases, or not clear to people affected by divine judgment. Theologies that allow for anonymous participation in saving grace (like some forms of inclusivism) would lead to criterial religious luck.

The third kind, *constitutive religious luck,* is "bad/ good luck in being the kind of person one is." (p. 16) Examples of subjects who suffer from constitutive religious luck are subjects who lack certain inclinations or abilities to participate in a religious tradition. Axtell argues that some accounts of the *sensus divinitatis* (Plantinga 2000) pose a danger of constitutive religious luck because the sensus would be affected by sin.

A subject suffers from *proposition religious luck* when she has good evidence for some religious belief but does not hold the belief *on the basis of* the good available evidence. In cases like these, the subject is just lucky to have good evidence available. According to Axtell, Plantinga's reformed epistemology leads to luck of this sort. On Plantinga's model propositional and doxastic

justification come apart, which leads to a devaluation of propositional justification. Here Axtell appears to overlook that Plantinga argues that a religious subject need not have propositional justification. A better example is found in the literature on cognitive explanations of religious belief. Here some argue for a strong distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification of religious belief (See Jong and Visala 2014). According to them, religious beliefs are often not based upon reasons but on cognitive biases.

A fifth kind is *intervening veritic religious luck.* Here a subject acquires a true religious belief, but we would be inclined to give credit to a supernatural agent for their having that true belief. Axtell's example is drawn from the theology of Karl Barth. In Barth's theology all religions that have ever existed are idolatrous, but the Christian religion (and only the Christian religion) is chosen by God as the locus of his revelation. Subjects who happen to follow the Christian religion happen to be lucky that God intervened and chose their religions.

The final kind, *environmental veritic religious luck,* occurs when a subject forms true religious beliefs by means of an unsafe or insensitive process. In these cases, the subject might have easily acquired a false religious belief. This kind of luck touches on religious diversity and is the main topic of the rest of the book.

1. Axtell notes that many religious believers would easily have had different religious beliefs if they had been raised in a different geographic or demographic location. Here Axtell introduces *inductive risk* as a measure of veritic epistemic religious luck. Inductive risk is "the chance or possibility of getting it [religious belief] wrong in an inductive context." (p. 57). While having beliefs with a significant degree of inductive risk does not necessarily render a belief irrational or unjustified, it often leads to what Axtell calls "counter-inductive thinking". Counter-inductive thinking is judging (religious) beliefs of others, that suffer from the same or similar amounts of inductive risk, differently than one's own.

Environmental veritic religious luck leads to the exceptionalist dilemma. The dilemma applies to religious exclusivists (religious believers who believe that their religious tradition is the only true religion). The first horn of the dilemma says that exclusivists cannot concede that their own belief-forming process is the same process as that of religious others without conceding that the process is unsafe.[1] The second horn says that religious exclusivists cannot claim that their own belief-forming process is unique without relying on *self-*

1 A belief is unsafe if it is easily believed when false; see Rabinowitz 2014.

favoring ascriptions of good religious luck. An example of such self-favoring ascriptions is claiming that one's own religious belief is unique because they are informed by the one true revelation of God. According to Axtell, the belief- forming process must be unique in an adequately formal sense. Axtell does not give an example of a uniqueness claim that is adequately formal. Based on my reading of the book, I believe he suggests that uniqueness claims that are agreed upon by various religious traditions meet this demand. The criterion rules out any appeal to theological reasons for uniqueness or grounding uniqueness in a particular testimonial chain. Axtell also suggests that no adequately formal uniqueness claim is available.

While Axtell rightly notes that many religious believers appeal to tradition-specific reasons to claim uniqueness, he does not do justice to attempts to offer other reasons. A well-known example is the resurrection argument in support of Christianity (See Lewis 2001). An engagement with this and similar arguments would have been appropriate.

Axtell argues that religious believers (like all believers) suffer from "bias blind spots" that make them unable or unwilling to see that their own beliefs are affected by biases just like beliefs of other subjects are. Although these biases affect many beliefs, they mainly affect controversial beliefs, like religious beliefs. One such bias is a tendency to prefer one's own group (in-group bias). Axtell cites evidence from cognitive science that subjects tend to be blind for their own biases but more attentive to biases in subjects from other groups. This results in charges of bias against other religious traditions without recognizing that one's own tradition is just as affected.

Bias blind spots might be a problem for the epistemic status of belief, but, according to Axtell, they are foremost problematic for religious dialogue and religious disagreement. Because religious subjects all too often fail to see that their own belief are as liable to biases, they often fail to see that other religious beliefs have similar epistemic statuses. Axtell hereby suggests that religious believers often fail to arrive at equal weight disagreement.[2]

Axtell's argument based on cognitive biases appears to be cogent. It is unfortunate that Axtell does not engage more with the debate over peer disa-

2 Defenders of equal weight disagreement argue that subjects ought to become significantly less confident about a belief if they learn that competitor beliefs ought to be given roughly equal credence (see Christensen 2007).

greement. When learning about bias blind spots, believers could react in a number of ways. Engaging with the literature on rational disagreement could have led to an interesting discussion on how believers can or should proceed.

The 5th chapter is devoted to the relation between epistemic exclusivism (only one religion is true) and salvific exclusivism (only one religion leads to salvation). Axtell argues that the failure to provide adequately formal uniqueness claims shows that epistemic exclusivist must embrace mutualism – the claim that adherents of other religious traditions are reasonable in maintaining their own religious beliefs even after exposure to one's own beliefs . Axtell adds that a just creator God would not deny salvation to subjects who are holding false but reasonable beliefs in any religious tradition. Therefore, salvific exclusivism is incompatible with epistemic exclusivism.

Axtell is right to note that if God is omnibenevolent, he would not deny salvation to subjects who are reasonably holding false beliefs. One can, however, wonder how many contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion subscribe to both salvific and epistemic exclusivism and thus how much damage Axtell's argument inflicts.

2. In chapter 6, Axtell discusses how cognitive science of religion (CSR) weighs in on epistemic luck. Some CSR-scholars argue that religious beliefs are better described as avowals than beliefs. Axtell connects this view to a Wittgensteinian understanding of religious belief where religious utterances like 'I firmly believe that there will be a Day of Judgment' indicate strong *faith* rather than a high level of factual certainty. According to Axtell, firm faith often comes with high counter-inductive evidence.

Although Axtell shows how some research in CSR is relevant for his overall topic (luck and religious disagreement), he does not draw many clear conclusions. Interesting questions would have been 'Does strong faith stand in the way of religious dialogue and reasonable disagreement?' or 'Is strong faith an epistemic vice because it renders people blind for their counter-inductive thinking?'

Axtell's book is impressive and offers a number of strong arguments against religious exclusivism that should worry its defenders. The book is, however, not an easy read and is sometimes repetitive. Axtell engages with the relevant social and cognitive sciences but does not engage adequately with the literature on epistemic disagreement.

Axtell's discussion is dense and detailed. He, however, seems to avoid making controversial claims or glosses over them when he does. For example, he writes that counter-inductive thinking shows that religious belief often is not safe and hence not knowledge. Such claims are clearly of interest to many philosophers of religion and theologians and deserve more attention.

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Jeff Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018, 192 pp.

In *The Greatest Possible Being* Jeff Speaks argues that Perfect Being Theology (PBT) fails in the jobs it purports to do, guiding us to attributes ascribable to God, allowing us to distinguish between the "dispensable" and the mandatory attributes, and helping us formulate a plausible semantic theory of "God". He offers a number of clever and carefully worked out arguments, and, having shown the failure of PBT, concludes with some suggestions for thinking more productively about God. Speaks works with the assumptions, intuitions, and definitions of much contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Call his version of PBT, C (for contemporary) PBT. I assume that he properly char-

acterizes CPBT and leave it to its practitioners (CPBTians) to make the case if their work has been misrepresented. Speaks invokes St. Anselm of Canterbury as an early proponent of PBT and quotes Anselm (and Augustine and Aquinas) now and again. But their method is different from CPBT. Call Anselm's version T (for traditional) PBT. I offer a rough outline of some of Speaks' arguments, noting points where any PBTian might hold that he has moved too quickly. Then I note how TPBT differs from CPBT and avoids Speaks' main arguments against CPBT.

CPBT, as Speaks understands it, sets aside God's existence and reasons for believing in God. The project is to decide what properties God has, based on a modal claim: God is the greatest actual being, the greatest possible being, or the greatest conceivable being. There should be a "greatness condition", that is "a condition on properties which is such that a property's satisfying that condition, together with the relevant modal principle, entails that God has that property"(p. 11). The condition should satisfy "Entailment"; if a property F satisfies the condition it is a property of God. And "Informativeness": "it should be possible (without reliance on prior substantive claims about God) to see that some interesting candidates to be divine attributes satisfy the condition" (p. 12). Speaks uses the schema (with many subsequent variations) for comparing beings having, and not having, property F in possible worlds w and w*;

(i) $\Diamond\exists xFx$ & (ii) $\forall x\forall y((Fx_{w} \,\&\, \neg Fy_{w^*}) \rightarrow x_{w} > y_{w^*})$

In Chapter 2, that God is the greatest *actual* being is easily dismissed, since one can posit some limited being as the greatest actual being whose attributes do not satisfy the greatness condition. Speaks moves to the greatest possible being (GPB) and introduces the problem of "trumping"; for any standard attribute applicable to God — omnipotence, let's say — we can imagine *x* is omnipotent and *y* is not, yet *y* is greater than *x* because *y* has other attributes that outweigh *x*'s on the greatness scale. Suppose *x* is merely omnipotent, lacking in knowledge and goodness, while *y* "lacks a few trivial powers" but is omniscient and perfectly good. Wouldn't *y* be greater than *x*? The trumping problem applies for any proposed attribute.

Restricting *x* and *y* does not succeed, even restricting them to God in *w* and God in *w**. One problem is that PBTians standardly argue that God is *necessarily* GPB. For any F, God is necessarily F, or necessarily not F. But the

restricted greatness condition begins *possibly* (God is F), which, given that necessarily God is GPB, entails God is F and so is trivial (p. 32). Suppose we consider conjunctive attributes, for example "Triple-O", the conjunction of [P] for every state of affairs *s* which it is possible for anything to bring about, *x* can bring about *s*; [K] for every true proposition *p*, *x* knows that *p*; and [G]: in every situation, *x* does the morally best thing which *x* can do. The trumping problem arises again. Might not a being that is [*necessarily* G] & [P] & "knows everything but a few insignificant proposition" be greater than Triple-O? To solve this iteration of the trumping problem, the tempting move to *necessarily* Triple-O reintroduces the problem of triviality (p. 42). After pointing out that further attempts to save the conjunctive strategy fail, Speaks moves (Chapter 3) to "God is the greatest *conceivable* being".

What should "conceivable" mean here? It must be different from "possible", and it must avoid "trouble-makers." A trouble-maker satisfies three conditions, "(i) God would be better if *F* than if not *F*. (ii) It is conceivable that God is *F*. (iii) It is not possible that God is *F*" (p. 54). Speaks focuses on a negative understanding of conceivable: *p* is negatively conceivable if it is unable to be ruled out. Why not a positive approach? Speaks often treats "conceivable" and "imaginable" as synonyms. He asks, "What would it mean, for instance, to positively conceive of God's being omnipotent, or perfectly good? Certainly we can't imagine these claims being true in any straightforward sense" (p. 56). And that constitutes the argument for the negative approach. PBTians, both traditional and contemporary, may think Speaks moves too fast here. We cannot *imagine* omnipotence, if that means make a picture in our minds of all that it is to be omnipotent, but there is a vast literature on how the limited human being can talk and think about God. Might not a "conceiving" less robust than imagining nonetheless allow for positively conceptualizing divine attributes? For example, Speaks uses "omnipotent" in the trumping argument, suggesting that he and his reader share intuitions about "an omnipotent being" on some positive understanding.

On the negative approach the question is what property cannot be ruled out based on either logical consistency or on some broader epistemic notion. The various proposals lead to trouble-makers or devolve into proposals about possibility. For example, suppose "*p* is conceivable iff Say that *F* is being able to make the radii of a circle unequal. Speaks discerns a trouble-maker: God would be better if He could do it. It is conceivable that God can do it, and it is

not possible that God can do it. Denying this conjunction involves appealing to what God can *possibly* be or do (pp. 56–58). Speaks tries other definitions of negative conceivability, but none is successful.

Chapter 4 moves to Impure Perfect Being Theology; GPB has every property meeting a certain description, labelled a G-property. In comparing the greatness of two beings we might focus on "absolute greatness"; greatness simpliciter in terms of, for example, possession of intrinsic goods. But the trumping problem arises again (p. 85). Alternatively we can compare greatness between members of a kind. But it is difficult to assign God to the appropriate kind, and whatever likely kind we choose, the trumping problem is inescapable.

Chapter 5 addresses "hidden attributes". There seem to be conflicts among standard divine properties: If God is free, then couldn't he have failed to create, but if creation is good, must he not create? If God makes libertarian free creatures, how can he foreknow their free choices? If omnipotence is the ability to actualize any possible state of affairs, doesn't that conflict with perfect goodness? And granted that there seem to be conflicts, God may have attributes of which we have no suspicion which conflict with the attributes the PBTian tries to derive, properly producing PBT skepticism.

Given the apparent conflicts, couldn't PBT at least help distinguish the mandatory from the dispensable attributes (Chapter 6)? For example, one atheist argument goes, God is said to be omnipotent, which means He is able to actualize all possible states of affairs, but He is also said to be perfectly good, which means He cannot bring about some evil state of affairs. QED, no God. The PBT defense "weakens" one of the conflicting attributes, by showing that it was impossible for God to have and hence dispensable, permitting a reconciliation. But, argues Speaks, since the "weakened" property was taken to be one the GPB ought to have, this move could just as well demonstrate that there can be no GPB (p. 123).

Any PBTian might take issue with the way Speaks couches this argument. If A, B, and C are arguing about some divine property — say freedom — and A insists that freedom is the ability to choose between good and evil, while B understands freedom to entail open options, but not necessarily with moral significance, and C understands freedom as the ability to exercise one's will in total independence of anything outside of oneself, it would be dogmatic of A to insist that B and C have dispensed with divine freedom and in effect denied the existence of GPB. Rather, A, B, and C — all defending GPB's free-

dom — might go on to explain why their own understandings capture what is so great about freedom. This is a standard PBT move.

Chapter 7 deals with the effort of "perfect being semantics" to fix the meaning of "God". Is it a proper name? A descriptive term? Not being a philosopher of language, I will not attempt to outline or assess the arguments here. It seems odd that one would assume that a term used for so long, world-wide, in so many disparate contexts could in fact have "a" meaning. Those engaged in PBT often explain how they intend to use the word "God", but that is not the same thing as setting out "the" meaning of the term. But perhaps I missed the point, here.

Having shown that CPBT fails, Speaks in Chapter 8, offers positive suggestions for thinking about God. He notes that both Anselm and Aquinas start by proving the existence of God, before they derive the divine attributes, but he finds this unpromising since many CPBTians are skeptical of the power of the arguments for God's existence. Instead we must simply allow substantial assumptions as foundational and proceed from there. "For instance, one might take as one's foundational attribute the property of being capable of offering human beings genuine salvation; or the property of being a suitable object of faith; or the property of being deserving of worship" (p. 156). Speaks *very* briefly describes ways in which starting from these attributes could guide the process of determining the divine attributes, distinguishing the mandatory from the dispensable ones, etc.

Speaks grants that making these attributes foundational would limit participants in the discussion. More puzzling is the claim that starting with these attributes is likely to be more fruitful than past efforts at PBT. The history of Christendom shows that salvation, faith, and worship-worthiness are concepts open to wildly differing interpretations. And it seems unlikely that one of these starting points will facilitate discussion between the theist and the non-theist, as Speaks hopes (p. 158). Many a non-theist does not believe he needs salvation, and mocks faith and worship.

Let me suggest a more plausible foundational claim, which allows TPBT to avoid Speaks' arguments. It is derived from Anselm's (and Aquinas's) method where both (as Speaks noted) begin with proofs for God. Even those who do not find the proofs watertight might agree that they point to an absolute and independent source of all. This is clearer in Anselm's *Monologion*, than in the *Proslogion*, but even in the latter work, having demonstrated the existence of that than which a greater cannot be conceived, the first attrib-

utes Anselm ascribes to God are existing necessarily and independently of anything else, being the creator ex nihilo of everything not God, and being the source and standard for all goods. (I read the *Proslogion* argument differently from Speaks, but this is not the place to discuss that vexed issue.). This starting point has broad consequences. For one thing it means that simplicity is among the first attributes ascribed to God, since complexity entails being caused and being "decomposable" if only in intellectu. Although, *quoad nos,* it is appropriate to speak as if God has a variety of different properties, we should understand that they are all one in God. Speaks quickly dismisses the simplicity issue (pp. 17–18). but if one embraces simplicity as a basic divine attribute, Speaks' way of setting up the schema for the greatness condition is a non-starter. It asks us to compare x possessing some property — say omnipotence — with y not possessing that property. But if one is used to understanding that God's simple act involves His perfect power, which He exercises by knowing, and which is itself the standard for good, then the comparative strategy of the greatness condition cannot be applicable to "properties" of God, since a being lacking one of the "properties" would lack them all.

Further, starting where Anselm and Aquinas start entails a very different understanding of the typical attributes than many CPBTians assume. Take omnipotence. In the contemporary literature it is often taken for granted that, in addition to God and what He makes, there are, existing independently of God (perhaps as platonic abstracta), possible worlds, states of affairs, propositions, properties, moral truths, etc. On TPBT the most fundamental understanding of divine power is that *nothing* with any sort of ontological status at all exists independently of God. A being dealing with external abstracta is less powerful. (Anselm makes the provocative claim that the possible and necessary are grounded in the will of God which is immutable, eternal, and could not be other than it is. Aquinas grounds possibilia in the nature of God.) And since being is *good*, God's creative power is the source and standard for all goods. Moral truths are the rules by which the created agent can reflect God. The point is that the way Speaks has set out many of his examples, including the examples to motivate the trumping problem, fail on TPBT. No being is TPBT omnipotent without being omniscient and perfectly good, and so for all attributes we can plausibly assign to God. Certainly starting where TPBT starts leaves tensions that are open to debate, and allows that plenty of what there is to God may be "hidden" from limited creatures. But it seems a far more inclusive and

productive starting place than the specific and revealed divine attributes that Speaks suggests. But note that the claim that TPBT offers a richer and more fruitful approach than CPBT rather supports than undermines Speaks' case against CPBT. Speaks is right to say that contemporary analytic philosophers of religion would do well to examine their assumptions, especially if they hope to engage with "that than which no greater can be conceived."

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Bertini, Daniele and Migliorini, Damiano (eds.), *Relations: Ontology and Philosophy of Religion*. Mimesis International, 2018, 300 pp.

The book is a collection of selected and invited papers joined by a common interest that is the concept of *relation,* as the title clearly shows. It is the result of the reworking of the contents of a conference held in November 2016 at the University of Verona, dealing with ontology, one of the main fields which studies relations, and the philosophy of religion. The book is divided into four parts which in turn could be divided into two: the first half dedicated to ontology and the second to the philosophy of religion, mirroring the book's subtitle. Its introduction, written by the editors, aims at highlighting the context from which the book has originated and its consequent structure. Editors named the four parts: History of philosophy, Ontology, Philosophy of religion, and History of religious doctrines — names that probably express their contents and intents better than the official titles they were given. The book seems to have two reading paths. Although Part one and Part four may appear extremely distant, an in depth reading of the book shows that they are skillfully interwoven. Indeed, the structure is the following. Part one deals with the history of philosophy (of relations) with a look both at the origins of the debate identified in English idealism (see chapter 1 by Guido Bonino), and in the Russell-Bradley's dispute, which is a recurring theme in the text. The latter is more widely recalled by Michele Paolini Paoletti in chapter 6, but it is an indispensable landmark of the entire book. Chapter 3, by Sofia Vescovelli, begins dealing with some theological features that will be helpful later on in the text and it moves on to examine process metaphysics, which

understands reality in dynamic and thus in relational terms. Part two, in a way, narrows the field of investigation as it deals with the ontology of relations itself, i.e. a peculiar field in contemporary ontology able to give fruitful accounts of reality. Here we find not only references to Bradley's regress, but also a taxonomy of relations (see chapter 5 by Jani Hakkarainen, Markku Keinänen and Antti Keskinen) which explains another of the cardinal points of the whole book, namely the difference made by contemporary analytical philosophy between internal and external relations. It will allow the reader, in the following parts, to understand how and why this branch of philosophy can be applied to the study of religion, but also, for example, to society with an openness to social ontology, cognitive psychology, and ethology in chapter 8 by Daniele Bertini. Parts three and four examine the last words of the book title, namely "philosophy of religion" respectively dealing with the question of relations in this area of philosophy and the specific use that has been made of it, especially in traditions different from the western one. It can be said that in Part three, there is a greater attention to the analytical philosophy that begins to join up with religion. In fact, Mario Micheletti's paper (chapter 9) changes the register of the text, introducing the theme of God from the very first line. In this case there is a negative final note regarding the application of analytical philosophy to the concept of *God* which, the author says, is blind to certain risks it could produce. The reference to a specific philosophical and analytical debate, however, is clear. Damiano Migliorini's chapter and Ciro De Florio' and Aldo Frigerio's one exemplify the mixture of the two areas, that is the focal point of the text — the former comparing different metaphysical positions with theological ones through a clearly analytical method, the latter with a specific focus on the metaphysics of time. In Part four, on the other hand, we have an openness to religious conceptions outside Christianity (see chapters 14 and 15, by Elisa Freschi and Jeffery D. Long, both dealing with oriental religions, and chapter 16, by Jaco Gericke, where the Old Testament and the Jewish word *elohim* are taken into consideration). The last paper, by Basil Lourié, probably represents the apex of the whole subject. For this very reason, I found its position really appropriate. Indeed, it leaves the reader with the desire to know more, but at the same time it brings together the key elements of the book. In fact, it deals with the philosophy of religion, in particular the trinitarian dispute in Hierotheos and Bryennios, showing the relationships that exist between the three trinitarian figures, i.e. Father, Son,

and Spirit, and rendering this relationships in formulas of a paraconsistent logic. In this way, it highlights how the presence of the two fields in a single book is not a mere juxtaposition but can find meaning, even with very different developments, and needs further research. Therefore, for many reasons the book is undoubtedly original as indeed the reader can see from the very first pages. First of all, because it is not so usual that analytical philosophy is concerned with religion: of course a tradition of analytical philosophy of religion exists and it is briefly outlined by Marco Damonte's paper (see chapter 12). For this very reason, perhaps, the paper could have found space before in the book organization although its conclusions as well as its content dealing with both analytical philosophy and the philosophy of religion let us better understand its position in Part three. Its conclusions, indeed, if not negative are at least dubious towards the application of a philosophy of relations to the philosophy of religion, at least as it has been proposed so far. However, finding exponents of an analytical philosophy of religion is not so easy, especially if we think about other branches of philosophy. Secondly, and above all, the originality of the book is due to the fact that the contributions collected here are very different from each other. In addition to the papers already mentioned, in Part one, for example, there is Agostino Cera's paper dedicated to the *Mitanthropologie* by Karl Löwith — an author who, certainly, cannot be considered a classic exponent of analytical philosophy — which is still useful in the structure of the book to have a broader vision of the subject dealt with. Of particular interest, then, is the openness to feminism with chapter 10 by Vera Tripodi, dedicated to feminist theology and its attempt to reconcile an ontology of being with an ontology of becoming, which turns out to be a special case worthy of attention. Again, Paolo Di Sia's paper (chapter 7) deals with quantum physics and its interpretations and applications, in order to ask how its principles can be applied to a kind of philosophy of religion or, more generally, to the concept of God. Reference to quantum physics is really appropriate and very popular, when contemporary philosophy and ontology of relations are at stake. This diversity of themes and approaches, as noted above, should not suggest a simple juxtaposition of scholars who in some way deal with relations. The common thread that works as a plot of the book, in fact, is firmly tightened and is well expressed by a quote by Bertrand Russell that the reader can find in the book, in Federico Perelda's paper (chapter 2), but also, precisely in order to underline its importance, on the back cover:

The question of relations is one of the most important that arise in philosophy, as most other issues turn on it: monism and pluralism; the question whether anything is wholly true except the whole of truth, or wholly real except the whole of reality; idealism and realism, in some of their forms; perhaps the very existence of philosophy as a subject distinct from science and possessing a method of its own.[3]

We can broadly state that philosophy is divided into two great branches: on the one hand philosophers who give priority to objects and subjects and on the other hand those who give priority to the relationships that exist between them. It is a very fundamental partition with enormous metaphysical implications that, more or less clearly, each philosopher has to make. Although this does not intend to diminish the variety of individual positions, such a distinction is needed, as any neat and manichean dichotomy, to bring out a fundamental philosophical choice with a never-ending importance. Recently, for example, it has resurfaced with the New Realism debate, but even within interdisciplinary fields as the philosophy of biology, the philosophy of physics, or generally speaking with philosophy joining science. Indeed, the question whether science (and philosophy of science, consequently) has to do with interrelated objects or with structures *simpliciter* is a very fundamental one. This is not the proper question at stake in the book, but the background positions and debates could be fruitfully recalled. However, a book entitled "Relations" leaves no doubt about its front. The book, therefore, more than clearly stands among those who give priority to relations and, in addition to this, it investigates what theological consequences as well as metaphysical ones are entailed by this choice and which kind of advantages it has on its philosophical enemy; namely it has the purpose to show how an ontology of relations can be fundamental to the philosophy of religion. As a consequence, we could not agree with the authors' choice, but once we accept it, it is coherent and widely explained. Indeed an account which focuses its attention on becoming, process, presentism and endurantism, external and internal relations, etc. is able to confront itself with the philosophy of religion and with historical religions too, trying to solve some typical theological problems, but also new ones. Obviously, since the book is a collection of papers, it is not possible to find an unequivocal answer to the question, as if

3 Russell Bertrand, *Logic and Knowledge. Essays 1901-1950* (Routledge, 1992).

it were the result of a single head. For example, it takes two options into account: the option for which relations are more fundamental than objects, and the one which simply states that they have ontological dignity, i.e. they have to be conceptualized by philosophers and counted in the list of what there is in the world. Rather, the reader can find solid foundations and interesting clues whether they have extensive knowledge in one of the two areas — either ontology or the philosophy of religion — and are willing to confront themselves with the other discipline; however they would find it attractive even if less open to this kind of commingling, as the book provides the opportunity to examine more in depth the theme of relations and understand its ample range. To think that a single volume can cover the vastness of the theme in the whole history of philosophy would require great ingenuity, but from the specific perspective through which the theme is analyzed, the lines are clear and exhaustive — though any good analysis cannot but give rise to new and fruitful questions.

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Michael C. Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018, 224 pp.

Michael C. Rea's Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews in 2017 flowed into his comprehensive, thought-provoking monograph "The Hiddenness of God" published by OUP in 2018. In this review, I first wish to give an outline of the book's composition and main claims. Second, I very briefly highlight what I especially value about Rea's book, and third I enclose a selection of critical queries.

1. Among the multifaceted claims contained in this book is standing out Rea's view that he has solved the hiddenness problem, not only the one purported by John L. Schellenberg et al., and that he has shown that the latter's hiddenness argument is unsound due to the falseness of some of its premises. Within the framework of analytic theology, Rea is explicit about arguing from a Christian point of view which draws inspiration from the sources of this tradition's history and its theology as well as spirituality.

In ch. 1, Rea sketches the structure of his book and how he plans to unfold its central theme that the hiddenness argument, especially Schellenberg's version of it, rather than questioning the existence of God, instead raises questions about an appropriate concept of the nature of God. In particular, Rea argues that the argument relies upon some ill-founded implications of divine love and disputable conditions regarding what is necessary for a divine-human relationship.

Ch. 2 explicates, first, what the term divine hiddenness may denote. According to Rea, in theological discourse it mainly refers to the essence of God which is characterised by its transcendence or rather intrinsic incomprehensibility in epistemological terms, and, in (religiously) experiential terms, the term also refers to the presence of God which believers claim to be perceivable and available only in a limited way. In addition to that, recent defenders of the hiddenness argument are introduced as relating to a "doxastic (belief-oriented) aspect" (p. 15) of divine hiddenness consisting roughly in the fact that some lack belief that God exists. Second, Rea aims at solving two versions of the hiddenness problem according to which the existence of a perfectly loving God is coherent with the phenomenon of divine hiddenness neither in experiential terms nor in doxastic terms (as put forward by Schellenberg et al.). Concerning the other well-known problem challenging theism, third, Rea asserts that "the problem of divine hiddenness, like the problem of evil, is fundamentally a problem of violated expectations" (p. 25). In the case of the problem of divine hiddenness, a perfectly loving God is not expected to allow divine hiddenness in experiential or doxastic terms to obtain.

In ch. 3-5, the first part of Rea's solution to the hiddenness problem is presented which consists in arguing that the alleged expectations a perfectly loving God is held to be violating are not justified. Ch. 3 elucidates that according to scripture and tradition, God is portrayed not only as being a perfectly good and loving divine person, but also as being transcendent regarding God's alterity in e.g. ontological terms and God's epistemic unknowability. In ch. 4 Rea explains why divine transcendence is neither to be understood in its darkest sense involving, *inter alia*, the view that no theological claims are literally true nor in its lightest sense implying that at least many theological claims, e.g. those about God's attributes which may be derived from philosophical reflection alone, are literally true. Instead, divine transcendence on Rea's account roughly implies that theological claims about e.g. the

attribute of divine love need to be derived from divine revelation in order to be literally true, otherwise they are analogically true at best. In other words, given God's transcendence conceptual claims about divine love should not be defended only by way of reflecting on what is involved in ideal human love and then concluding that this, at a minimum, is literally true of divine love. Rea concludes that, since the aforementioned alleged expectations a perfectly loving God is held to be violating are claimed to be literally true but brought up through philosophical reflection which is not based on divine revelation, the expectations are not justified. In ch. 5, an additional reason why these expectations are not justified is presented, namely that even a perfectly loving God may not desire the good of human beings in an unlimited way or desire union with human beings in an unlimited way but might instead desire the good of God in an unlimited way and desire union within divine Trinity in an unlimited way. And so, Rea in fact argues in these chapters that premise S1 of the hiddenness argument (p. 21) according to which a perfectly loving God is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person is left unsubstantiated.

In ch. 6-9, Rea presents the second part of his solution to the hiddenness problem. He explains why, from a Christian stance, it is apt to maintain that God is perfectly loving towards human beings, so that the traditional, mainly positively connoted analogies describing God as e.g. caring parent or devoted spouse are better characterisations of divine love than the negatively connoted analogies entertained by proponents of the hiddenness argument depicting God as e.g. a ghosting spouse or negligent parent. Ch. 6 and 7 entail an account of religious experience according to which God's loving presence, in a wide variety of ways, is available to all those evincing a concept of God and not being in a conflicted relationship with God, thus allowing them to enter a personal relationship with God. Briefly, taking oneself to experience a divine encounter involves experiencing stimuli in the form of natural phenomena, is impacted by one's own cognition, and is a kind of learnable skill. In ch. 8, Rea argues that also those evincing a concept of God but having a conflicted relationship with God (as e.g. Job or the nation of Israel as described in the book of Lamentations) are in a position to personally relate to God. Ch. 9 entails the view that even those who lack a concept of God and have a conflicted relationship with God are nevertheless able to participate in a personal relationship with God just by trying to do so. And so, Rea in fact argues in

these chapters that premise S2 of the hiddenness argument (p. 22) is false according to which no finite person will nonresistantly lack belief that God exists due to a lack of e.g. experiential evidence in form of a religious experience, thus not allowing that finite person to personally relate to God, even if a perfectly loving God as described by the hiddenness argument exists.

2. As I see it, Rea's core achievement is that he explicitly addresses the problem of divine hiddenness as a set of many subsets, reframes several parameters of the analytic hiddenness debate so far by vigorously challenging certain background theses in an extensive way, and thereby apparently lifts the debate to a new level of argumentation. So, for example, Rea broaches the issue of what might count as an adequate theistic concept of God, offers a sophisticated, precise account of religious experience including a broad class of candidates of also rather low-key "*garden-variety divine encounters*" (p. 115), and includes inspiring meta-considerations about what might characterise philosophical theology (or rather theological philosophy) and how it might work. In a way, one gets the impression that Rea seeks to re-own the topic of divine hiddenness and deal with it also on theological rather than only on philosophical grounds-given that talk about the hiddenness of God grew out of theological literature and that certain expectations on God as depicted by Christian theism are at stake, it would, indeed, sound sensible to at least consult the sources of theology in this debate.

3. Nonetheless, I am wondering whether it would not have been beneficial to hint at the non-literal use of the term divine hiddenness entertained by Schellenberg which unavoidably caused some misunderstanding in the debate. Moreover, Rea's choice of terms in his distinction between divine hiddenness in an experiential and doxastic sense might make the impression that the difference between these two phenomena is bigger than it actually is. At least on Schellenberg's preferred defense of the latter phenomenon, both may entail a lack of experiential evidence in form of a religious experience, whereas the persons concerned by the former phenomenon already believe that God exists, and the persons concerned by the latter phenomenon lack belief that God exists.

Apart from this linguistic query, I am not quite sure if what Rea depicts as divine hiddenness in a doxastic sense fully captures Schellenberg's intent. Rea states that both nonresistant nonbelief and reasonable (inculpably held) nonbelief do not obtain, whereas mere lack of belief due to someone's incon-

clusive evidence for God's existence, even if this evidence is seen by her to at least weakly support belief that God exists, occurs. Regarding Rea's definition of the latter kind of nonbelief and its even-if clause, at least Schellenberg would say that, roughly, if one's evidence already weakly supports belief in God, whether or not one is aware of it, then one believes in God (even though weakly), so that what is described here is actually not nonbelief in Schellenberg's eyes. But then, given this definition, I cannot see how Rea's affirmation that divine hiddenness in doxastic terms as defended by Schellenberg occurs is warranted, and why there would be a hiddenness problem of the Schellenberg sort which needs to be addressed. Setting this even-if clause aside, what seems to be crucial at least about Schellenberg's notion of a nonbeliever is that she does not reject a personal relationship with God by any means, but I cannot see how this point is captured in the respective definition. If I am right on this, then, again, the kind of hiddenness claimed to obtain here is not the one Schellenberg refers to as obtaining. But that could also possibly mean that, in Rea's view, the kind of nonbelief which is claimed to occur or have been occurring in the hiddenness argument's premise S4 (p. 22) is a nonstarter or rather that the premise is simply false, thus rendering the argument to be unsound, too.

Finally, I may add that it remains unclear to me which positive doxastic attitude towards the truth of the proposition that God exists save belief is required on Rea's account of religious experience. And I would be very curious to learn whether Rea thinks that lack of belief in God's existence is, loosely speaking, a good or bad thing, and thus whether this problem of divine hiddenness is an instance of the problem of evil or not.

It is beyond doubt that Rea needs to be thanked for this compelling and controversial book which I dare say is a genuine enrichment of the hiddenness debate. It seems as if Rea wishes to turn things upside down in this debate. That is, Rea may be said to claim that the hiddenness argument is anti-theistic insofar as it helps seeing an, in his view, inadequately conceived theism which is its target, or rather that the hiddenness argument is even pro-theistic insofar as it helps rediscovering an, in his view, adequately conceived theism.