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Matthew Sharpe
Dylan Nickelson *Editors*

Secularisations and Their Debates

Perspectives on the Return of Religion in the Contemporary West

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Part I

Secularizations

Introduction: Secularization and Its Discontents

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Matthew Sharpe and Dylan Nickelson

Sigmund Freud's 1927 work *The Future of Illusion* expresses the great psychoanalyst's most whiggish assessment of the situation of Western, post-enlightenment societies. In it, Freud reanimates the ancient tradition of the materialist-Epicurean criticism of religion, with its skepticism concerning all invisible powers. For Freud, famously, the religious belief in higher, supernatural deities—particularly, the monotheistic God—represents a wish-fulfillment and illusion (Freud 1927: 30, 43). This illusion takes its particular shapes from our earliest childhood experiences of helplessness, and the longing for an all-protecting, omnibenevolent father. With the progress of science, and its benefits in technology, Freud opined that the period of the cultural pre-eminence of religion in the West was over. *Civilization and its Discontents*, written 3 years later, expresses a similarly sceptical assessment of religion. Whether founded in an oceanic, mystical sentiment of oneness, or the refined language of the theologians, religion remains for Freud 'patently infantile' (Freud 1930: 86). Between 1927 and 1930, however, Freud's assessment of the wider prospects of modern *Kultur* shifted, if it did not entirely reverse. With the fortunes of fascism rising, and the first clouds of renewed European war forming on the horizon, Freud now argues that the psychological price demanded by the modern world's manifold civilizational advances is perhaps too high. The sexual and aggressive impulses modern society demands subjects renounce must return in the forms of organized violence, collective and individual neuroses—and in the same form of unconscious guilt Freud had argued elsewhere animated the totems and taboos of the great religions (Freud 1913). Although Freud did not draw the conclusion, the logic of his wider *Kulturpessimismus* points to the claim that the psychologically deep-set 'illusions' of religion could expect a long and viable future.

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Whether one accepts Freud's metapsychology, or his claims concerning religion, one thing is clear. In the decades surrounding the turn of the millennium, a new consensus has emerged that the process of the 'secularization' of Western societies has not proved as inevitable as the Freud of the *Future of an Illusion*, and many *Aufklärers*, had taken it to be. As several of the contributions to this collection note, the term 'secularization' has a complex history, in which it has accumulated many, even contradictory, meanings. However, as in Freud's 1927 vision of the future of the West, its predominant meaning in sociological discourse since Emile Durkheim and Max Weber's work had been to describe the supposedly inevitable decline in the cultural centrality, ubiquity, and political power of religious elites, beliefs, institutions, and practices in modern societies: what Peter Berger called the 'sacred canopy' (Warner 2010: 22–26, 29; Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 56; cf. Wilson 1966; Berger 1969; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Stark and Iannaconne 1994; Stark and Finke 2000). Empirical studies in the UK and elsewhere, drawing on statistics of church membership and attendance (Brierley 1998; Crockett and Voas 2006; Warner 2010: 7–14), have attested again and again to this decline in what some call 'the aggregate level of religious demand' in the West since the mid-nineteenth century (Fincke and Stark 1998; Iannaconne et al. 1997). Different theorists have generated multi-dimensional models to chart the complex processes of secularization. Secularization is seen as involving simultaneously processes at the 'macro' level, involving the functional differentiation of social subsystems (political, economic, and cultural) formerly subsumed under ecclesial authority; the 'meso' level, encompassing the emergence in modern societies of plural religions and denominations which compete for individuals' allegiances; and at the 'micro' level, wherein individuals' religious faith and practices have been privatized, or separated from their public and professional roles, and public life more generally (Dobbelaere 1981, 1999, 2002; Casanova 1994). These social and institutional changes in turn were the results of a wider set of developments, which classical secularization theories held to be profoundly irreversible. Intellectually, the advent of the modern natural sciences in the seventeenth century, the development of biblical hermeneutics and the historical sciences (Gaukroger 2008: 23–24; Warner 2010: 18–19), then the success of Darwinian theory of natural selection, were held to have forever discredited two-millenia-old Christian accounts of creation, biblical history, and the meaning and provenance of human lives (e.g.: Warner 2010: 14–22). Socioculturally, theorists point to the advent of modern societies characterized by complex divisions of labour, the expansion of markets which operate with increasing disregard for provincial divides and loyalties, the proliferation of large, industrialized cities, and the breakdown of geographically and culturally closed communities (Wilson 1982: 153–162), as all over-determining the diminishing significance of religion in the West (Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 57–59; Warner 2010: 26–29).

Nevertheless, after reaching its pinnacle in the 1960s and 1970s, this 'classical' sociological understanding of secularization today is in decline. The case of Peter Berger, one of the principal advocates of the classical theory in his 1969 work *The Sacred Canopy*, is illustrative here. Berger had earlier argued that religion had long ceased to provide the 'sacred canopy' presiding over all areas of social life. By

1999, Berger had revised his assessment, seeing little evidence of religious decline, outside of Western Europe, and the University campuses of other developed Western nations. The real enigma, Berger now proposed, was not to puzzle over why religion had managed to remain in the modern Western nations, despite the logics of secularization. It was to wonder why religiosity had declined there at all (Berger 1999). In many ways, the horrific events of 11 September 2001 served to crystallize a growing, felt need to question the earlier sociological consensus about the inevitability of secularization, if not the advent of what some theorists have termed a desecularization of the West. Here, it was argued, the West was forcibly reminded that its own achievement of a nominally secular society was at most a specific, local achievement, unmatched in the middle east, and other areas of the globe (cf. e.g. Casanova 2006). The fall of communism in the Eastern bloc had not been followed only by the embrace of Western style free markets. It saw also the reinvigoration of the Church in Poland and elsewhere, only ever artificially suppressed by the ruling Soviet powers (Warner 2010: 33–36, 41). In some, more conservative quarters, the terrorists' willingness to wager their lives for a religious cause was counter-posed—in a mixture of horror and thinly concealed envy—to the alleged, vacuous nihilism of Western subjects, awash in the relativism of a profligate, anomic consumerism. Particularly in the context of a war which was announced to be potentially of unlimited duration against such a religious foe, the functionalist view of religion as necessary for social cohesion—Seneca's old *bon mot* that religion is for the wise untrue, for the many true, but for political leaders *useful*—was more and more openly propounded by neoconservative cultural voices.

The association of the accused perpetrators of the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre with fundamentalist forms of Islam underscored another religious datum sociologists had also observed in the final decades of the twentieth century: the rise of forms of religious fundamentalism, including the growth of evangelical Christianity within the United States. Differently, and often in explicit opposition to these 'returns to fundamentals,' the period following the cultural revolution of the 1960s saw the growth of new religious movements in the West. The so-called new age and human potential movements, and the Western adaptation of forms of Eastern belief, meditative and yogic practices is one of the defining features of later modern consumerist societies. Last if perhaps least in import outside of a very narrow cultural elite, in the 1980s and 1990s, the radical post-structuralist or postmodernist theoretical critiques of the enlightenment had given way to a sequence of qualified 'returns to religion:' on the intellectual Left: whether to a form of secularized Judaism in Levinas, Jacques Derrida or Jean-Francois Lyotard, or a rejuvenated Saint Paul, in Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, then Slavoj Žižek. In the wake of these manifold developments, Jurgen Habermas' post-911 annunciation of a 'postsecular age' in which religious views could be expected to retain their vitality and importance was, like Hegel's owl of Minerva, a dusk-borne recognition of an achieved cultural fact (Habermas 2006).

This collection forms one of many monographs, edited volumes, and dedicated journal articles and editions given over to the contemporary reconsideration of secularization (Martin 2005; Dobbelaere 2002; Pecora 2006; Swatos and Olsen 2000;

Bruce 2011; Gabor and De Vriese 2009; Calhoun et al. 2011). Its contents centre around contributions from a 2010 workshop, *Secularization and its Discontents*, held at Deakin University, Australia. In contrast to many other contributions to the debates surrounding secularization and the return to religion, however, the contributors in the volume are overwhelmingly philosophers and social theorists, rather than historians, theologians, or sociologists. The essays collected here do not, by and large, contest matters of empirical sociology, or dispute the figures concerning either religious decline or desecularization, nor challenge the methods for selecting and interpreting the data (cf. Warner 2010: 3–8). Indeed, the predominant sense of 'secularization' that several of the contributions broach or contest comes from theological, rather than sociological discourse. It has a near-opposite sense than the descriptive use of the term in much twentieth century sociology. Far from describing the alleged death of god in the West, for much 'political theology' led by Carl Schmitt, and more recently the thinkers of the radical orthodoxy school, the term 'secularization' describes a process not of rupture, but one of *continuity* between modern beliefs, institutions, and systems of thought. In his 1923 work *Political Theology* Carl Schmitt had argued that all modern political concepts were 'secularized' theological concepts. Notably, he highlighted the parallel between absolute sovereigns' capacities to declare states of exception and theological miracles (Schmitt 1985 [1923]). Throughout the following decades, thinkers like Karl Löwith and Albert Camus would argue, comparably, that the teleological accounts of history central to national socialism and Marxist-Leninism involved 'secularized' forms of Christian eschatology: the conception of human history as a linear progression leading finally to the end of the world and last judgment (Löwith 1949; Camus 2008 [1952]). Differently, Martin Heidegger's later retelling of the history of Western philosophical ideas argues that its great thinkers from Plato to Nietzsche were the unconscious bearers of a hidden 'ontotheology' (Heidegger 1969). In the hands of a radically conservative thinker like Schmitt, and in the works of John Milbank and the radical orthodoxasts or Michael Gillespie more recently, the claim that forms of modern thinking 'secularize' theological concepts is central. As Hans Blumenberg argued in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, in the hands of these thinkers 'secularization' represents a category of 'historical wrong' (Blumenberg 1983). On one hand, tracing the history of modern ways of thinking back to theological antecedents serves to undermine modern self-conceptions of the enlightenment as involving a radical break with premodern superstition and ignorance. On the other hand, the secularization claim here carries over the sense of *illegitimacy* associated with the early modern Protestant monarchs' 'secularizations' of Church properties (cf. Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 59–60). If modern forms of thinking can be shown to secularize theoretical notions, then, it is held that they do so in heretical forms, parasitic on true religion and productive of wider anomic nihilism. Modernity is an apostasy which does not recognize its true nature.

Alongside radical orthodoxy, and the revaluations of forms of Christianity and Judaism in the post-poststructuralist intellectual Left, Charles Taylor's publication in 2007 of his *magnus opus*, *The Secular Age* provides the final stimulus for the chapters that follow. Taylor does not himself subscribe to what he terms the

'intellectual deviation' model explaining the modern age (Taylor 2007: 773–776): his name for the 'secularization thesis' of Milbank and others (Milbank 1993; Löwith 1949; Taubes 2009). Instead, Taylor's gripping, and similarly all-encompassing, narrative of the origins of modernity stresses the evolution of new modern 'social imaginaries' (background, often unstated assumptions amongst ordinary people) rooted in institutional patterns and practices. Taylor's notion of secularization, indeed, is closer to that of classical sociological theses than it is to the Schmittian-style claim. It describes for him the separation of religion from public life; the decline in levels of belief in developed Western nations; and the rendering of religious conviction and belonging a contingent and optional, rather than necessary, feature of modern subjectivity (Taylor 2007: 2–3). Yet Taylor's gripping narrative of the origins of modernity, couched in the language of a human need for transcendence allegedly closed to modern, 'buffered' forms of subjectivity, stands as a similarly powerful, 'astonishingly Catholic' critique of the modern age. Taylor wants, like Milbank et al., to challenge what he terms the triumphalist 'subtraction' account of modernity, wherein forms of secular inquiry and institutions, positioned as deeply natural, finally emerge from under centuries of artificial, theological and ecclesial repression. Secular thinkers are challenged by *The Secular Age* instead to own up to the modern world's debt to its theological antecedents, at the same time as religious believers are asked to accept what Taylor considers to be the genuine gains associated with the modern period: 'Modern culture … carried certain facets of Christian life further than they ever were taken or could have been taken within Christendom… We have to face the humbling realization that the breakout was a necessary condition of the development,' Taylor wrote in 'A Catholic Modernity?' of 1996—as elsewhere he has provocatively commented that perhaps Christians owe:

> a vote of thanks to Voltaire and others for (not necessarily wittingly) … allowing us to live the gospel in a purer way, free of that continued and often bloody forcing of conscience which was the sin and blight of all those 'Christian' centuries.(Taylor, cited in Steinfels 2008)

The book is structured into five parts. These parts aim to address each of the major areas of theoretical debate, in contemporary theological and philosophical considerations of issues around secularization and the 'return to religion'.

The opening part (Secularizations) stages two challenges to the idea that there could be one notion of 'secularization' that might operate across different cultures, in different historical periods. It brings to the table two contributions which call into question, in different ways, a potentially hidden parochialism in the way that Western debates about secular modernity have been carried out.

Purushottama Bilimoria's contribution (Chap. 2) critiques Western conceptions of secularism from a perspective deeply informed by the author's Indian heritage and learning. Bilimoria targets in particular imported Western ideas of a necessary, desirable secularization of society, beginning from Hegel's conception of secularism: one that, through imperialist literature, gave a preeminent direction to the ideology of many Indian nationalists during their drawn-out independence struggle. Bilimoria contrasts the Western debates on 'the secular' crystallized in Taylor's *A Secular Age*,

with the current Indian debates—where 'the secular' has all but been hijacked by the Hindu Right. He shows—reversing Hegel's trajectory—what impact the Indian experience and debates concerning religion, the state, and nationhood could have on European and Anglophone debates, animated often (as Bilimoria notes) by an urgent sense of the cultural and wider crisis of secular modernity. While there is some evidence of Western theorists, including Taylor, beginning to attend to debates around secularization in the developing nations—and hence opening Western debates to different possibilities for negotiating questions of religion and politics—Bilimoria argues that there are as yet severe limitations to these overtures. He notes that one scarcely finds any such approach or opening to non-Western experiences and rethinking of the secular in the works of other contemporary European luminaries; pointing in the closing parts of his Chapter to the figures of Habermas and Žižek in particular. For Bilimoria, this all-too-characteristic lack or lacuna in recent debates in the West reconsidering secularization and its discontents makes today's critique of secularism, like the wider 'philosophical discourse of modernity' which it carries forward, much the poorer for it.

Philip Quadrio's piece takes off from a criticism of Jürgen Habermas' commitment to the modern liberal division of public and private spheres, and its political instantiation, the liberal division of state and church—or what Quadrio calls the 'boundary issue: the boundary between civil and religious authority'. One of Habermas' key references, Quadrio notes, is the founding documents of the United States, including the 'marvellous' article 16 of the *Virginia Declaration of Rights* (Habermas 2006: 3). For Quadrio, Habermas' position is nevertheless characterised by a telling, larger historical or genealogical blindness, concerning the origins of the modern liberal heritage Habermas is revisiting. As his piece details at some length, these founding American documents in particular owe a direct debt to the philosophical—but also *theological*—premises of John Locke's political thought, as presented in pieces like the highly influential *Letter Concerning Tolerance*. Challenging the secular reading of Locke as a wholly modern, post-theological figure—and anticipating the types of claims made by radical orthodox figures to be discussed in the chapters of Rossouw, Nickelson and Sharpe—Quadrio argues that Locke's claims in favour of religious toleration 'takes over structures and concepts' from leading Protestant theologians (Luther and Calvin in particular), which in turn have deeper roots in Augustine. Quadrio focuses in particular here on Locke's allegedly 'natural' distinction between the 'government of souls' and the 'government of commonwealths'—with its attendant divisions of inner and outer, material and spiritual-salvific needs—which becomes the basis for recommending a distinction between just civic and religious authority. For Quadrio, historical analysis shows that this distinction is far from 'natural,' and that in particular the restriction of religious concerns to 'inward' or other-worldly matters is foreign to nearly all non-Western, non-Christian religions. As he puts things: 'We find that Locke derives the boundary from a dualistic account of human interest that flows from a political anthropology with a Latin Christian origin; his account of what is proper to religion and to the relation of religion to the political has been shaped by the way his own religion understands these

matters'. And for Quadrio, this is not simply an antiquarian point, but one which has contemporary pertinence. It challenges the founding liberal claim to legitimacy of the modern state on the basis of its claimed 'neutrality'. This 'neutrality' is in fact the product of an irreducibly particular, and partial, theological heritage. For Quadrio, thinkers like Habermas in the broadly Lockean-liberal heritage, unknowingly impose 'a localised conceptualisation of religion, conditioned by a historical and cultural experience with a particular religion' in their thinking concerning secularization, and the church-state/public-private divides: '… that the very distinction between a public reason and a private reason is a distinction constructed on the basis of reasons that were themselves religious'. As a result, the imputably 'natural' or unproblematically 'enlightened' liberal arguments for the privitization of religious faith in modernity, are bound to appear to non-Western, non-Christian subjects as not unproblematic or 'natural,' but foreign to their own senses of the scope of religious concern. Quadrio's paper, then, is a call for a more adequately historically self-aware approach to contemporary questions of legitimate religious participation in the public sphere. As he puts it in his conclusion, this greater awareness of the particularly Christian presuppositions of Western liberalism ought to: 'give us reason to pause and reconsider what is presupposed … by the Lockean conception of the relationship between politics and religion' and in this way—echoing Kant's famous injunction—'to take the perspective of others, to see our political traditions the way others may…'

Roland Boer's contribution heads Part II of the collection, centrally focussing upon the question of the state and its relations to religion. Boer's chapter takes up the issue raised already by Quadrio and carried forward differently in both Johann Rossouw's and Dylan Nickelson's chapters: the nature of modern state, and its role in secularization and its discontents. Boer's particular contribution here is to emphasise the uncanny relevance or prescience of Marx and Engels' writings in nineteenth century Prussia on just this subject—both in their strengths, and in their limitations. Like Quadrio, in the first part of his chapter, Boer draws attention to how the young Marx's arguments for a post-Christian, secular state turn on what we can ironically call a wrongful universalisation of the particular, more or less closed or exclusive, forms of Protestant and Catholic Churches vying for political influence in that specific historical context. Boer turns then to Marx's later position, echoed also in Engels' article from 1843 called *Frederick William IV, King of Prussia*, which argues instead that the modern secular state represents not simply the oppositional overcoming of Christianity, but the only means to resolve what he sees are the complex of specifically Christian contradictions involved in bringing the religion of the Nazarene to political life:

> These contradictions include the tension between otherworldly religion and this-worldly politics, the problems inherent in a political attitude to religion and a religious attitude to politics, the impossibility of actually living out the prescriptions of the Bible for living with one's fellow human beings (turning the other cheek, giving your tunic as well as your coat, walking the extra mile and so on). What is the resolution of these contradictions? It is 'the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of civil society (*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*) (Marx 1975 [1844]: 156)

The sting in the tail here is that, just as the nominally 'secular' state (as for Quadrio) in fact is a secularization of a specifically *Christian* constellation, so too the tensions between different religious traditions which generated the push towards a secular resolution in the modern states paradoxically do not disappear in the secular age, 'although the ways they now make their presence felt are different from how they appeared in the Christian state'. Boer notes that the privatization of religion will always face what he terms 'pressure within many religions for a very public, political expression of their truth claims'; as well as assuming, problematically, that 'the religions themselves will operate with a similar level of tolerance towards one another'. More than this, for Boer as differently for Quadrio, 'the more church and state are separated, the more they seem to be entwined,' given the specifically Christian origins of the modern state remarked by Marx and Engels. If we consider a variety of historical cases, from contemporary Turkey to the US, Boer argues that 'the complex issue of religion and politics turns up with a persistence that belies any effort to separate them'. Boer's conclusion is that the tacit presupposition of many defenders of secularization—namely that it is inescapably progressive, since religion by its nature is always archaic and regressive—cannot be sustained, any more than the separation of Church and State: secularization can in fact serve as the basis for reactionary positions, as for instance in some contemporary responses to Islam in the West. On this basis, Boer recommends that we should 'recognise that secularism in not necessarily progressive and that religion is not a default reactionary position', asking whether it would not be more productive 'to seek the progressive dimension of both so that the concerns of this age and this world might be addressed'.

Johann Rossouw's contribution (Chap. 5) bridges the argumentative concern present in both Quadrio and Boer, to locate the historical or genealogical antecedents of the contemporary liberal state, and arguments critically examined in the chapters by Nickelson and Sharpe. Writing from a unique perspective informed by both longstanding Buddhist practice, and his recent conversion to Orthodox Christianity, Rossouw share the concerns of thinkers like John Milbank and William Cavanaugh—and many other religious critics of modernity—that Western consumerist capitalism flirts with what Rossouw terms 'a materialist denial or denigration of the spirit'. His concern is to trace the origins of this contemporary nihilistic cultural *denouement*, which he locates in three interwoven registers: the theological level, where Rossouw—like the radical orthodoxasts and differently Michael Gillespie—assigns pivotal importance to the nominalist theology championed by William of Ockham; the technological dimension, where Rossouw intriguingly single out the decisive importance of the invention of the mechanical clock somewhere between 1270 and 1330, in terms of changing the West's conception of lived time, and progressively (or regressively) denying the possibility of any sense of higher or sacral times, such as those enshrined in shared religious ritual or *praxes*; and the political dimension, with the appearance of the modern territorial state from, roughly, the fifteenth century. Drawing on William Cavanauugh's *Myth of Religious Violence* (differently, the subject of Nickelson's critique in Chap. 6), Rossouw contests triumphalist or 'whiggish' accounts of the modern liberal state, with its corollary, the privatisation of religious claims. He sees in this privatisation of

religion, in fact, the flipside of a larger political trajectory in which the early modern confessional states sought to achieve 'greater control over the body-minds of citizens than any preceding institution…' The contemporary situation, Rossouw then argues, can best be categorised in terms of what philosopher Bernard Stiegler calls the 'hyper-industrial society', wherein through the marketization of everyday life—and the massive explosion of digital means of reproducing images, and saturation marketing—individuals' subjectivity and attention is increasingly solicited, divided, and effectively manipulated. The dangers of this situation then, extend beyond what Rossouw calls that 'demonic dialectic' involved in 'Western politicians elevating the economy and security to the highest possible status, whereas the absolutization of the economy and security is accompanied by ever deepening anxiety, as well as by economic and military insecurity'. They reach deep into the spiritual and existential conditions of contemporary subjectivity, and the possibility of individuals leading meaningful lives. 'If it is correct to pose that human beings cannot live without the actualization of a higher ideal, reality and truth,' Rossouw indeed warns, 'then a social order that reduces us to our basest material needs and desires, that smirks about reality and glorifies fictions of all kinds, including 'lifestyle,' and that only concedes the existence of a positivist, factual truth, cannot last'. In this situation, Rossouw argues with Stiegler, Paul Valery and others, 'that it is today necessary—and not only necessary but even urgent—to interest minds in the fate of the Spirit, that is, in their own fate' (cited in Stiegler 2010: 22). Like Boer, Rossouw contests the oversimplistic notion that overcoming religion is necessarily progressive or humanely enriching. Instead, he encourages what he terms 'a strategic alliance dedicated to a new politics of the spirit' between defenders of the ideals of enlightenment, and adherents to religious traditions and practices. Such an alliance, drawing on his three motifs of the post-medieval fate of reality, time and institutions, Rossouw sees as drawing on three dimensions: 'First, for such a new politics the affirmation of a realist ontology is essential. Second, the affirmation of a liturgically mediated time is necessary. Third, our institutions should be steered in such a way that the balance between spirit and matter is restored'.

Part III of the collection considers the important work of the radical orthodox theologians, drawing on John Milbank's groundbreaking work *Theology and Social Theory*.

Dylan Nickelson's chapter returns to the themes of church and state but focuses his attention on the political aspects of the Radical Orthodoxy movement in theology, in particular on the work of William Cavanaugh. Nickelson applies a rudimentary logic to Cavanaugh's arguments in a bid to get to the heart of the latter's analysis of the modern history and his prescription for the future. Nickelson argues that Cavanaugh finds the modern world suffering from an ill-defined malady: nihilism. This is a claim repeated in the work of other members of the movement, notably John Milbank (to whom Sharpe will devote more attention in the next chapter). Radical Orthodoxy research mines the theological origins of the modernity for the cause of this malady. The claim that modern nihilism is caused by the secularization of theological concepts is common to the work of Cavanaugh and Milbank, Nickelson argues. Integral to Milbank and Cavanaugh's claims are the

concepts (albeit implicit) of *conceptual replication* and *conceptual perversion*. As Nickelson highlights, for Cavanaugh in particular, the sorry state of contemporary society is a result of the replication *in a perverted form* of Christian thought patterns and institutions. Participation in the body politic through the modern state is our perverted replica of participation in Christ's body through the Eucharist. Although it is a sentiment absent from his later work, Cavanaugh's earlier work proposes a cure for our ill. Modern society, Cavanaugh claims, is built on a theological conceptual structure but God is absent. Integral for the proper functioning of the conceptual structure, God needs to return. But, as Nickelson demonstrates, this proposed cure—returning God to public life—is not the only one that follows from Cavanaugh's premises. As Nickelson's logical analysis shows, for Cavanaugh Christian concepts were antecedent to both functioning, pre-modern society and the dysfunctional modern variant. As such, the premises on which Cavanaugh builds are the very premises creating the possibility of at least two treatments. Yes, one could reinstate God and a belief in Him. A renewed belief in God may restore a society built upon theological concepts to its proper functioning, thus curing the modern world of its nihilism. But one could also create a society based on non-theological ideas. An alternative solution to our modern ill may be the removal of the theological concepts on which that dysfunctional society is built.

Matthew Sharpe (Chap. 7) continues Nickelson's critical approach to the radical orthodox orientation towards secularization and its discontents. But his chapter focuses primarily on John Milbank's founding work *Theology and Social Theory*, rather than the work of William Cavanaugh. Sharpe argues that it is ironic, and finally contradictory, that Milbank's radical criticism of modernity turns on identifying its historical roots in the nominalism of William of Ockham. The irony here is that Milbank's own reconstructed theology leans heavily on an acceptance of the kinds of radical ontological scepticism associated with post-Heideggerian, 'post-structuralist' thought. Sharpe hence focuses upon the ontologically basic role Milbank's thought assigns to narrative, monologue, or story, as against dialectic, dialogue, or argument. This primacy of narrative is illustrated by the form of Milbank's own work, the form of the *Geistesgeschichte* or 'culture history'. For such positions, led by Hegel's *Phenomenology of Geist* and *Philosophy of History*, it becomes necessary to account for all of Western intellectual history—sometimes back to the pre-Socratic Greeks—in order to understand the contemporary world and debates. Past thinkers are then examined, not on their own terms, but with a view to retroactively understanding 'how we became what we are': which in Milbank's assessment, means an explanation of contemporary, secular nihilism. The force of Sharpe's criticism gestures towards a wider critique of post-Heideggerian historicism and the effect upon academic debate of the forms of historically inflected holism it enshrines—wherein to understand a given proposition or position, one becomes compelled to trace the whole of its presuppositions, which are in turn positioned as historically over-determined by inherited commitments which reach far deeper than the author's conscious intentionality. Philosophy or intellectual inquiry on this model, Sharpe suggests, threatens to be reduced to the vying of different, allegedly incommensurable 'narratives' generated by competing

theoretical demiurges, and their patient exegesis by invested students. One can seek to genealogically expose the presuppositions of such positions (a move which typically carries a never-satisfactorily explained, implicit normativity, as Blumenberg observed (1983)), but the particular validity claims these theoretical wholes produce at their peripheries cannot be rationally contested by scientific or philosophical recourse to a shared, mind- or narrative-independent reality. For it is the founding anti-realist supposition of this intellectual configuration that such a reality is impossible *de jure*. And in response to the question then of how historical-theoretical paradigms change, or new perspectives emerge, one can only alternately answer by invoking occult causes like Heideggerian 'destining', Derridean 'differance', or voluntaristic responses hypostasising radical decisions, ruptures, traumas, or events.

Bryan Cooke's piece opens Part IV of the volume, 'New Atheism and the post-secular theoretical turn'. His chapter (Chap. 8) is a vibrant challenge to contemporary popular or 'New' atheists Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. When these new atheists are not painting religion as inherently violent, they are painting religious believers as inescapably irrational because of their belief, Cooke observes. While this image of religious believers as people prone to fits of irrational religious enthusiasm makes for an easily identifiable enemy of reason, for Cooke the image is a caricature of more considered approaches to faith and belief. Indeed, in a marvelous philosophical irony, Cooke shows that the New Atheists' caricature of religious believers is actually a stunning likeness of the New Atheists themselves. Harris, Dawkins and Hitchens offer their readers easy answers to contemporary ills. In a post-September 11 world, the New Atheists can clearly identify the enemy—a violent religious other. Yet for Cooke it's actually not this other but the New Atheist himself who pedals the most unimpressive cognitive achievement as the 'apogee of rationality'—effectively proposing that simply by participating in a disbelief all-too-ordinary today one becomes the 'unacknowledged heir of Newton and Einstein'. In a reversal worthy of Slavoj Žižek's cultural criticism, Cooke suggests that it's the New Atheist's belief in an irrational religious other, impervious to Enlightenment reason and mired in dogmatic belief in the Divine authorship of this or that holy text that is *itself* the most dogmatic. On this last point, Cooke argues that a more open-minded approach to religious traditions, and particularly the tradition of biblical hermeneutics, provides ample theological evidence not only that religious believers haven't all turned their back on reason but of their embodiment of the rational capacities the New Atheists like to think of as exclusively secular virtues. As Cooke asks on the question of the rational implication of believing in the Divine authorship of a religious text:

> why would a belief in the 'sacred' or even 'divine' status of a given Book not give rise to a concomitant belief that any reading by a mortal, finite interpreter would be necessarily short of the truth, such that to claim that any interpretation was 'natural', 'authentic', 'definitive' or 'straight-up' would be in severe danger of (heretical) *hubris*?

Indeed, Cooke notes, the Divine authorship of a religious text contains its own antidote to idolatry and dogmatism. The faithful, aware of the divine authorship of their holy books, are for this reason potentially *more* open to the possibility that

have misinterpreted the text, that they have confused their interpretation of the letter with the spirit. Thus religion, contrary to the New Atheists' assertions, contains its own 'dialectical motor' which holds within it the potential for the next challenge to stale ideas. As such, Cooke claims, religion contains within it the potential for the rational self-critique that the New Atheists with their caricatured religious other and easily-accessible key to wisdom—don't believe—claim as their exclusive preserve. Cooke pushes his critique further. Drawing on recent work by Alberto Toscano (2010) and Phillip Wegner (2009), Cooke highlights that, when it comes to hunting contemporary villains, the New Atheist may be on a wild goose chase. Drawing the chapter to a close with a reflection on September 11, Cooke asks whether the New Atheists' post-911 fixation on religious fanatics has not, in focusing on those who believe too strongly, made a virtue of not believing in much at all.

Petra Brown's chapter picks up on the themes within Cooke's chapter. However, Brown explores the work of Karen Armstrong, particularly her charge that 'new atheism' is itself a form of fundamentalism in that it, like religious fundamtentalism, is theologically illiterate and intolerant of competing worldviews. The intolerance New Atheism displays towards religious worldviews in particular is but a contemporary variant of Enlightenment rationalism, which in its march toward progress and truth in this world renders illegitimate those forms of understanding that seek truth through the less measurable, more symbolic and therapeutic avenues from religious and mystical traditions. The figure that captures this lost mode of being is the *Homo religious*: a pre-modern being, open to understanding the world through story and myth. This mode of existence was gradually lost as explanation began to replace myth. However, the practice of the *Homo religiosis*—the participation in ritual and the close link between ritual and understanding of the world—was 'engrained in Western consciousness'. Armstrong cited uses the example of Denys the Areopagite, who through meditative practice of came to the realization that language is an inadequate means by which to gain knowledge of God. Through Aquinas, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, this practice and approach to God was lost, setting in train the demise of *mythos*. In the second half of the chapter, Brown challenges Armstrong claim that this heritage is lost, turning to Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard as one who lived this mode of being through the contemplation of human sin. Therefore, whereas Armstrong finds our modern salvation only through a revival of the 'mystic traditions of all religions', Brown argues that, given our proximity to Kierkegaard and his contemplation of sin, 'the distance between the 'Unknown God' and the 'Modern God' is not as great' as Armstrong believes.

Rory Jeffs' contribution to the volume (Chap. 10) brings to the collection a dedicated reflection on the 'post-secular turn' in continental European philosophy. Jeffs, like Cooke and Bilimoria, notes that the last decades have seen a remarkable resurgence of theoretical interest amongst leading intellectuals with, and adaptation of, theological concerns, *motifs*, and particularly the unlikely figure of Saint Paul. As Jeffs puts it, for the likes of Agamben, Badiou and Žižek, Paul has become the revolutionary figure 'whose own form of resistance against the Roman

Empire becomes a model for resistance against all Empires', and 'the model relevant for our current age of secular globalisation'. However, what makes Jeffs' contribution stand out in the already-voluminous literature on this 'theological turn' in the theoretical Left, is his tracing the debt contemporary theorists owe, in their conceptions of modernity and secularization, to the heterodox Russian thinker Alexandre Kojève, particularly his famous lectures in Paris in the 1930s on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Geist*. Jeffs' piece draws on his extensive research into Kojève's early work on the mystic thinker Vladimir Solovyov, who in Jeffs' words, 'attempts to conceptualise a mystical intuition and "vision" of the future unification between an eternal Absolute as represented by God and an empirical and temporal Absolute in human history'. Far from being a simple 'atheist', as Kojève often presented himself, for Jeffs Kojève's reconception of the Hegelian philosophy of history has deep roots in Solovyev's heterodox eschatology, which 'sought to merge the religious eschatological tradition with the rationality of the German idealist philosophers Hegel and Schelling'. This theological shaping of Kojève's thought, as Jeffs examines, explains Kojève's unlikely proximity to that 'apocalyptician of counter-revolution' (Taubes's phrase) presently also experiencing a theoretical revival, Carl Schmitt. The particular weight of Kojève's eschatological inheritance is evident in Kojève's famous, paradoxical notion of the 'end of history'. The notion is famously paradoxical, since on the one hand it represents the culmination of Kojève's conception of history, and yet, from the mid-1940s, Kojève began to harbor deep hesitations about the desirability of the 'universal and homogenous state' he saw world history ineluctably working towards. Referring to Geroulanos's argument (2010: 155), Jeffs observes that Kojève's end-State '"lacks any idealist or paradisal basis", and in it man, "without recourse to religion … is left only with the value of violent negation"'. The final section of Jeffs' chapter thus turns to Giorgio Agamben's messianic thought. Jeffs notes first how Agamben acknowledges a debt to Kojève for his conception of the contemporary period as one of universalised state of exception, wherein law is in force without significance. More intriguingly, Jeffs claims that although Agamben aims to distance his advocacy of a form of Pauline messianism in response to the present situation from Kojève's deliberations on the end of history, there is a proximity between the formalism of Agamben's proposed 'messianic life' with its rendering inoperative (*to katergein*) of the law, and Kojève's later flirtation with ideas of a 'formal [post-historical] act' to resist the universal pacification and juridification of the end of history.

The final Part V of the volume broaches two wider responses to contemporary debates concerning desecularization, and Charles Taylor's *The Secular Age* in particular.

John Rundell's contribution (Chap. 11) is an extended, reflective response to Charles Taylor's monumental 2007 work *The Secular Age*, which puts this remarkable work in dialogue with Taylor's larger *oeuvre*. Rundell critically reconstructs Taylor's image of modernity and of the modern 'buffered' self, an image he sees as deeply indebted to the romantic lineage of cultural critique, wherein: '[we] are left with a view of human life which is empty, cannot aspire commitment, offers

nothing really worthwhile, cannot answer the craving for goals we can dedicate ourselves to' (Taylor 2007: 717, 718). Against this nihilistic or levelled-out condition, Rundell notes, Taylor posits a redemptive, more 'porous' form of subjectivity open to a dimension of extramundane transcendence: '… contextualized and constituted by a porosity between two worlds, the mundane and the enchanted'. For Rundell, there are three main threads with which Taylor weaves the concern with transcendence which animates *The Secular Age*—suffering, violence and mystery—and which shape Taylor's critique of the modern condition. Taylor's central claim, here as elsewhere close to the radical orthodox position, is that the modern 'immanent frame' can only dream, falsely, of buffering itself against these three faces of transcendence:

> And for Taylor this is the second basic problem and predicament with the modern human condition and its social imaginaries. At both levels of the social imaginaries and modern self-formation, the desire for control, as well as the endless inchoate din that this desire produces, displace and remain deaf to a sense of the mysterious and an indetermination beyond human control.

Furthermore, as against the symbolic and practical resources granted by the religious traditions, Taylor argues that 'the modern world does not have the resources internal to itself to respond to its own dilemmas, difficulties, and violences': violences most spectacularly displayed by the totalitarian regimes, but looking back paradigmatically to the Terror of the French revolution, and forward to contemporary forms of fundamentalist violence. Even more basically, Taylor sees modern men and women as increasingly bereft of cultural imaginaries capable of reconciling them with the most pressing, larger existential experiences of love, sexuality, and death. What is needed, for Taylor, is—as Rundell importantly notes—not a return to the *status quo ante*. Unlike many more radical critics of modernity Taylor does acknowledge important cultural gains from secularization, and expresses deep hesitation about the 'hyper-Augustinian' conception of original sin, with its 'obsessive sense of human depravity; and … juridical-penal view of atonement' (Taylor 2007: 653). Rather, so Rundell argues, Taylor aims at a 'modernisation' of 'the Christian Agapaic tradition in order to counter the traps of violence in modern porosity…' This modernisation should involve carrying forward the modern emphasis on the elementary dignity of everyday life: 'a sense of the value of the unspectacular, flawed everyday love, between lovers, or friends, or parents and children, with its routines and labours, partings and reunions, estrangements and returns' (Taylor 2007: 628). It would, differently, also involve carrying forward the non-denominational attempts within romantic literature and poetry to give form to transcendence, and the internal depths of subjectivity otherwise closed off to modern, administrative and economic rationality, and our buffered selves. Rundell is critical of Taylor, to the extent that he sees *A Secular Age*—in contrast to some of Taylor's earlier work—as falling prey to 'the prejudice (in Gadamer's sense of the term) of the immediate identification of rationality with control, violence, instrumentality and modernity, contrasted by 'the invisible', nature, the sublime, and the poetic, which has fascinated critics since Romanticism'. Nevertheless,

the conclusion of Rundell's chapter, drawing on Agnes Heller in particular, points with and against Taylor towards the creation and celebration of cultural practices enshrining non-instrumental relations to the natural world and to each other, as well as a metaphorically 'slower' sense of lived time than the breakneck speech of contemporary neoliberal capitalism—what Rundell calls 'this-sided spaces for the possibility of mystery and wonder'.

In the final chapter of the volume, Wayne Hudson (Chap. 12) returns to the theme of post-secularism. Hudson presents the case for postsecular approach to governance and vision of such an approach could provide solutions to contemporary problems of public policy. He begins the chapter by challenging the Enlightenment critique of religion and the resultant exclusion of spirituality from public life and, consequently, issues of governance, finding the exclusion misguided and unsustainable. The problem then becomes, as Hudson notes, how we deal with contemporary issues of governance given the inability of Enlightenment secularism to deal with a world in which religious belief remains. Hudson finds inadequate the post-religion approach to governance, in which religion is recognised as part of our cultural heritage and continues to exist in evermore atrophied forms. Postreligion's lack of a clear organisational model belies its underlying ideological roots in the Enlightenment critique of religion and the project to purge spirituality from the public sphere. If we are to solve problems of contemporary public policy, Hudson argues, we need to rethink the anti-spiritual basis of the European Enlightenment and provide a clear model of governance. With that in mind, he shift his attention to setting out the framework for a post-secular approach to governance. Far from shunning Enlightenment values, Hudson defends the application of reason to the reform of human affairs, pursuing a 'middle path between secularism and religious revivalism' whereby Western secularity and its concomitant advances are reconciled with the continuing presence of religion in society. 'In terms of method,' Hudson adds, a post-secular approach to governance 'seeks to promote debate and discussion in light of the complexities of the emerging global order and pragmatics relevant to the management of complex societies, and not political philosophical principles articulated in Europe and America in the eighteenth century'. Such an approach, because of its basis in the organization form inherited by the West, has the potential to weight societal concerns against those of the individual—a recurrent problem within societies which adhere to a liberal political philosophy. Furthermore, the postsecular approach to governance, unburdened by the 'political philosophical principles' of a particular ideology, offers the possibility of a truly malleable form of political engagement, one that can conceptualize politics as more than that public activity taking place in that ill-defined 'space' known as the 'public sphere' and in which considerations of sacral considerations may achieve legitimacy. This new postsecular approach to governance, as Hudson envisages it, would allow for religious citizenship while respecting existing democratic processes and the protection of freedoms.

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Disenchantments of Secularism: The West and India

2

Purushottama Bilimoria

2.1 Introduction: Taylor's polysemy of Secularity

In his tome *The Secular Age* (2007) Charles Taylor sets out three senses of secularism (French, *laicité*). The first of these pertains to the separation of 'state' (the political, economic, educational, bureaucratic institutions and social organizations governing the public sphere) from the 'Church' (the spaces marking the broadly cultural and faith-spheres of believers, or the adherence to God or predicated on some notion of ultimate reality). This is the predominant ideology of the modern capitalist and post-industrial West, Western Modernity and much of postmodernism as well. It is our 'secular age'. Thus a secular state must base its laws and political decisions on reasons and the communicative apparatus of rationality that everyone could accept, irrespective of their particular ethical or religious conceptions (Baynes 1998).

The second, somewhat hackneyed sense of 'secular' in Taylor, adverts to the compatibility between 'the emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres' and the fact that a vast majority of people still believe in God, and practice their religion vigorously (Taylor 2007: 2). Whereas in the earlier, excarnated, secular age all goals beyond human flourishing were eclipsed and contained within immanent secular humanism and the absolutes of modern science, there is here a personalized openness to those very transcendental possibilities; whole communities might find it tempting. The United States, Taylor notes for his prime example, is striking in this regard: 'One of the earliest societies to separate Church and State, it is also the Western society with the highest statistics for religious belief and practice' (Taylor 2007: 2). And religious belief, we might add, that exceeds Judeao-Christian predilections in the peculiar 'melting pot' version of multiculturalism. Buddhism is embraced widely in urban regions across the continent, while Islam boasts a

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formidable presence among its immigrant communities, as do Hindu-Jain and Sikh cultures among transnational South Asian communities. 'Here belief in God might go unchallenged and is indeed unproblematic. The majority of Muslim societies and the milieu in which the vast majority of Indians live are given as conforming to this sense' (Taylor 2007: 2).

The third sense of 'secular' for Taylor, by contrast to both above—and more significant for Taylor's reformist narrative—registers a shift toward a space where religion is 'understood to be one of the options among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace' (Taylor 2007: 3). And this is how Taylor encapsulates the secular in the third sense:

> …the change [shift] I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God ['or the transcendent'], to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others … Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. (Taylor 2007: 3)

This third sense of the secular Taylor christens as '*secularity*': it concerns the *conditions of belief*. Secularity in this sense 'is a matter of the whole understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place'. It is 'a condition in which our experience of and search for fullness occurs; and this is something we share, believers and unbelievers alike' (Taylor 2007: 19). The search for fullness takes our disenchanted age beyond the closed world-perspective to the higher, transcendental reaches beyond human flourishing and an ontological grounding of morality; it is then the 'new context in which all search and questioning about the moral and the spiritual must proceed' (Taylor 2007: 20). Hence, Taylor is comfortable in concluding that a society would be deemed secular *qua secularity* or not, 'in virtue of the conditions of experience and search for the spiritual'. And while in passing he mentions that the case of India is correlated better (perhaps historically at least) with both the latter senses of being 'secular', but not with the first (Taylor 2007: 4), in the case of the West, 'the shift to public secularity has been part of what helped to bring on a secular age in the third sense'. One cannot avoid noticing (if a pun be permitted) the slight circularity in the argument and certain debatable presuppositions, not least of an irrepressible human need to embrace *external* transcendence for moral and spiritual goals beyond just human flourishing. Even so, the overall thesis holds largely true in the case of modern India as well as in modern Western nations.

I applaud Taylor's endeavor toward opening up the hitherto rather closed taxonomy of secularity in modern-Western cultural monolingualism since the Enlightenment and his quest for a more robust and contemporaneous perspective that takes into account both the historical experience of humanity with its divergent stories about religion and the social world, and the inexorable 'return of the religious' in recent decades, whose reverberations are felt more in the media and certain cloisters within the academe than in the broader intellectual discourses of the West (Singer 2011). Nevertheless, in what follows, I wish to contest Taylor's still profoundly redemptive and evidently Christian/eschatological construction of the reformed secularity he wishes to advocate or prescribe, and more importantly, the narrow representation of the supposed case of India, that he mentions *en passant*.

In what follows, I will problematize the senses in which India could be said to be secular or not secular, or the kind of secularity that afflicts the Indian condition, particularly in the shifts that have occurred after the imperialist *philosophes*, such as Hegel and Marx and Weber, cast a Eurocentric (Enlightenment) spell on India, along with the interventionist inroads made by British/European colonialism, that unsettled an established pattern of the relationship between the sovereign instruments of governance and religion. The imposed discourse(s) of secularism in any and all of Taylor's senses have only helped to, as it were, muddy the waters and has left behind in the postcolonial landscape a troubling legacy from which the Indian society has barely recovered and with which the modern nation-state continues to grapple. If not that, then it becomes entangled in ambivalent and hybrid imbroglios, such that we now have adherents of God Rama protesting that India has embraced an ideology of 'pseudo-secularism' to the detriment of its national and cultural harmony (Bilimoria 2009). The battle-line is drawn not just between secularism and spiritual transcendence, but it cuts in multiple vectors across religions (of which there are more—and claiming more adherents—than in all of the US, Europe and the rest of the Western world put together). The situation and challenges from and for secularism facing the Indian, post-Gandhian experiment are so fraught with dilemmas and discursive instabilities that it is worth examining this scenario—if only so that the West may pay heed to its own by-gone Orientalist errors and be cautious before hurriedly coveting or expropriating religion in response to the discontents of secularity. There are lessons to be had here.

2.2 The Eurocentric Frame of the 'Secularisation Debates'

I begin with a thesis recently developed by the postcolonial Sikh scholar in Ann Arbhor, Michigan, Arvind-Pal Mandair (2010). Mandair attempts to connect

> the operations of an imperialist technology in a past historical movements (specifically during the encounter between Britain and India) with its legacies in the present, namely, the crisis of secularism and/or the 'return of religion' into the heart of the Indian nation-state and the projects of the South Asian diaspora.(Mandair 2010: 13).

He explores these legacies via a reassessment of the role of religion and language in the formation of both the imperialist and nationalist ideologies, specifically in the work of monotheism and monolingualism, considering the two to be parts of a single process that he tellingly dubs as '*mono-theo-lingualism*' (Mandair 2010: 13).

Whole Western academic disciplines are committed to the idea that the phenomenon called 'religion' has been constitutive of the cultural and philosophic frame of the West, notwithstanding the different moments through which a certain metaphysical continuity has been manifest: the Greek (*onto*-), the medieval-scholastic (*theo*-), and the modern humanist (*logos* or logic)—hence, 'ontotheological'. Indian (not least postcolonial) theorists in their critique of secularism—presumably in deference to the letter of the (European)

Enlightenment—however maintain a stricter separation of the religious and the (secular) state; while in the post-Enlightenment (to the post-Modern) era the lines are somewhat more blurred between religion and secularism because they 'inhabit other spaces' in the Humanities and Social Sciences. A genealogy is traceable from colonial Indology (scholarly-comparative praxis focused on India and things Indian) to neo-colonial religious reform movements, that demonstrates that the concept of religion used by Indologists and Indian elites were in the period in question affected by Western philosophy, theology, and politics. And its genesis arguably goes back via Marx and Weber to Hegel. The myth underscored was that politicizing or deprivatizing religion will inevitably lead to catastrophe, that religion is the cause of violence, therefore the liberal state is needed to guarantee the protection of its citizens.

In the construction and perpetuation of Indian secularism, Hegel both perpetrated this essentialist myth of secularism and at the same time muddied what was essential to an understanding of the very traditions of India in question. Hegel recognized the importance of religion in India's long cultural history and the production of its thinking, literature, philosophy, magical practices, social institutions; however, because the religions of India were not grounded nor guided by the self-awareness of Reason (*Vernunft*), it lacked the maturity of the apparatus enabling self-determination or freedom in political and civil life. Hegel was greatly troubled by the richness of India's religious life and its representations, though a little less troubled with Hinduism's philosophical abstractions. Perhaps this shows the prejudices of his time, of the Christian mind that abhors any presence of the pagan, and of the scholarly type that favours the abstract concept over the seemingly irrational and fantastic appearances of popular religion, myth and the *cultus*. This is a story of how 'religion' was both invented (for the 'Other') and in the same moment gerrymandered (Mendieta 2001). For India, Hegel felt that these two poles characterized the whole of the cultural matrix but were articulated in such a way that no real resolution was possible on the Indian terrain alone. Such a resolution of opposites was left to those cultures further along the developmental and, it seems, 'evolutionary' sequence—those that the descendants of the Aryans in the European continent were bequeathed with. The theoretic implications and impact of such a philosophy of history/culture as Hegel proclaimed through his voluminous opus on non-Western people's perception of the cultural *alterity*, and on the constitution, internally as it were, of their own identity, location, and *topoi* vis-á-vis the West (which one might call 'internal orientalism') have been ominous (see Bilimoria 2011).

This impact, as Mandair argues (2010: 121), is endemic in the modern Indian espousal of secularism that came via the Jena Romantics, Indologists and the native elite alike, persuaded by Hegel's ontotheological schema, the epistemography (Spivak 1999) of power and progress (2010: 155). It was left to the colonial administrators in the subcontinent (as elsewhere) to carry through the project of 'the formation of a modernist identity for Indian elites, an identity that is, paradoxically, religious in essence' (2010: 112). One might say, these came to form a peculiarly

Indian form of secularism that is not mute on matters pertaining to religion—even to the highest reaches of metaphysics.[1]

Before moving to examine the Indian scenario I wish to touch on the Western modernists who I named in the Introduction as exemplifying the influential neglect of non-Western experiences of secularism. Habermas for one; and I will also touch on the enthusiastic avowal of certain select religious tropes in Žižek's reformed post-Left-Marxist-anti-multicultural revival of the rebellious imaginary of Jesus (the 'non-Christian' Christ): 'to Hell with the Buddha (even 'Europe's Buddha')' (to echo the Nietzschean prejudice) (Bilimoria 2008).

Like most modernist philosophers, Habermas seems completely oblivious to the existence of non-Western contestations between modernity and religions, except for some passing reference here and there, especially in his attempt to countenance the rise of fundamentalism globally. While he acknowledges

> the rise of religious fundamentalism, the return of religious law as an alternative to secular civil law, Europe's *Sonderweg* with regard to religion and politics, 9/11, and issues relating to naturalism such as biotechnology in the field of genetic engineering, (Duvenage 2010: 344)

the preoccupation is entirely with the challenges faced by Western modernity. In his more recent book-length work on *Between Naturalism and Religion Philosophical Essays* (2008) Habermas's main concern seems to be primarily focused on a defense of 'soft' naturalism in which he invokes Kant's more conciliatory approach in his philosophy of religion to 'assimilate the semantic legacy of religious traditions without effacing the boundary between the universes of faith and knowledge' (2008: 211). As a prefatory comment to this project, he observes: 'Nowadays religious fundamentalism, which also exists within Christianity, lends the critique of religion a regrettable topicality'. This is really a veiled allusion to extremism of political Islam and evangelical Christianity; but there is no reference to the convoluted politics and the West's complicity in the Middle East, especially on the rise of modern Zionism in Israel (Eisen 2011). Still, Habermas goes on to offer an interesting insight. 'Nevertheless', he says,

> the focus of attention in the West has in the meantime shifted. Here, in the European part of the West, the aggressive conflict between anthropocentric and theocentric understandings of self and world is yesterday's battle. Hence the project of incorporating central contents of the Bible into a rational faith has become more interesting than combating priestcraft and obscurantism. (Habermas 2008: 212).

Here Habermas finds some solace in Kant's project of predicating the principle of moral law, laws of duty and right on practical reason and the kingdom of ends. Habermas also points out that Kant never did abrogate the role of religious

[1] Although we can't pursue this here, we note that this would not be the first time in the history of the Indian civilization that a recourse to the secular in the moral and political discourses of sovereign reinvigoration has been afforded: this happened with the Buddha who stood up to the excesses of Brahmanic priestly hegemony (Bailey and Mabbett 2008), and in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (the presumed Indian Machiavelli) (Bilimoria 1998, 2007).

teachings on morality, especially in the exemplary lives of prophets, saints, monks, and so on, as distinct from the authoritarianism of the ecclesiastical orders, in providing practical reason with its 'store of suggestive and inspiring images', in short, a needed epistemic stimulus for the postulates with which it (practical reason) attempts to recuperate 'a need articulated in religious terms within the horizon of rational reflection'. We know that Kant tried to justify a continuation of some modicum of religious faith as '*fides*' (from which we get fideism) within the limits of reason. Indeed, he wanted to overcome metaphysics in order to make room for faith. But there is no reference to any of the world's religious traditions in Kant, or in Habermas, that might augment the task of practical reason in its alliance with faith. In fact, Kant is rather dismissive of and disparaging of the religions of the Tutsi, Hawaiians, Hindoos and Sino-Tibetans too in rather racist terms as the people belonging to species whose reason is not yet cooked, is rather 'raw humanity', looked upon as 'immature' with only the more primitive or aboriginal sensibilities (see Bilimoria 2002a, b; 2013). Simply lost to Habermas, or beyond his eurocentric purview, is Gandhi's discourse ethics and critique of modernity, which while not based on a strict adherence to Enlightenment rationality, has had a far wider and profound universal impact in the lived world than Habermas' communicative ethics is likely to have (Gupta 2009).

Agnes Heller once said that the Hegelian adventure of World Spirit was not consciously meant to be a fiction, but neither was it meant to be the reconstruction of facticity. One must wonder then what it was meant to be? A script for a dinner party? Clearly, such grandiose philosophical histories become weapons in the hands of unscrupulous colonizers of one sort or another, and while Hegel and Schopenhauer may have fallen out of favour in modern or post-modern scholarship their ghosts still haunt the modes of discourse within the academy and outside it, in the underside of modernity and in the phenomena of 'Orientalism' (external and internal) and neo-colonialism (Dussel 1996).

And finally to Slavoj Žižek, who seems to have embarked on the path of resurrecting the Hegelian rebirth, despite (or perhaps in cohorts with) his commitment to Left-Marxist anti-capitalist anti-liberal-democratic-multculturalism and intensely postsecular and political, even revolutionary ideals. How so? By bringing the political into the erstwhile formulations of Cartesian subjectivity as the common ground (commonality) for the universal. Of course, neither subjectivity nor the universal are as they stood in Descartes' *cogito*, the subject, and Hegel respectively. Rather, in contemporary discourse they appear to be stripped of their excessive, repressive and exclusivist paradigms, which has led to the rejection of the unified transcendental Subject (God, Man, Nation, etc.). The universality instead is a void proliferated by decentered multiple subjectivities (gay, feminine, ethnic, religions) corresponding to the theoretical movements of postmodernism, postcolonial theory, and their ideological compliment, New Age Gnosticism—all of which he finds unpalatable. 'Žižek confronts these false alternatives by using Lacanian psychoanalysis to reappraise the standard narrative of German idealism, mainly of Schelling and Hegel' (Mandair 2010: 398). The subject in what Žižek calls its 'night of the self' is a paradoxical creature, not without self-contradictions and inner tensions, etc.

It follows that if that is what the particulars are constitutive of in the world/void then there cannot be a conception of the universal of human subjectivity, other than the purely abstract. 'Rather, universality is a site of unbearable antagonism … or minimal difference with itself. So subjectivity becomes a ground play of the political and awaited univeralization' (Mandair 2010). And here, like Habermas, Žižek does not rule out the role of religion; indeed in the postsecular ideology it is a necessary dialectical force to be reckoned with. However, the 'return to the religious'—the phrase is something of a cliché now—is cast not in terms of the old authoritarian, orthodox, God-centred, anthropocentric, Church-decreed religion of faith and revelation. Rather, it is a matter of the kind St Paul discovered on the road to Damascus; and here he follows in the footsteps of Tsow Bidou who has also written approvingly on St Paul. At a key-note address to the American Academy of Religion, Žižek provocatively aligned Jesus not with the Incarnational divinity within the Trinity (the possible polytheism aside) but with the hero of the Young Marx and Engels, the frontline fighter and social struggler dear to all Marxists-Leftist revolutionaries: 'That is the Jesus I would put my rational faith on!' (Žižek 2009). Here is Žižek's theo-humanist confession in more concise terms, discoursing on the true nature of dialectic:

> And that is why I have always liked the radical eschatological Christian vision whereby the idea is that when humanity fights for salvation, for good against evil, then this is something that not only concerns humanity but, in a way, concerns the faith of the universe and the fate of God Himself … The whole point is to historicize the so-called eternal questions, not in the sense of reducing them to some historical phenomenon but to introduce historicity into the absolute itself … And here again, we are back to Hegel and Schelling, because if there is anything to learn from German idealism it is precisely this dialectical attitude. This can also be found in Heidegger and the perspective of how the disclosure of Being requires the human in the sense of *Dasein* (being-there). That is to say, the contingent humanity is at the same time the only site of disclosure of the absolute itself. (Žižek and Daly 2004: 88–89)

What Žižek knows of and says about Europe's 'Other' is derived from his Occidental predecessors, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Husserl and Heidegger in his references to the 'pre-modern societies' and what is lacking in them and why their anti-colonialism is not as fantastic an achievement as critiques of Orientalism have assessed it to be. So Mandair asks rightly: 'But does Žižek not make the same move in his effort to reconstitute a "progressive/leftist Eurocentrism: out of Christianity's self-sacrifice?"' (2010: 409). The secular or 'secularisation' that is born of a 'disenchantment of the world', it seems, is not without its own disenchantments (Warner 2010).

2.3 The Complex Indian Experience of 'Secularisation'

I want now to thus proceed to put to test, demonstrate and elucidate the above argument—vis-à-vis Taylor's programmatic of secularity as it applies to the Indian case—by analysing the troubled relation between the majority Hindu and a minority Muslim population respectively on the question of the role and function of religion

and religious community-law in the public qua political domain of a nation whose Constitution (in its Preamble at least) declares it to be a 'secular, socialist, democratic Republic' (see also Bilimoria 2006).

The continuing presence of the Muslim in India is a symbol of the 'failure' of the Indian nation. That presence is a sign of a lingering disease, a psychotic split to be precise, in the discourse of Indian nationalism between the 'secular' and the 'properly Hindu'. This sense of failure is what Partha Chatterjee (1993) calls an unresolved contradiction between the (post)colonial nation's (European) enlightenment project and its nativist consciousness of difference. That difference is inscribed in the discourse of communalism which was introduced during the Raj and used by the colonial state, then by the Muslim League; and the major Indian nationalist factions carried it into independent India to put limits, if not brakes, on the dominance of secularism. The paradox is that there has been at least two senses of secularism operative within the Indian nationalist discourses: and both have been seen as the *cause célèbre* or the failure of the Indian nation, while both claim to represent the 'true nation'. More pertinent though, it is the hermeneutics, including an intervention in moral governance and juridical processes, that puts the respective claims into practical test in *real politik*. A fledgling Hindu nationalism, apprehensive of its own marginalization under both the colonial state and, later, the secular nationalist's stigma of Hindu communalism, would place itself in the interstices of the variant political nuances, claiming that both have reached their limits and are therefore 'pseudo' (*banawati*), meaning 'pretend only', and hence hides beneath its sanguine crust a civilizational failure (Bilimoria 2009).

Put in another way, Hindu nationalism turns the coat or *dhoti* of secularism inside out, and points to the obfuscation over the precise interpretation of what this entails in the Indian context—and this is nowhere more apparent than in the pervasive polemic of 'pseudo-secularism' that the Sangh Parivar ('family organizations' or network of Hindu rightist groups)[2] and in particular the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership have all too readily utilized in criticizing the nation's serious lapses in not being able to deal with its 'Other'. But this polemic is made possible to a large extent by the inherent ambiguity in the very concept of 'secularism' and, more significantly, its apparent failure in the Indian context. This claim is not original to the Hindu right or the ideologues of a strident Hindutva. The version of secularism that has failed, as scholars such as Ashis Nandy, TN Madan, Mushirul Hasan, and Pratap Banu Mehta (2010) have argued, is one that seeks to distance religion and collective

[2] 'The Sangh' (comprising at the helm the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), a breakaway from the Hindu Sabha, was founded in Nagpur, Maharashtra, in 1925. Its ideologues are VD Savarkar (who gave the term 'Hindutva'), KB Hedgewar, Balasaheb Deoras, and MS Golwakar, succeeded by Rajendra Singh, who launched the movement to which were inducted Jan Sangh (now defunct), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Kar Sevaks, Bajrang Dal, Shiva Sena and a splintering of various saffron shades. One of its main activities from inception has been to impart para-military training and ideological indoctrination (Bacchetta 2004: 6). It founded two political parties: Jan Sangh (now defunct) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has representations in the other major parties (NDA), with infiltrations into Communists and Muslim factions, ADMK, and other parties in the South.

religious aspirations from the political structuration and legal processes of a society in a multicultural and pluralist environment (Taylor's first sense moderated by the Nehruvian attitude). This was an impossible project for India. As Mushiral Hasan (1994: 26) observes: 'Delinking of state and religion remains a distant dream; secularisation of state and society an ideal.' But secularism, in the nuances taken on board by the Constitution makers and markers, adverts to a healthy diversity and harmony of all religions, *ceteris paribus*.

What the term 'pseudo-secularism' undergirds then is a convoluted attack on both nuances; and to an extent rightly so. The former nuance—a legacy of the Enlightenment—is being seriously undermined in world politics; and it was never true of pre-British India and much of the Christian and Islamic principles of governance The Indian society is basically religious, historically and continuing into the vanishing present. The latter nuance is shown to be rather weak in the face of real challenges, short-changing of religious rights, etc., in the state's agenda for tighter political control and an uneven economic liberalization. In the climate of communalization, any group in control or through certain manipulative machination could engender a situation of insufferable compromises to the religious freedom, rites and rights of another group, while at the same time placing the onus of the Constitutionally-nuanced project of secularisation on the doormat of the weak-kneed state which for its part abrogates the executive responsibility of reining in harmony and culture of toleration. As I will demonstrate, this is precisely the argument used in the show of force with which the charge of 'pseudo-secularisation' is meted out by the ideologues of Hindutva. They are the ones on the losing end, the slippery slope of the secularizing promise, since it is their religious freedom that has been severely compromised. Appeasing the minority communities is communalism abetted by Nehruvian 'pseudo-secularism' (i.e. reneging on the state's commitment not to marginalize nor for that matter abet and patronize any one religion over another, as guaranteed by Articles 25–27).

The idea of secularism that prescribes a complete separation of church/religion and state had much appeal in the elite fragments of the nationalist freedom movement, for which Nehru has been accorded most credit (though in fact, part from licensing favoritism in the industrial planning agenda, Nehru was a tolerant secularist). The Constituent Assembly, on the other hand, was all too cognizant of the diversity of the highly politicized religious communities, and so its recommended draft Constitution reflected a series of accommodations and compromises on the design of the secular state and the normative order. It reasoned that a state can in principle be secular but its disposition towards the society made up of divergent religious community could be one of (principle #1) toleration, regulatory neutrality and reformative justice (principle #2) (see Dhavan 2001: 311). And a corollary to this would be a careful calibration of an active rather than a passive principle (#3) of 'religious freedom' which covers a range of liberties, including the right to beliefs, rituals, religious institutions, and non-discrimination on grounds of religion, race, and gender. Nevertheless, on substantive issues, such as for example the extant and manner of religious reform, social welfare, caste justice, gender issues, education, the Constitution chose to remain silent or 'neutral' and at best relegated these to

either the perfunctory articles under the Fundamental Rights or to the unenforceable Directive Principles. Still, with Indira Gandhi's addition to the Preamble, ironically, of the very hitherto absent place-marker (with the term) 'secular', there could be no argument, in principle, that the nation was ready to make a firm commitment to an inclusive and mutually tolerable co-existence of different faith-traditions, thereby affording respect to the Articles in the *Adhikarapatra* [Bill of Fundamental Rights, Constitution of India, adopted 1950, with Amendments] that enshrine and protect the right of each religious community to profess and propagate its own faith and, by being free to establish places of worship, educational institutions and self-sufficient procedural means, realize its own values and aspirations.

It is here that the Hindutva Parivar and political cohorts have focused their attention in isolating a single group as the cause of this failure, and are grieved that, even as the majority populace, its own religious rites/rights, representation, preferences and needs are not being honoured by the secular state, nor respected by the minority community (or that there is some kind of collusion between the two, as in the heydays of the Congress rule, the Communist interlude, hybrids in the South, and so on).

Even more than the political shifts, or stagnation, or back-firing, one platform on the national scenario that is likely to sustain and feed the continuance and re-growth of the Hindutva ideology is the silent symptom in the nation's alleged pseudo-secularism, or its absence, under the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The question of common civil law covering all citizens doubtless occupies centre-stage in any discussion of community identity or gender justice (Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon 2005: 7), but it takes a more saffron shade under the *diya* (lamp) of Hindu nationalism. Hence you had Anglo-Muhammandan Law and Anglo-Hindu Law; and Christian and Parsis retained their own Personal Laws.[3]

[3] A brief note first on the genealogy of Personal Law, what is also often referred to as religious-community law, more broadly. Personal Law in India constitutes a legacy from the British Raj (since Warren Hastings actually) when a hybrid system of Law based on an egregious bifurcation of extant mores and customs into the 'public' and 'private' was instituted. Public codes governed fairly uniformly the criminal and certain civil codes, in commerce, public safety and security and services and welfare, and so on. Laws applicable to the private sphere of morality, which largely govern what is nowadays called Family Law, but inclusive of property rights within family, were brought under Personal Law (Bilimoria and Sharma 2000). Personal Law would then govern marriage, fiduciary partnerships, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, succession, and adoption. The jurisdiction of Personal Law remained strictly within the community's own continuing customary, scriptural, communal and traditional legal practices. The legislature and civil courts would tread on this institution with utmost care and caution, and their jurisdiction was restricted to only those matters or disputes that were brought under the community's provisions, dispensation or exemption within Personal Law (property distribution in an extended family upon death of the father or husband), or litigated under the Criminal or Penal Code where there is a real threat to the life and livelihood of an individual within a family dispute (e.g. enforced vagrancy following a divorce or denial of coparcenary entitlement). Hence there was the Anglo-Hindu Law for Hindus, Anglo-Mohammad Law for Muslims, and Christian Law for Europeans and Anglo-India Christians. Similar transformations of indigenous law into specific legal discourse that ended in a portmanteau of religious-legal practice occurred elsewhere, in British-governed Islamic colonies as well, e.g. Yemen, Turkey.

Along with the Penal Codes of the previous two centuries this system has survived with some modifications into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and it has been a source of much anguish, strife, and debate in post-independent India. Personal law of Hindus have been largely codified, i.e. traditional laws are reconfigured in the light of secular humanitarian standards via the so-called Hindu Code Bill (1955–1957). Thus the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, reins in prohibition against the practice of bigamy. The Hindu Succession Act gave widows the right to absolute maintenance, and daughters the right to inherit. Family courts had also been set up. While the Hindu Code eased the pressures on divorce and marital difficulties, property rights and inheritance among Hindus, it created other barriers and difficulties—Ambedkar resigned from Parliament in his disillusionment or Weberian disenchantment—for it did not override the proclivities of caste, patriarchy and race under Mitakshara law. For example, under Hindu law, sons can claim an independent share in the ancestral property, but the daughter's share is based on the share received by the father. Hence a father can effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but the son will continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, have no residential rights in the ancestral home. The Code also remained ambivalent over issues such as the inheritance rights of tribal women, copacenary rights in matrilineal communities, widow re-marriage among certain caste Hindus and so on, not to mention being unable to weed out the practice of sati, dowry, bride harassment, child marriage, and continuing bigamous practices among Hindu men, and a few other anomalous remnants from the medieval times. And just who counts and does not count as 'legal Hindu' is also a matter of some debate: should the Code apply unequivocally to Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and tribals (such as of Nagaland) without exemptions as an after-thought? Careful case studies have shown that Hindus, particularly in rural area, remain largely ignorant of the Hindu Code Bill or the Special Acts and continue to follow localized legal traditions, such as Mitakshara, Deobarg and so on. The State for its part also fosters patriarchal relations in negotiating political power and global capitalism (Basu 2001: 180). Hence the tension between 'tradition' versus 'modernity' cuts both ways, and it does not augur for a movement toward a sanguine common code. It was the Hindu nationalists and secularists who foiled many opportunities to effect comprehensive gender equity on the grounds of preserving patriarchy (Parashar 2002; Basu 2001: 164).

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Hindu nationalists, Hindu Personal Law is far ahead for its time. It is much secularized and this reformative feat has been achieved indeed at almost a 'civilizational' cost, implying—and here is the rub—that minority religious communities continue to enjoy the glories of their own archaic and unsecularized Personal Law. And the secularist vote-bankers support, in particular, the Muslim and Christian through a forged hermeneutic of the Fundamental Rights, ignoring the mandate of the Constituent Assembly (Article 44 under the Directive Principle) wherein it is decreed that the Indian 'state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code'. It must be emphasized, however, that this non-juridical directive does not say the State should univocally legislate or enact the UCC in the fashion of Justinian Roman Law or the Napoleanic Code, but through

gradual reform and initiatives undertaken by the communities concerned. As we see with the Hindu Code Bill, this is a step in that direction, but codification, and specially under a universalist strain—that is, locating a common denominator in terms of justice and equity, across all religious communities—may simply be consolidatory rather than reformative 'on the ground' (Dhavan 2001: 317).

Returning to the Hindutva imagined charge sheet, the claim is that Personal Law of Muslims and Christians and Parsee is a system alien to the majoritarian ethos and the larger trajectory of nation-building: a unified nation with a common code. And why should the Hindus alone have to bare the burden of the regulatory and reformative agenda under the watchful eyes of the secular state, bent on secularisation every aspect of Hindu faith and life, while the Muslim is exempted and is a willing claimant to the Constitutional license to continue with their own religiously sanctioned social practices, customs, and laws?

Indeed, this sort of qualm had reared its head quite a few times, in the Maha Sabha assembly, in the writings of Savarkar and Golwalkar, with the passing of the Muslim Sharia't Act in 1937. It had exacerbated the debate in the Constitutional Assembly on a three-way divide, between those who, like the self-proclaimed leader of the so-called 'untouchables' (since re-termed as 'Dalits') Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, desired a uniformity of codes on a rigid platform of secularism across all communities—religious caste, non-castes—and those like Nehru who while they desired uniformity of codes thought India was not developed enough to adopt such a fully-secular judicial system, and in any event it is better to reform Hindu Personal Law and worry about the minorities later. And worry they did.

The Sangh's most explicit and vociferous stance on Muslim Personal Law (MPL) that propelled a campaign for UCC, surfaced in the aftermath of the famous 1985 Shah Bano case. Here a 75 year Muslim woman's petition for increasing the amount of maintenance from her ex-husband was upheld and judged in her favour under the Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code that prevents vagrancy due to destitution, desertion or divorce. The husband's argument was that the claim is in violation of MPL provisions as inscribed in Islamic law. He provided evidence from statements made by the MPLB (All India Muslim Personal Law Board). In the landmark Apex Court judgment, Justice Chandrachud pronounced, presumably, *obiter dicta*, that the judgment was consistent with Qur'anic injunction (he cited two verses from the Qur'an) in respect of the right of a woman to be properly maintained by their divorcing husband. The bench also remarked on the desirability of moving towards a common code.

There was a nation-wide uproar. While progressive Muslims declared it was consistent with the Qur'an, the conservative Muslim orthodoxy was up in arms, for this beaconed the death of MPL. Feminists and progressives, communists and hard-core secularists welcomed this as a step in the direction of women's rights (Bacchetta 2004: 122), and they unwittingly banded together with Hindu nationalists to attack the principle of communal personal law itself, calling instead for uniform civil code, which the Muslim community remained opposed to. The ulema issued a fatwa against the Apex Court's judgment and the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi panicked. Opposing the judicial verdict became the cornerstone of his policy of

appeasing Muslim clerics who, he believed, controlled minority votes. He did not listen to the most rational Muslim voice in his own Parliament in support of the judgment, and instead responded by hurriedly passing the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, to 'specify the rights of Muslim divorced women at the time of divorce' that effectively barred the Muslim women from access to the Criminal Procedure Code for redress after divorce. Under the Bill, a modern woman has to bring her case and grievances under MPL, unless her marriage was under secular civil code. A non-converted Hindu woman married to a Muslim man in a *nikah* ceremony and divorced would face the same constraints.

The Hindu nationalists were incensed at the retrogressive intervention by the state on what was a judicial pronouncement to circumvent MPL. As Bacchetta notes:

> Although they took the same position as progressives and feminists their underlying motives differ(ed) sharply. The progressives and feminists sought to defend women's rights, and they favoured the enactment of a secular uniform civil code. The RSS's [Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh's] motive was to divide Muslims along gender lines, and to use Muslim women to denigrate Muslim men. (2004: 123)

And so they played the card of majority-minority relations and identity politics. In the 1990s the political wing of the Sangh, the BJP, took up the enactment of UCC as one of the three agendas for the national cause: the 'ideological mascot' of Hindutva in achieving Ram Rajya (Hindu Golden Age). As late as 2004, the BJP remained committed to the enactment of a uniform civil code, but with a slightly altered rationale: 'primarily as an instrument to promote gender justice'. But 'social and political consensus has to be evolved before its enactment'. Overall, there has been no real change in the BJP's stance on the minorities. A further anomaly that has gone unquestioned in the Parivar stance, and especially the mechanizations of BJP politics, is the precise template for and contents of the prescribed UCC, the manner in and means by which it is to be promulgated (if not imposed *ab extra*), and their position on the rights of religious communities balanced against rights and equality of citizens, equal respect and religious liberty of all religious communities, and civic equality of minorities, Constitutionally protected.

It is palpably clear that the Hindu nationalists respond in part to the Muslims when they allow themselves to be used as vote-banks by the established parties, or when they evade the imperative of Hindu populism by playing up the issue of minority rights and trumping the juridical avenues opened up to them post-Shah Bano judgment and the now mollified Muslim Women's Act. Muslims fall in-between the wedge of two strands of nationalism: secularist and Hindutva. In that regard, the protagonists of the latter continue to charge the nation with perpetrating the pseudo-secularist agenda, when in fact it is Muslims who have been caught up in the agenda from both ends. Muslims cannot be part of the cultural nationalism as the definition of Hindutva does not permit it, how can then the political machinery bend backwards to accommodate their inclusion in the Ram Rajya nationalism?

My claim here is that keeping the issue in obscure terms and juxtaposing it to the polemics of pseudo-secularism is a deliberate strategy to gain support of the majority

community and to forge alliances with conservative parties, especially in the North and the South. While ameliorating its stance on a range of social and economic issues, but holding steadfast to the deafening call for UCC (even though when in power) the BJP did little or nothing to reform Personal Law or enact legislations towards UCC. Meanwhile, the judiciary largely in its own wisdom since the Shah Bano judgment, remains opposed to any such move, in the interest of preserving democratic liberties. In their own way, in judgment after judgment across the country, the Muslim Women's Act is interpreted to encompass wider meaning and in more liberal terms than might have been the original intent, without disregarding, indeed informed by, the Criminal Procedure Code and other civil liberties that are afforded to the disadvantaged under Constitutional rights. This is attested to in cases brought by divorced Muslim women to the High Courts in Kerala, Bombay, and Calcutta. Thus, as Rajeev Dhavan (2001: 316) astutely notes: '[I]f personal laws are discriminatory to women, they would have to be tested against the doctrine of equality, and then struck down if found to be discriminatory and unreasonable.' In terms of the principles of secularism, both the state and society have to develop a consensus for social change. It may cautiously empower the society to do so. But neither is there scope for unlimited religious freedom, nor should the state exceed its neutrality in matters of religion, or discriminate against a religion, or favour one over another. The principles of secularism in the triadic vision of Gandhi-Nehru-Ambedkar (the third, especially, of regulatory reform), 'was certainly not devised to arm political Hindu fundamentalists to chastise Muslims for not making their law "gender just", or vice versa' (Dhavan 2001: 312). If, again as Dhavan notes, the

> "uniform civil code" was once a serious constitutional objective, it has now been trivialized into becoming a tragic farce. Politics has taken over. Hindu politicians, who are not really concerned about personal law reform, use the idea of the uniform civil code to chastise Muslims for not emulating the Hindu example. (Dhavan 2001: 317).

What we have shown is the explication of the thesis that Mendieta sums up aptly in the following adage (2009: 237): 'Religion remains not just an inexhaustible fountain of moral inspiration, but also an uncontainable, and undomesticateable source of both social cohesion and *social intolerance*' (emphasis added). A post-Hindutva yuga or truly post-secular era would only arrive when the Muslim ceases to be the symbol of the failure of the Indian nation, and the pseudo-secularisation that underpins the call for UCC is set aside; not the secular project as such, which awaits integration in the nation's agenda, but with the inclusive voice of Indian qua Indian Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Parsee—as indeed of women and other marginalized, minority, and disadvantaged groups or communities.

2.4 Conclusion

I began the chapter by showing that the real threat for Hegel from the colonized was not physical but intellectual (even in the lurid abstractionism or 'polymorphic-perversity' of Hindu gods and goddesses that end up in the concept of Brahman)—a threat to the very design of the *Concept*. Hence Hegel's ontotheological schema can

be considered as a diagram of power—a discourse of knowledge as power, as Foucault critiqued—that at the same time provided a means for controlling the constituent and subversive forces within Europe, as well as a 'negation of non-European desire'. For Hegel, the Orient was as much a failure in the march of Reason heading toward the self-realization of the *Geist* as the Muslim is a failure in the Hindutva march toward Ram Rajya. This is not a matter of coincidence but one of convergence of a trajectory set for the successors of the colonial epistemography within the subcontinent (Spivak 1999: 134–56). Invention (or essentializing) and gerrymandering of religion as we saw with Hegel affords several reincarnations. But even Marxists and those committed to secular modernity fail to see 'the polyvalent nature of the Hegelian schema as a diagram of power that exerted a theoretical and practical influence on colonial, neocolonial [experience]…' (Mandair 2010: 155), and now postcolonial/globalized formations of power. This legacy has had an indelible influence on the Humanities and Social Sciences, the history and philosophy of religion included, and has worked its way into the Frankfurt Critical School also, whose key representative Habermas is as much guilty of its imbrications as were a galaxy of neo-Hegelians in the previous century.

Enrique Dussel (1996) in his deconstruction of the concept of 'modernity', Joseph Prabhu (2012: 134–5) observes, "points out that thinkers as different as Charles Taylor, Stephen Toulmin, and Jürgen Habermas in their accounts of modernity have presented it as an exclusively European occurrence centering around the key events of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, and in Toulmin's case, the Renaissance. This Eurocentrism is most explicit in Max Weber when he introduces the 'problem of universal history' with the question: 'To what combination of circumstances should the fact 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?' (cf. Warner 2010). According to this model, Europe had exceptional internal resources that allowed it to supersede through its superior rationality, disenchantment and organizational power all other cultures. What is forgotten in this account is that the history of European world conquest and the wealth and power that Europe acquired through such conquests and the misery visited on the native peoples. The solipsism of Descartes' 'ego cogito' is the mirror image and resonant expression of this inward-looking modern subjectivity, unwilling to acknowledge the oppression it causes to the subjected peoples of the New World".

I have then moved to argue from the Indian experience that however well-intended and benign the initial impetus towards the grand concept and promises of secularism, whether in the abstract or as the practical project of secularisation, there is also an underside to it, that in time surfaces as secularism's many infelicities, inadequacies and instabilities. If the signs of these entropy have not shown up sufficiently in Western experience since the Enlightenment railed in the 'force of secular law', then one could arguably bear witness to it in non-Western sites, particularly in the largest democracy in the world. To be sure, India's success and reputation as the largest (not necessarily the best or the most successful) democracy is yielded in part by virtue of the nation-state's commitment to a secular ethos—unlike in its neighboring theocratic state of Pakistan, or China for that matter. However, by the

same token, the fault lines in cementing and sustaining a rigorous democratic structure also, paradoxically, as I have shown, lies very much in the imbrications of secularism, particularly as it is unable to come to terms with the long history of the nation's religious fabric and is held to ransom by one community that feels woefully marginalized and underprivileged by apparently excessive rights that another religious community seems to enjoy with impunity, all under the protective canopy of the secular ideology which in the Indian rubric made the concept malleable to religious inclusiveness and pluralism of law. Secularism, in the eyes of the critics, in the Indian context at least, becomes something of a farce, if not exactly, a form of 'pseudo-secularism' as the aggrieved Hindu Right have been claiming. There are obvious lessons to be learned for those in the West who believe, as Charles Taylor does, that the time has come in the West when the old rigid concept of secularism is perched to give way to a more robust and open-ended conception of 'secularity'. Gandhi's uncompromising repudiation of modernity emphasized the transcultural benefits of a non-violent sociality. The oppressors, he maintained, had to be liberated from their own worst selves. And secularism is part of the tethers (Gandhi 1998: 137; Parekh 1999). And so the hermeneutic circle is complete: secularism is born from the underbelly of modernity as the 'disenchantment of the world' (Weber); the postsecular marks the birthing of the 'disenchantment of secularity'.

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Locke, Secularism and the Justice of the Secular Solution: Towards a Self-Reflective Transcending of Secular-Self Understanding

3

Philip Andrew Quadrio

3.1 Introduction: Habermas and the Founding Documents of Religious Liberty

In the preamble to his essay 'Religion in the Public Sphere', Habermas tells us: 'The United States was the political peacemaker *en route* to establishing a freedom of religion that rested on the reciprocal respect of the religious freedom of…others' (2006: 3). With reverence, he cites the 'Marvellous Article 16' of the *Virginia Declaration of Rights*, drafted by George Mason in May of 1776, as the first document of religious freedom in the history of liberal secular politics (Habermas 2006: 3). What fascinates me about this point of departure is the way it invokes a conception of religious liberty anchored in a view that emerges from a theological outlook. Thus the structures that free the public sphere from religious interests and religious ideology are the product of religious ideology and so imbued with interest. We find a conception of the relationship between politics and religion emerging from a theological explication of what it ought to be. Insofar as theological explication is meant to make clear the political implications of a doctrinal orientation we can see there may be much presupposed within it about which philosophers ought to remain critical.

This paper pursues a critical perspective on these founding documents by focusing on the conceptual articulation of religion embedded in them. I move beyond 'Article 16' of the *Virginia Declaration* to consider other documents related to religious liberty in the first modern liberal state, the USA. English philosopher John Locke is a vital figure, since it is his conception of the relationship between politics and religion provides the theoretical background to these documents. Thus we move from a consideration of the foundational documents of religious liberty in

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the USA to a consideration of the Lockean conception of secular tolerance presented in the *Letter Concerning Tolerance*.

But Locke's ideas have a history. As such, we will consider what, if any, theological elements underwrite the ideas expressed in the *Letter*. I will contend that core elements of Locke's account are part of a venerable tradition of thinking in the Latin tradition of Christianity. The claim is not that Locke's work is theology, but rather that it takes over structures and concepts that are theological and, because of this, vital premises in Locke's work can only be justified theologically. This illustrates that the original documents of secular tolerance have a foundation in Latin Christian thinking. Furthermore, it leads to a consideration of the way these concepts are presently understood and the cultural/religious limitations of that understanding. The conceptual leads us to the historical through the realisation that our concepts have a history.

If the structures animating secular thought are founded on religious structures, concepts and premises, this brings the worry that a specific religious context constitutes a framework of comprehensibility for secular thinking. Despite enlightenment representations, such secular thinking is not the product of universal rationality. This radicalises and critically impacts upon one of Habermas' concerns: yes, secularity puts demands on the religious that are not placed on secular citizens. But regardless of whether one is religious or secular, having a cultural connection to the Latin tradition will mean that the demands of secularism are at least comprehensible, which is not necessarily the case for those outside it. This leads to a further question: what is implicit in the concept 'religion'? Habermas in his engagement with Rawls sees the issue of secularism the way that Rawls and Locke see it, as a boundary issue, settling the just boundaries between politics and religion. But he never considers what these boundaries are supposed to contain, and what these concepts are meant to pick out. Thus, I will begin here with some conceptual considerations, then turn to the historical story outlined above. The aim of this paper is, however, broadly 'Habermasian': for the aim of telling a historical and conceptual story is to assist in sharpening what is implicit in the secular self-understanding of modernity.

3.2 Motivations: Historical Self-Understanding, Parochialism, Politics and Religion

Self-understanding, for sapient, concept-using, self-evaluating creatures such as ourselves, is bound up with historical understanding. The cultural formations we inhabit and identify with have histories (Brandom 2000: 26–7). Part of telling a story about contemporary art practice and its norms is telling the story about its connection to prior practices and norms: some of these are confronted, others appropriated. Whether a particular practice or norm is confronted or appropriated is not arbitrary; it depends on the historical hermeneutic through which our understanding of the practice is refracted, the way we situate it within the history of art practice. Such an account has deep salience for those who identify themselves as artists, and

they will likely be better equipped to engage the art world through understanding it. Or, again, part of understanding a particular legal system is to consider the way it developed over time; some understanding of contemporary art or legal practice might be obtained without specifically historical understanding. If all one wants is an instrumental grasp one might even consider that one can get a 'pretty good' grasp without historical reflection. But this can never tell the full story about the practice. So a failure to achieve historical understanding is likely to constrict one's engagement with the formation in question.

Consider: nearly every nation state with a historical connection to England features a common law system. But legal systems do not require this; they are not defective without it. Further, common law can be incorporated into a political system in different ways; the common law tradition in Scotland differs from the English tradition and is not as central; despite the historical connection between these states their systems are different and common law has a different role in each. No amount of agonising over structure will explain this, or why two countries with a historical connection to England, such as Scotland and Ireland, have different systems, or why the Irish system is closer to the English.

Understanding the difference between a state with a common law tradition and one that lacks it, or understanding the difference between common law practices, requires more than a descriptive account of the systems. We need to understand the way they have developed in response to social and historical vicissitudes. Nor does reverting to functionalist explanation help, because even where a practice serves a social function whether or not it originally emerged to satisfy it is contingent; whether or not a social practice is preserved despite functional inefficiency is also contingent. Some are, some aren't. Under either of these conditions historical understanding helps clarify our understanding where functionalist explanation leaves it undercooked. Such historical understanding can assist in coming to terms with the emergence of some cultural formation or phenomenon. It helps us to come to terms with its origins, and perhaps gives us an indication of why a functionally inefficient practice is preserved despite inefficiency. More strongly, it might furnish us with reasons for preserving that inefficient practice, or defend it as reasonable regardless. It is not the case that functional justification is ultimate justification, reasons need to be weighed, one cannot judge, a priori, that a reason which is functionalist in form will be stronger than one that is historical.

If an adequate understanding of a cultural formation requires historical understanding, and if cultural formations have 'histories' rather than 'natures', then for secular citizens to achieve a 'self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of modernity' (Habermas 2006: 15) they need some historical insight into secular thought (Brandom 2000: 26–7). This requires insight into the relationship of some of our original documents of religious freedom to their religious background and the concepts at play within it. Obtaining this is important to any dialogue about how to conduct politics under conditions of religious pluralism, and for understanding the boundaries between the political and the religious. In regard to the first issue, we cannot presume things to have been resolved or that our present answers constitute a final, unchallengeable result, underwritten by universal reason.

It might be that these answers, while taken as universally valid, are shaped by narrow conceptual presuppositions. The appearance of universality in the answer secular thought gives here might be due to the presuppositions embedded in the question and concepts at play. It may turn out that these presuppositions are not universally acceptable or even universally comprehensible.

Such thoughts ought to lead philosophers to raise a further question, one relating to the meaning of the concepts under consideration—'politics' and 'religion'. If the question of the secular is focused on the boundaries between religion and the political, then perhaps we need to reflect on these concepts, not simply on the proper boundaries between two (seemingly discrete) cultural formations, if such boundaries exist. We may need to reflect on the way our understanding of the boundaries between them is articulated through our historically informed (and circumscribed) understanding of what is proper to each.

To apply a concept to a phenomenon is to judge it according to the norms implicit in the concept—it is to commit oneself to the adequacy of these conceptual norms to this phenomenon. But what norms are implicit in concepts such as 'religion' and 'politics'? In trying to answer this, we ought to be sensitive to the way that our understanding, and the norms of judgment implicit in it, might lie in tension with the phenomenon to which we apply them. This is because these concepts are supposed to capture phenomena that are potentially broader than our experience; and the way these concepts carry historical baggage that impacts on what we feel committed to in applying them. We need to be sensitive to the way our conceptual commitments are answerable to concrete phenomena and the way the phenomena transcend our often localised or parochial experience (Brandom 2009: 38–40).

Consider: if we take it that religion is a private matter between an individual and whatever they take as divine, then we are committed to the idea that privacy is implicit in the concept and reality of 'religion'. But it is an open question whether privacy is a feature of religion per se rather than merely a feature of some particular religion. Nor can we say that the concrete phenomena we call religion 'ought' to conform to our concept, as then our concept appears unanswerable to the phenomenon judged through it. Privacy is not implicit in the concept of religion, even if it is implicit in the particular religion 'I' experience: My shoes are red, but redness is not implicit in the concept 'shoes'. I can commit myself to something being a pair of shoes without committing to them being red even if my primary experience with shoes is with my red ones.

If it is true that the liberal answer to the question of the relationship of religion and the political is shaped by a particular theological outlook with its understanding of the 'proper' purpose of each, then it is legitimate to worry that this outlook has determined, at the conceptual/normative level, what these universals properly pick out: determined what is 'proper' to the politics and religion. But why should theology, which is always particular and so invested with particular interest, determine what is proper to either the political or the religious? The least that can be claimed is that political philosophers have, largely, received a conception of religion and religiosity that has emerged from a specific tradition. While this is true of religion,

it can be argued that it is also true of politics. So, liberal secular discourse itself may be more tightly linked to a particular political theology than its emphasis on neutrality permits. If we take the secular liberal value of neutrality as a standard of judgment then there may be a sense in which it fails by its own standards.

The Western[1] intellectual understanding of religion, and what religion is properly concerned with, the norms implicit in the concept, has been shaped by a historical experience with a certain complex of religions, most generally theism, particularly Christianity, most particularly Latin Christianity. That is, the Latin tradition of Christianity is a specific manifestation of Christianity, which is a specific manifestation of theism, which is a specification of the more general term, religion. The dangers of assimilating the norms of religion per se to the norms of Latin Christianity seem obvious enough. But, while political philosophy tends to treat the term 'religion' as if it were unproblematic, it is almost a truism in religious scholarship that, in fact, we lack a stable conceptual articulation of religion (Quadrio 2009: 385–392), and that most theoretical understandings are one-sided and chauvinistic. The problem we are concerned with here is the way a localised conceptualisation of religion, conditioned by a historical and cultural experience with a particular religion, is taken over by social and political theorists in their thinking about the relation of religion and politics (Quadrio 2009: 385–392). This is true not just of Locke and those inspired by him, but also of Rawls and Habermas.

As scholar of religion Michael Pye points out, 'Religion casts its own deep shadow across the study of religion, obscuring its actual shape in many particulars' (1994: 54). Most religious systems presuppose much about the nature of religion per se and do so on the basis of parochial experience. That is, particular religions carry a limited, localised conception of religion and its place in human life but project it as universal or normative. Those raised within these religions will likely share that conception and its implicit commitments. Indeed, as Pye shows, the tendency is to distort unfamiliar traditions by attempting to assimilate the features of religions I am not familiar with, to the norms of those I am (1994: 56ff). If my religion is 'centrally' about individual salvation, I might expect this in other traditions, so I look for a soteriology in them. If I believe such salvation can only come through individual rather than collective effort, then I might see traditions based in collective endeavours as 'missing the point', deficient or degenerate, reading the mismatch between the norms implicit in my concept and the phenomena I encounter as evidence that the phenomena are 'primitive', 'deficient' or 'corrupted' rather than seeing my concept as parochial and inadequate—a 'deficient' conceptualisation. This insulates the concept, so that the mismatch between the norms implicit in the concept and the phenomena leads to the phenomena undergoing a diminution of status—it is almost unanswerable to the phenomena.

[1] 'Western' here refers to cultures influenced by Western or Latin Christianity—which is distinct from Eastern Christianity, other forms of Theism and other religious traditions.

Scholars of religion often emphasise Pye's point, that our understanding of religion and its proper purpose is distorted by our own experience and life circumstances. Consider G.W. Trompf:

> [A] common problem is that we usually approach religion with certain [fixations] … To rectify our imbalance we may well need insights into the historical sources, or into the socio-psychological conditionings behind … our 'fixations'. We are also likely to benefit from a certain broadening of our outlook as to what so-called religion might encompass … A preliminary yet important question to be asked, for example, concerns whether the emphases brought by any person to the matter his or her initial stabs at a definition, let us say obviously mirror the present context of their life history. (Trompf 1990: 3)

Trompf and Pye make the same point: we bring to our theoretical consideration of religion parochial or localised background assumptions and commitments. These cast a shadow over our engagement with religion. The concepts we employ, even when we discuss or reflect on our own personal history and commitments, are potentially struck through with the presuppositions of the religious tradition/s we are most familiar with. This does not necessarily mean we go wrong in employing the concepts we do. We might get things right in certain degrees. But what it does ask from us is to be wary of these historical and cultural limitations.

3.3 History (A): The Founding Documents of Religious Liberty

So, for Habermas, the United States was the political peacemaker between conflicting religious traditions, establishing the foundations for a reciprocal respect of religious freedoms. As 'Article 16' of the *Virginia Declaration* states:

> …religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience… (Mason 1776)

Setting aside the specificity of expressions such as 'our Creator' and 'conscience', which only have traction within a specific range of traditions, we see that religious liberty is derived from a reflection on what is implicit in the concept of 'religion'. We discover something about Mason's understanding of religion from this Article: that it fits with his Episcopalian (Anglican) background. Religion is for Mason about the duties owed our creator; a matter to be directed by the individual on the basis of reason or conviction; not subject to external compulsion or force; a matter for conscience; personal, private and oriented on the creator God. So the claim, 'X is a religion', implicitly commits one to the idea that X shares these features.

Mason is not merely using the concept, not merely embedding the concept in the document. He is also telling us what is implicit in the application of it. The question is, however, to what degree Mason's religion is casting a 'shadow' (Pye 1994: 54) over his concept of religion, the degree to which the 'context of [Mason's] life history' (Trompf 1990: 3) influences his conception of religion. The understanding expressed in the *Virginia Declaration* seems well suited to a broadly Anglican outlook,

a persuasion that loomed large in eighteenth-century America. But if one shares Mason's conception of religion (which is contingent), and if one's understanding of the political takes the appropriate reflexive form of something oriented towards external relations between individuals, not a matter of privacy or conscience, an external matter, a matter of intersubjective agreement, binding on all regardless of private opinion, and so coercible (contingent again)—if one accepts all these things, then and only then, it might seem reasonable to suggest that religion is a matter the state ought not meddle in.

It is clear, however, that Mason derives much of his understanding of the relation of politics and religion not from theological sources, but from John Locke. It was through reading Locke that Mason had the 'insight that a republic had to begin with the formal, legally binding commitment that individuals had inalienable rights that were superior to any government' (Schwartz 2000). While the *Declaration* is a condensation of Lockean political theory, the article which draws Habermas' attention encapsulates Locke's theory of religious tolerance contained in his *Letter Concerning Tolerance* (1689). In fact, not only does Mason's 'Article 16' distil the core of Locke's letter, we find that they have a similar understanding of what one commits oneself to in judging something 'religion'. In particular: both suppose that religion is a duty owed to our creator, rather than one owed to our fellow citizens (implying the separability of those duties). Both concur that religion itself is a matter of personal conviction, and that this implies that religion is uncoercible, so we are free in regard to it. Locke, no less than Mason, understands religion along these lines. Further, both view religion as inward and otherworldly, as opposed to politics, which is seen as outward and this-worldly. It is not merely that the sphere of authority for each is distinct, there is complementarity between them.

The *Virginia Declaration*, subsequently, influenced the *American Declaration of Independence*, drafted through June of 1776. In particular, the second paragraph of *The Declaration of Independence*, predominantly written by Thomas Jefferson, distils the core of the *Virginia Declaration*. So the most famous passage of one of the most important documents in modern political practice, the *Declaration of Independence,* presents Jefferson's condensation of Mason's prior condensation of Locke.[2] In regard to his political outlook Jefferson himself was greatly influenced by the work of Locke and held him to be one of 'the three greatest men that have ever lived, without any exception…' Locke is particularly praised for what he has offered to moral science. In the following year, 1777, Jefferson drafted the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (Jefferson 1777), which, in 1786, passed into law as the *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom* (Jefferson 1786). This again distils the principles of Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. It begins: 'Well aware that Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or…by civil incapacitations…are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion…' (Jefferson 1786). The *Act* too thus moves off from a metaphysical assertion, that we have been created (by God) and granted an inner

[2]The *Declaration of Independence* was so dependent on these earlier documents that James Madison apologized for its plagiarism and John Adams claimed it to be hackneyed.

freedom that buffers our beliefs and commitments from external coercion. It then makes an assertion with normative force, that these facts are part of a providential plan, implying that we morally ought not depart from that plan, and that our political structures ought to accord with it. Thus the *Act* enunciates the principles of religious liberty contained in Locke's *Letter*, these principles accord with the order established by God, one being actualised in the practice of the New World.

What we note is that in the Act, and its earlier embodiment as the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom,* the inwardness of religion is linked to a divinely ordained order. This order shows us that God intends for the individual to be free in regard to their commitments, particularly religious commitments, that these commitments are a matter of conscience and so inward and non-coercible. It would go against the providential order to interfere with individual conscience, the state must be constructed to reflect this. Its regulatory activity must make space for the individual freedom of conscience that God has granted. Both the *Declaration* and the *Virginia Statute* directly appeal to a divine or providential order of things. The *Declaration* tells us: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' (Declaration of Independence 1776). This statement embeds in the document a metaphysically conceived sense of a moral order, one replete with an obviously theological anthropology. There is what Charles Taylor (2004: 3–5) calls a moral order (or the idea of one) based around the notions that we have a Creator and, further, as with the *Virginia Statute*, that we are created as equals with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It seems, however, as if the document not only specifies what is entailed in that order but is meant to help that moral order to be concretely realised (Taylor 2003: 66–8). God intended humanity to be free with respect to conscience and religion, and both the *Declaration* and the *Virginia Statute* are vehicles for actualising this plan. The separation of religion and politics is demanded by a divinely ordained moral order; the separation is demanded by what we take as implicit in a certain religious imaginary.

All of these documents are important landmarks on the road to establishing religious liberty. Each is an important landmark leading up to the establishment clause, of *The Bill of Rights* (1791), which states: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. Jefferson famously refers to this clause as creating a wall of separation between the church and the state. This claim appears in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of 1802, where Jefferson says:

> Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith and his worship, that the legislative powers of Government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act [the establishment clause]…building a wall of separation between Church and State.

Again Jefferson's liberal understanding of the 'wall of separation' is based on a conceptual articulation of the religious that reflects Locke's, which is itself a recapitulation of earlier Christian political theology reformulated in Locke's political

philosophy. Most importantly, Jefferson is deriving and legitimating the separation from an understanding that sees religion as; a private matter that lies between a 'man and his God [sic]' not a matter of public interest (Jefferson 1802).

Now, even if Jefferson's comments to the Danbury Baptist Association represent a rhetorical move rather than one that flows from theological commitments, the important point is that when he comes to explain the separation he does so in the same Lockean terms we find in Mason's work. Religion is a personal and inward matter between the believer and God. We are accountable only to God in regard to these commitments. Civil law has authority only over outward action, not inward commitments, beliefs and opinions; and these facts allow for a separation between Church and the state, between religion and politics. Not surprisingly, for a man influenced by the earlier work of Mason and who held Locke, along with Bacon and Newton, to be one of the three greatest thinkers ever to have lived, what we find is decidedly Lockean. Even if we interpret Jefferson's letter as rhetorical, the fact that he understands and explains the establishment clause in terms that resonate so strongly with Locke's own view, the fact that Lockean philosophy would seem to provide the theory that underwrites the practice, is significant because Locke's understanding of these matters is theological even if Jefferson's is not.

While a lot more would need to be said in order to reconstruct the political theory that underpins constitutional and political practice in the United States of America, the above is sufficient to suggest that the work of John Locke is significant in shaping the outlook on politics, religion and their relation. So we need now to turn to Locke himself.

3.4 History (B): Locke and Liberal Tolerance

In the text, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), Locke tells us that to prevent some from:

> …colour[ing] their spirit of persecution and unchristian cruelty with a pretence of care of the public weal and observation of the laws; and that others, under pretence of religion, may not seek impunity for their libertinism and licentiousness…I esteem above all things necessary to distinguish the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bound that lie between the one and the other. If this not be done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have…on the one side, a concernment for the interests of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth. (Locke 1689: 118)

The first thing to notice is that from Locke's perspective the most fundamental problem is a boundary issue: the boundary between civil and religious authority. He is worried about the instrumentalisation of religion for various purposes. But he thinks these issues can be resolved by determining the 'just bound that lie[s] between' civil government and religion (Locke 1689: 118).

For Locke, in order to stop transgression of the boundaries between civil government and the governing of souls we must determine the sphere of authority (the 'just bound') for each form of governing. Largely this is drawn out of Locke's

understanding of the nature of religion, particularly the role religion plays vis-à-vis the human predicament. It is through considering his discussion of these issues that we discover much of what he feels implicit in the concept: religion. By focusing on Locke's account of human nature and human interest, an account distributed across a binary between civil and religious interests, we can make his core presuppositions about religion (and politics) explicit. We find that Locke derives the boundary from a dualistic account of human interest that flows from a political anthropology with a Latin Christian origin; his account of what is proper to religion and to the relation of religion to the political has been shaped by the way his own religion understands these matters. So, Locke moves from a classically Latin Christian anthropology replete with an account of the place of religion in human life (what religion 'does'), to a dualistic account of human interest and derives the boundaries of political and religious authority from this. This clarifies what is implicit in his conception of religion and politics.

For Locke the governing of souls is different from governing a commonwealth. What is proper to one is not what is proper to the other, they can be demarcated. He divides human life into two spheres of interest, a sphere of civil interests, pertaining to the commonwealth and a sphere of religious interests, pertaining to the governance of the soul (Roover and Balagangadhara 2008: 526). Within the former, legitimately under the authority of the commonwealth, Locke determines we have the following civil interests: life, liberty, health, freedom from pain and material possessions (Locke 2002: 118). Thus, civil and political life is about securing material, this-worldly needs and ensuring our capacity to act according to our material preferences. In regards to such interests, the civil magistrate has authority, particularly to secure our 'just possession' through force of punishment. But punishment is directed only towards those interests the magistrate is empowered to protect (Locke 2002: 118).

The jurisdiction of the civil magistrate reaches as far as our civil interests; this is the boundary of civil and political authority. Implicit is the idea that the magistrate has no authority over our inner life, our commitments, particularly religious commitments, because, for Locke, these are just not concerned with material life. The magistrate's authority cannot be extended to the sphere of religious interests 'because the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate' (Locke 2002: 118). Locke gives us three reasons why. First such a power cannot be given to the magistrate voluntarily because no-one can abandon care for their own salvation, which is a matter for each to determine through their inner meditations (Locke 2002: 118). Second, the magistrate's command does not reach it, because the magistrate's power consists in outward force whereas 'true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind' (Locke 2002: 119). Third, because on matters of religion, the magistrate is as fallible as anyone, and religion is subject to reasonable pluralism (Locke 2002: 120).

This latter point draws attention to an issue of importance to Locke: cognitive fallibility. The magistrate, like every human being, is subject to error. So while Locke holds there is one true way to heaven, he denies we can be certain what this is. He leaves room for reasonable pluralism: no human being can determine which

church or sect offers the correct path, this is a matter for inward reflection. The former two points are also important because they carry a determinate religious outlook, the first stresses salvation and the way concern for salvation is a private matter; the second stresses the inwardness of religion, or at least 'true and saving religion',[3] a feature that buffers religion from external coercion. But notice what is implicit in this account of civil authority is not merely that it ought only be concerned with the regulation of material this-worldly interests, but that our religious interests are not orientated on material life.

Thus civil authority pertains to things of this world and does not impinge on religion because it is up to the individual to determine the good for themselves. The state relies on outward force to compel actions but cannot compel belief, since that is an inward matter. There is no guarantee that any person's conception of the good, or of what salvation demands, is right. Thus Locke concludes, 'all the power of civil government relates only to men's civil interests, is confined to the care of *the things of this world*, and hath nothing to do with *the world to come*' (Locke 2002: 120). Locke's understanding of religion operates within a tension he imagines between this (material) world and the (spiritual) world to come; religion is focused on the world to come, on individual redemption, it is a vehicle for redemption through inward acts. We also discover what Locke sees as proper to the political: it is concerned with this world and the various things of this world. Thus we find ourselves within a dualistic conception of the relationship between politics and religion whereby this-worldly interest is juxtaposed to otherworldly interest: 'things of this world' stand against things proper to 'the world to come' (Locke 2002: 120). Put in Augustinian terms: while religion is orientated on the heavenly kingdom, the city of God (Jerusalem), politics is orientated on the Earthly city (Babylon). In the Augustinian account, the latter is properly subordinate to the former; that is, the order implicit in the city of God ought to define the boundaries of authority for the earthly city. But reading between the lines this is no less true of Locke, or Mason or Jefferson (Copleston 1993: 89).

Locke then considers the churches. A church is a voluntary society joined for the purpose of public worship according to what the individual sees as acceptable to God and effective for salvation (Locke 2002: 120). No one is bound to any Church except by individual volition based on individual insight into what constitutes effective salvation. The only reason one enters such an association is for the sake of salvation and that is the only reason one would stay (Locke 2002: 120). Here community is seen in instrumentalist terms, we enter into religious community for the purpose of furthering our individual salvation. The kind of association offered by a church, religious community, is of instrumental rather than intrinsic value. This is a reflex of Locke's account of the state, which is instrumental to the material needs of the individual; churches, like states, facilitate the actualisation of individual goods, if they are good it is because they represent an instrumental requirement for the

[3] The formulation connects religion to salvation, implies that true religion is salvific religion, it 'saves', but this also tells us about the human condition, we require redemption, we are in some predicament from which we require salvation (Locke 2002).

actualisation of individual needs. In the state we come together for mutual benefit in pursuit of *material* goods; in a church we come together for mutual benefit in the pursuit of *spiritual* goods. In both realms, we come together for mutual benefit and it is this that keeps us together.

If some individual feels they have found in their church some doctrine incongruous or incompatible with their own insights, then they should be as free to leave as they were to enter. This is part of what Taylor refers to as an ethics of belief (Taylor 2003: 13): because religion is a matter of conscience, a private matter for individual reflection, I ought not commit myself to doctrines I do not accept. If my church holds doctrines I find unreasonable, I may rightly leave it for another whose doctrines I feel are. Civil authority has no power to tell me what to believe or commit to for the sake of salvation, nor what to approve or disapprove. Civil authority can limit my actions with regard to material things, but cannot compel me to believe such actions are good, acceptable to God, nor suited to salvation; it can demand conformity of practice but no more. To adapt a locution from Critchley (2007: 7), civil authority is 'externally binding but not internally compelling', it can bind actions, but it cannot make me value the action I perform, that is contingent, as such whether or not I actually affirm my own law abiding civic behaviour, rather than merely perform the required acts, is contingent on my own inner commitments. The difference between them lies in the difference between a descriptive claim, for Critchley our political norms no longer motivate, and a normative claim, for Locke our civil norms ought only demand external compliance, but cannot demand internal commitment. The only source of authority in terms of belief is the individual and what they can commit to in light of their understanding of matters and conscience. The individual becomes the source of legitimation for any particular doctrine or axiological orientation and is the normative foundation for their own membership in a religious community.

From here, Locke turns to consider the power a church may have and the restrictions to which it is subject. Because the end of any religious society is the attainment of salvation through worship, this restricts authority so that it may not have any authoritative claim on a person's civil/worldly interests (Locke 2002: 122). Nor is it appropriate that it make use of force, which is only legitimately wielded by the civil magistrate. The concern of a church does not relate to material interests, it is orientated towards facilitating the otherworldly interests of its members: the interests of the soul, most importantly individual salvation. Ecclesiastical authority is 'destitute of all compulsive power', destitute of outward force (Locke 2002: 122). Thus if a church is to compel, it must compel by means other than outward force. It can only have recourse to 'exhortations, admonitions and advices', to urge, warn and advise (Locke 2002: 123). If these forms of discursive appeal fail to have any impact, the only thing left is the exclusion of such individuals from their communion of faith (Locke 2002: 123).

Of course, Locke is aware that moral philosophy has to concern both spheres, it is just as interested in the duties we owe God as those we owe fellow citizens. But he is aware that there are ambiguities and issues concerning the boundaries between them. Where do we draw the line between religious interests and civil interests? Locke tells us that the 'good life, in which consists not the least part of religion and

true piety, concerns also the civil government; and in it lies both the safety of men's souls and of the commonwealth' (Locke 2002: 140). Human beings have both material and religious interests, and an adequate account of the good life addresses both. Thus '[m]oral actions belong … to the jurisdiction both of the outward and inward court; both of the civil and the domestic governor; I mean both the magistrate and the conscience' (Locke 2002: 141). Yet, 'one of these jurisdictions (might) entrench upon the other, and discord arise between the keeper of the public peace and the overseer of souls' (Locke 2002: 141). There are boundary issues between the spheres and so we must identify what properly belongs to each. Because the material and the religious are set over and against each other, conceptually, there is some promise that we can reconcile the demands of both, that there need not be conflict between them. If there is a complementarity in the opposition between them then there may be complementarity between the moral demands placed on us by each.

Fortunately for Locke, he can do what we no longer can, he can make his determinations by appeal to a common frame of reference: that being the Latin Christian tradition that had dominated Western European life for centuries a frame that brings its own conception of the place of religion in the human life and predicament. Of particular importance is what that framework tells us in regard to the human condition, which clarifies both the human relation to God and to society. From this anthropology Locke develops a moral psychology that fits with the doctrine of the two spheres. This anthropology and the moral psychology founded on it complements and fills out the story he has previously given about the two spheres but is just as fractured or dualistic. So, while one may agree that Lockean metaphysics is not based in a substance dualism, one has to acknowledge that his account of human nature presents a fracture. It is not the 'Manichean Moral Psychology' Rawls attributes to Kant, since it is not so marked by a sense of conflict within the human being (Rawls 2000: 303). Nonetheless the account is marked by dualism and a tendency to relativise or devalue this world in favour of eternity. Here is what Locke tells us:

> Everyman has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery … depending upon his believing and doing those things … necessary to the obtaining of God's favour … it follows … first, that the observance of these things is the highest obligation … because there is nothing in this world that is of any consideration in comparison with eternity. Secondly, that seeing one man does not violate the right of another by his erroneous opinions and undue manner of worship, nor is his perdition any prejudice to another man's affairs, therefore, the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself … Anyone may employ as many exhortations and arguments as he pleases … But all force and compulsion are to be forborne … Nobody is obliged in that matter to yield obedience unto admonitions or injunctions … further than he is persuaded. Everyman in that has the supreme and absolute authority of judging … because nobody else is concerned in it, nor can receive any prejudice from his conduct therein. (Locke 2002: 141)

In this light, Locke moves from his anthropological assertion about the soul to extract an account of human interests and on to some practical political conclusions. Let us consider the other side of our natures:

> But besides their souls, which are immortal, men have also their temporal lives here upon earth; the state whereof being frail and fleeting … they have need of several outward conveniences to support thereof … But the pravity of mankind being such that they had rather

> injuriously prey upon the fruits of other men's labours than take pains to provide for themselves, the necessity of preserving men in the possession of what honest industry had already acquired, and also of preserving their liberty and strength … obliges men to enter into society with one another … [to] secure unto each other their properties, in the things that secure them comfort and happiness in this life, leaving in the meanwhile to every man the care of his own eternal happiness, the attainment whereof can neither be facilitated by another man's industry … this is the original, this is the use, and these are the bounds of the legislative … powering every commonwealth. (Locke 2002: 141–2)

So again, we move from an anthropological assertion to an account of human interest, and then to some political conclusions. What is important is that on the basis of a theological anthropology Locke produces a dualistic moral psychology the nodes of which offer us a theocentric and an anthropocentric moment. Our moral interests are divided between two orders, one orientated on God and the eternal, the other orientated on our material, embodied needs. *Qua* beings with a soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery, we are members of an eternal kingdom. This is an inward matter. It is a matter of having the right convictions, subscribing to the correct substantive doctrines, those favoured by God, and thus developing a relationship with God and the eternal order. It is theocentric but inward. *Qua* creatures with a temporal and embodied existence we live in a civil society, the realm of bodily needs, bodily actions and political institutions; here, it is a matter of sustaining material existence and using force to limit human 'pravity' or 'crookedness'. Legislation and authority can demand I respect the property and liberty of others in the name of the prosperity and liberty of all, because that is what civil society was established for; it is anthropocentric and outward. The civil order was not established to assist us in the work of the soul, but it does make space for it, private space, and because the work of the soul is inward, the outward force of the magistrate cannot touch it. Legislation may conform our actions but it will do so without touching our conviction, it cannot ask me to desire the action I perform. Legislation and force have no authority over my inner convictions, no one can dictate the substantive doctrines I affirm, this is a matter between myself in my inward existence and God.

3.5 History (C): Locke's Antecedents

This Lockean understanding of matters fits with the kind of political theology we find in Luther and Calvin, who are proximal to Locke and significant to his social and intellectual context, although behind them is a much older tradition of thinking in Latin Christianity. The dualistic tension between the demands of this world and the demands of the next are as old as Augustine, but while vital to Latin Christianity the status of Augustine in the Christian tradition is not settled. Furthermore, there are traditions, such as Islam, whose holy texts hold specific instruction *vis-à-vis* social regulation, where the 'work of the soul' is bound up with material interests. These are traditions where instituting certain forms of social/political regulation is a religious duty, and whose members could well find that the binary structuring

characteristic of Lockean liberalism contradicts their understanding of what religion demands. So, while the Lockean understanding fits with a venerable tradition in Latin Western thinking about religion and politics, whether or not it fits with other traditions is contingent. Religion per se clearly need not articulate a dualistic anthropology, nor a dualistic division within human interests and it need not posit any dualistic tension between this world and the next (Quadrio 2009: 387–8). Whether or not a different tradition could find the separation of church and state rationally acceptable depends on whether they can affirm this structure. This tension, this dualism, within the Latin tradition facilitates a separation of religion from the political, the separation makes sense in light of that understanding of what religion is, the structure fits with 'our' religion, is structured by it, it does not demand of 'us' significant accommodation.

While what Locke tells us fits with Augustine, more significantly it fits with the kind of political theology found in Luther and Calvin, theological figures who are highly important in the political and social struggles of seventeenth century England (not to mention seventeenth century Europe generally). Of course the path from Luther or Calvin to Locke is indirect, and we do not find Locke drawing directly from them. However, his understanding of the bible shaped much of his political opinion. The puritan background of his household would, no doubt, have given him a grounding in Calvin. However, his understanding of the relationship between religion and the political was most significantly shaped by the work of liberal Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker. This is particularly true of Locke's mature work and his latitudinarian views. In his work, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie,* Hooker thinks through issues of Church and state in England while trying to mediate between Calvinist and Lutheran views. For Hooker, while God took an interest in the human soul and its moral condition, God was not interested in the organisation of the Church. God is indifferent in regard to regulative matters; they were to be determined at the organisational level. This recapitulates the same division between the political regulation of the human community and the moral concern for the soul important to us. It is the same public/private distinction. The influence that Hooker had on Locke is clearly evidenced by the fact that in Locke's text, *Two Treatises on Government*, the only authority that is cited more often than Hooker is the bible itself. In that work he positions 'the judicious Hooker' against the conservative Robert Filmer, supporter of Charles I and divine right monarchy (Locke 2002: 2).

What we can say is that with Locke, as per the broader Latin heritage, we are simultaneously members of a spiritual eternal world and an earthly temporal one. Human institutions have no authority over the divine and eternal realm. Human laws cannot tell anyone what duties they owe God. That is left to the believer and their inner response to the Gospel. Certainly a church provides a context of interpretation for the Gospel, but what is important is the believer's response to the Word. Further, God does not speak directly to the believer; God only speaks indirectly through the Gospel narrative and the believer's response to it; humanly constructed legislation or institution that sought to define an individual's duties to God, the requirements of their salvation, or the interests of their soul, usurped

God's authority, trespassing beyond the boundaries of human authority. Such authority only pertained to the kind of legislation that would serve as a check to Human 'pravity' and so protect possessions, health and liberty from the incursions of others. Or, as Calvin put matters, 'our consciences do not have to do with men but with God alone. Thus is the purpose of that common distinction between the earthly forum and the forum of conscience…there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men' (Calvin, quoted in de Roover and Balaganadhara 2008). The division is clear, as we have seen, Locke mirrors this formula almost exactly.

Not just Calvin but Luther also reflects this same structure. While Luther's view has a Manichean feel to it and seems more to reflect something of a Hobbesian-style pessimism than Locke's more optimistic work, nonetheless for Luther if we were all perfectly good we could live by the gospels alone. But we are not perfectly good. Hence, we need princes, or secular authority, as a check against human pravity; without such secular authority 'men would devour one another' (Gillespie 2008: 122). The wielders of secular authority are bulwarks against human pravity and its tendency to drag human society into viciousness, without secular laws 'no one could support wife and child, feed himself and serve God. The world would be reduced to Chaos' (Gillespie 2008: 122). So, Luther tells us, 'The Temporal Government has laws which extend no further than life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul' (de Roover and Balagangadhara 2008: 531). Again the Lockean formulation seems to be a recapitulation of this earlier view, again the division is clear.

In general what we are led to are the following three ideas: that the human being is a being that inhabits two realms, an eternal kingdom and a temporal civil realm; that *qua* members of an eternal kingdom their concerns are private, personal and theocentrically orientated, the salvation of the soul, and here the only authority is God; in the temporal sphere, they pursue earthly and embodied interests but require temporal authority of the magistrate to keep their baser natures in check and secure them against the chaos that would otherwise ensue. But this is the view that we find in Locke and we find it present there in a way that demonstrates little distance from Luther and Calvin. To claim that Locke offers us a secularisation of that earlier view seems to overstate matters. Yes, we situate Locke within a history of reflection on modern politics in a way that we do not situate the works of Luther and Calvin. But it is clear that Locke's view recapitulates the same structures, is framed in a similar language. It is a political philosophy that never shies away from using theological language, nor from drawing directly from theological sources such as Hooker, which Locke does extensively. Locke's understanding of the proper relation between religion and politics is founded on theological ideas and is theologically articulated. This is the view that passed to those who drafted the fundamental documents of American religious liberty.

3.6 Conclusion: Parochial Understanding, Parochial Solutions?

What the above considerations ought to do is give us reason to pause and reconsider what is presupposed, not only by the Lockean conception of the relationship between politics and religion but also his understanding of what is implicit in the two relevant concepts, politics and religion. Further, we ought to be sensitive to the way contemporary liberal discourse still moves within the ambit of that view and carries with it presuppositions inherited from its theological foundations. These elements, barely concealed in Locke, pass into the express political and constitutional practice of the first modern democratic state, the United States of America. From here the notion that our religious interests are inward, a matter of conscience, orientated on God and salvation, and separate from temporal this-worldly interests becomes a 'pre-theoretical starting-point' for liberal reflection (de Roover and Balagangadhara 2008: 531). Today liberal politics and, particularly, discussions of the limits of liberal toleration are still anchored in a conception of society divided into public and private spheres.

But how do we identify what lies within the two spheres? (de Roover and Balagangadhara 2008: 527) More particularly, how do we give a person whose orientations are not structured by a modern, Western and liberal outlook, and thus an inheritor of the specific articulation of politics and religion that structures this division, some way of identifying what properly belongs to each sphere? Note here, the problem is not so much about boundary disputes, which is clearly the way that Locke, Rawls and Habermas take it, as it is about defining that thing which the boundary is supposed to contain. Taking the problem to be a boundary dispute presumes that what is contained by such boundaries is conceptually clear. Our problem is not just articulating what this is, but doing so in a way that is intelligible to those that do not share 'our' cultural presuppositions, those not orientated by a Christian or even a monotheistic frame of reference. This is the point. Before we can have the boundary dispute we need a settled, non-parochial understanding of the things that the boundaries are supposed to contain.

To suggest that the issue is about a boundary dispute is to assume that the conceptual distinction between politics and religion, between public and religious reasons, is not only clear but also valid. It is to suggest that this distinction is itself the product of public rationality, universally accessible.

It seems to be the case that the very distinction between a public reason and a private reason is a distinction constructed on the basis of reasons that were themselves religious. If we accept that the constitutive feature of a public reason is that it be a good reason, whereby good means something that everyone could affirm, regardless of their comprehensive doctrines, then we have presupposed the comprehensibility, if not the universal validity, of that distinction; that our practical material needs are distinct and separable from our metaphysical commitments. Setting that aside, if we do accept that the constitutive feature of a public reason is that it be a reason everyone can share, then one must ask: whether the idea which founds

Lockean secular tolerance, and that of Mason and Jefferson (the idea that religion is an inward and private matter orientated on God, salvation and the other world, whereas politics is a public matter orientated on civil interests) is in fact a good reason, one that everyone might share, regardless of their religious commitments or comprehensive doctrines? Here one might worry about whether there was, in fact, a 'good' reason (as opposed to a religious, and thus particular, one), for accepting this distinction. With that worry comes the threat of disappearing into a cloud of irony.

As such, a primary worry in regard to the liberal-secular distinction between religion and politics, public reasons and religious reasons, is that the structures that are supposed to free the public sphere from religious interests and religious ideology are structures that contain, in a sedimented form, religious and theological presuppositions. In particular, these sedimented presuppositions concern the vital matter of what is proper to religion and proper to politics. The structures that are supposed to free citizens from religious ideology and interest are structures articulated from within a particular ideology and thus conceal a particular interest. Here we must recognise the religious heritage of liberal political thinking. This is something that we must remain critically aware of, particularly in discussions with those who do not share these presuppositions about how we are to conduct politics under the conditions of pluralism. Such awareness seems to be simply part of what it is to achieve a 'self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of modernity'. It is something we must remain aware of for three reasons: firstly, to ensure that in our discussions of the proper relation of religion to politics we proceed on the basis of a proper historical self-understanding; secondly, so that such discussions proceed on the basis of an understanding of the contingency of our solutions; thirdly, because such an awareness might help us to take the perspective of others, to see our political traditions the way others may, as traditions that may contain theological or even metaphysical presuppositions (Habermas 2006: 4).

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Part II

Church and State

Marx and the Christian Logic of the Secular State

4

Roland Boer

4.1 Introduction

> If you call your state a *general Christian* state, you are admitting with a diplomatic turn of phrase that it is *un-Christian*. (Marx 1975a: 106, 1975b: 118)

The precarious separation of church and state is, once again, under threat. From the invocation of a vague 'Christian heritage' by European countries, through the contradictory debates over (Muslim) head-coverings in France and Denmark, to the open avowals of Christian belief and its effect on their political lives by leaders in the UK, Australia and Malaysia, it has once again become clear that the separation of church and state is either an impossible goal or a political fiction. At the same time, a number of major studies have appeared that challenge assumptions concerning secularism. For example, Charles Taylor argues that secularism entails not the banishment of religion but other, diverse ways of being religion. And Talal Asad proposes that the separation of religion and the state is not the removal of religion from public affairs but another means for the state to control religion (Taylor 2007; Asad 2003).

Rather than rushing to yet another new proposal concerning religion and the state, it is worth considering the rich heritage of Marxist thought to see whether there are not a few good resources that might be deployed. So I turn to an old and somewhat neglected discussion that has an increasing and surprising relevance in our own time, namely the contributions of Marx and Engels in the context of the heated debates over the issue of religion and politics in the 1830s and 1840s. They write of the situation in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, when Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the King of Prussia, desperately tried to hang onto the idea of a Christian

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state. Marx and Engels mercilessly explore the contradictions in that position. More specifically, in digging out some fascinating material from the early 1840s, we find that Marx's texts manifest a tension that is still present in our own debates. On the one hand, in *Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction* (which ironically did not pass the censor (Marx 1975a, 1975b)[1]), Marx argues that religion is a particular concern and that it really should have no part in the general matters of the state. On the other hand, in *On the Jewish Question* (1974, 1975e) Marx points out that the secular state is born out of the contradictions within the Christian state. At this point I bring Engels into the discussion, looking at an astute journal article of his from the same time, *Frederick William IV, King of Prussia*; for here Engels takes a very similar position to the second one Marx adopted (1975b, 1985). Needless to say, while Marx's initial position is still a common one today and has less and less mileage, the second, more dialectical, position is a far more interesting one, for it recognises the tensions within secularism itself.

4.2 Banishing the Particular

In his first journalistic article, where he reflects on the revisions to the Prussian censorship law of 1842, Marx develops an argument that leads to the following conclusion: the only way to allow a plurality of religions within any state is to have a secular state. In other words, religious tolerance is based on a secular indifference to religion. Muslims, Hindus, Greenlandic shamans, Christians and so on can all exist together as long as I am indifferent to them all. Still common today, especially with the increasing presence of religion within politics, this conclusion is in itself quite unremarkable. However, I am more interested in the way the 24 year old Marx arrives at such a conclusion. The starting point is an old friend, namely the distinction between the general and the particular. Religion is, by definition, a particular beast. Each religion makes a truth claim, based on the specific nature of its own belief and doctrines, that excludes all others. They are, if you like, complete worldviews that cannot tolerate any other complete worldview: 'each religion believes itself distinguished from the various other *would-be* religions by its *special nature*, and that precisely its *particular features* make it the *true religion*' (Marx 1975a: 104, 1975b: 116). It follows, then, that any idea of religion in general is a contradiction. One cannot talk about the general features of religion, since that involves denying the specific features that make each religion what it is. These features held in common must of necessity discard any positive content of any specific religion. The result: the idea of religion in general is nothing other than a non-religious position.[2] In short, such a general religion is another version of secularism.

[1] Where Marx and Engels wrote the original text in German, I cite the English source first and then the German source.

[2] 'This *rationalist point of view* … is so inconsistent as to adopt the irreligious point of view while its aim is to protect religion' (Marx 1975a: 103–104, 1975b: 116).

What is wrong with this argument? Apart from the use of the generic term 'religion', which should be ruled out by the argument itself, the sample pool is a little restricted. Marx's context has something to do with this, especially in light of the Thirty Years War fought between Roman Catholics and Protestants (1618–1648). In one sense, the controversies of the 1830s and 1840s provided yet another turn in the rumbling history of the Reformation. From Luther's defiance (and assistance by the Duke of Saxony) in the sixteenth century to the Thirty Years War that raged over the German states, Italy and the Low countries, Protestants in the north and Roman Catholics in the south had dug themselves in to become deeply conservative. The Roman Catholics looked to the Pope, while the Protestants (a mix of Lutherans and some Calvinists in the far north) drew upon conservative streams of pietism, marrying an inner walk with God to a tenacious hold on the Bible as the 'word of God'. Despite all the best efforts of the Prussian state to keep both Protestants and Catholics in a civil if often fractious relationship, the mutual antagonism ran deep. Thus, during his early experiences with journalism, Marx found that one of the major dividing lines between the various newspapers was in terms of the Catholic/Protestant divide.[3]

In fact, Marx goes on to use this difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants to argue against the push for a Christian state under the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. If it is to be a Christian state, then what type of Christianity will be the religion in favour—Roman Catholic or Protestant? Favouring one would exclude the other as heretical. Why? The 'innermost essence (*innerstes Wesen*)' (Marx 1975a: 105, 1975b: 118) of one is completely at odds with the other. Even more, all else becomes secondary, for one 'who wants to ally himself with religion owing to religious feelings must concede it the decisive voice in all questions' Marx 1975a: 106, 1975b: 118.

This is not the best argument, despite the fact that it is recited regularly today. Not all religions operate with mutually exclusive worldviews, even though many do. The obvious example is Hinduism, which prides itself on the fact that it is inclusive rather than exclusive, that it is perfectly possible to be a Hindu pursuing a potentially infinite range of specific practices and beliefs. The nice catch here is that Hindus will claim that this feature makes Hinduism superior, all the while neglecting to mention the ingrained caste system. I could also cite more open-minded forms of Christianity rather than what we would now call fundamentalist exclusivism. Then there is the long story of syncretism, the gradual acquisition of all manner of 'pagan' practices into any religion that found itself expanding—whether Mahayana Buddhism as it moved into China and Japan, or indeed Christianity as it spread from Palestine to Rome and then across Europe, drawing in all manner of fertility and solstice festivals along with a good collection of spirits.

[3] This deep tension shows up in various observations and passing comments concerning German politics and society in Marx's endless journalistic pieces (See, e.g., Marx 1980a: 127, 1980d: 57, 1980e: 96, 99).

4.3 *Aufhebung* of the Christian State

Marx's initial position, then, is to argue that the exclusive particularity of each religion rules out any generic notion of religion and that therefore the state cannot support religion in any general sense. It must either support one religion to the exclusion of all others or (since the first position is highly undesirable in the name of religious tolerance) support none. Only through complete secular indifference to religion can the state function at all.

But now we come to a disconnection with this initial argument by Marx. Over against his separation of particular and general, Marx makes a much more perceptive dialectical observation in *On the Jewish Question*. Here he argues that the fully realised Christian state is not what everyone thinks it is (the 'Christian state' of Friedrich Wilhelm IV); rather, the true Christian is the negation of Christianity: that is, a, secular, atheistic and democratic one (Marx 1974: 357–359, 1975e: 156–158).[4] The crucial point here is that the contradictions inherent within the idea and practice of a Christian state can only lead to its dissolution. These contradictions include the tension between otherworldly religion and this-worldly politics, the problems inherent in a political attitude to religion and a religious attitude to politics, the impossibility of actually living out the prescriptions of the Bible for living with one's fellow human beings (turning the other cheek, giving your tunic as well as your coat, walking the extra mile and so on). What is the resolution of these contradictions? It is 'the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of civil society (*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*)' (Marx 1974: 357, 1975e: 156).[5] This is the realised Christian state, that is, one that has negated itself and relegated Christianity to its own, private place among other religions and other parts of society. This is of course the way in which religion now operates in secular Western societies. In his own time Marx espied its arrival in the United Stated, with the separation of church and state making religion a private affair (In his usual comprehensive fashion, Charles Taylor (2007) makes a similar argument, namely that secularism is another way of being religious).

What is intriguing about this argument is that this modern secular state arises from, or is the simultaneous realisation and negation of, the Christian state. This argument is a long way from Marx's efforts to banish the particularity of religion from any form of the state. Marx's argument for the simultaneous negation and realisation (the famous *Aufhebung*) of the Christian state in the secular state may move in a number of directions. To begin with, one may connect it with a point

[4] Another example of Marx's awareness of the contradictions inherent in the Christian state appears in his long discussion of thefts of fallen wood (his third piece of commentary on the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly). He points out the paradox of the Reformation's abolition of monasteries and secularisation of their property. Although it was a necessary step to get rid of an abusive institution, it also had its downside, for nothing replaced the meagre support the poor had received from the monasteries (Marx 1975f: 232, 1975g: 207).

[5] Or as he puts it in his debate with Bruno Bauer, the 'modern state that knows no religious privileges is also the fully developed *Christian* state' (Marx and Engels 1974: 117–118, 1975: 111).

made today: that the secular state arose out of the Christian need for religious tolerance and pluralism and thereby as an answer to the tensions between a plurality of Christians and other religious positions (See, e.g., Brett 2009). Or as Marx put it, Christianity itself 'separated church and state' (Marx 1975c: 186, 1975d: 198).[6] What we require is a religious secularism in which (and here the argument folds back to Marx's initial position) the secular state is the only proper basis of religious tolerance. In order to overcome older practices of religious intolerance and in response to the sheer number of different forms of Christianity, the only viable response is a secular state that favoured no Christian denomination or indeed no religion at all.

But this argument leads to the dead-end of current debates, for it is no advance-apart from asserting the need for one more effort in order to achieve a thoroughly secular state for the sake of religious tolerance. A different line that emerges from Marx's argument is that the new form of the state does nothing to relieve the contradictions of the old one. The secular state may be an effort to overcome the tensions of the Christian state, but as the full realisation of the Christian state, it still embodies those contradictions within the new form. In short, it is no solution at all. This I suggest is the young Marx's real contribution to debates in our own time.

4.4 Engels and the 'Christian King'

A third possible line to follow from Marx's argument has a different sting in its tail. Before we feel that sting, I would like to bring Engels into our discussion, for in an early piece he makes a strikingly similar argument to Marx. Engels tackles the question of church and state in a rather judicious article from 1843 called *Frederick William IV, King of Prussia* (Engels 1975b; 1985).[7] His main point is that the efforts of the self-described 'Christian king' (always in mocking quotation marks)[8] to establish a Christian state are doomed to collapse through a series of contradictions. The underlying problem is that the Christian-feudal model the king has in mind is, like theology itself, an ossified relic from the past that will no longer work in a world that has made huge strides in science and free thought—by which I understand Engels to mean not merely philosophy but also democracy, political representation and republicanism. The result is that the king must make a whole series of compromises that doom the effort from the start.

[6] See Breckman (1999: 295–296), who argues that when Marx came to the conclusion that the secular state actually has a dialectical basis in theology, that he saw the inadequacies of liberal, republican arguments for such a state.

[7] See also Engels's comments in the late letters on Paul Lafargue's efforts to bring about the separation of church and state in the French assembly (Engels 1968b: 248, 1968c: 239, 2001a: 330, 2001b: 320).

[8] For example: 'The Prussian King, who calls himself emphatically "the Christian King", and has made his court a most ludicrous assemblage of whining saints and piety-feigning courtiers' (Engels 1975c: 530, 1975d: 515).

Now Engels does not find the Prussian king an obnoxious person as such. He credits the king with having a system, even with being kind-hearted and witty. But the king is also a reactionary with an impossible agenda. Engels begins by pointing out that various obvious measures are really the outward manifestation of a deeper problem encouraging church attendance, laws strengthening the observance of Sunday rest, tightening of the laws concerning divorce, purging of the theological faculties, changing examinations to emphasise firm belief, and appointing believers to government positions. The problem is that the Prussian king is caught in a dilemma: the logical outcome of his programme is the separation of church and state, yet he seeks to fuse the two. On the one hand, as the Head of the Evangelical Church, as *summus episcopus*, he seeks to subordinate the church to secular power. Even though he wants to combine ecclesiastical and state power in his own person, to join 'all power, earthly and heavenly' so that he becomes 'an earthly God' (Engels 1975b: 362, 1985: 431), he is in fact king first and supreme bishop second. On the other hand, such a move runs directly into the wall of Christian doctrine: one's primary allegiance should be to God and not some temporal power, whether state or king: 'A person who makes his whole being, his whole life, a preparation for heaven cannot have the interest in earthly affairs which the state demands of its citizens' (Engels 1975b: 363, 1985: 432). In other words, a full recovery of Christianity means the separation of church and state.

Engels's argument intersects quite neatly with Marx's: Christianity itself leads to a separation of church and state, for there is drive towards secularisation within Christianity, especially in light of the endless divergence within it. Any effort at a Christian state must decide what form of Christianity is to be favoured.[9] Is it to be Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, or …? The existence of the Orthodox churches in their multiplicity, as well as the event of the Protestant Reformation put the lie to the claim by the Roman Catholics to be the one 'catholic' church. Even within the history of the Roman Catholic Church there were numerous schisms and breakaways that were either absorbed and curtailed or expelled as heresies (if you can't absorb them, crush them). According to this argument, any Christian theory of the state must enable and allow for such diversity. The only way that this can happen is through a separation of church and state: no one form of Christianity can dominate without making a travesty of theology itself.

It seems to me that this argument is implicit in Engels's exploration of the contradictions in Friedrich Wilhelm IV's programme. For example, this Prussian king not only recognises both Roman Catholic and Protestant, but he also freed the Old Lutherans from the enforced union in 1817 of Lutherans and Calvinists in the Evangelical Church. With the various Protestant churches now given freedom in their internal affairs, the king struggled to maintain his role as the head of the church. But which church? Is one church to submit to the state-imposed authority of another?

[9] He makes a similar point in his discussion of the Established Church of England and the English constitution in relation to 'Dissenters' and the Roman Catholics (See, Engels 1974: 580–581, 1975a: 501).

It is a hopelessly contradictory solution and one unacceptable to the churches themselves. The more Friedrich Wilhelm IV tries to deal with each situation in question, the more confused the whole situation becomes. In the end, these efforts like those that sought to restore feudal privilege in the context of an Enlightenment-inspired basis of Prussian law lead to the collapse of the so-called Christian state through internal contradictions. The solution is a secular state.[10]

4.5 Sting in the Tail

A little earlier I suggested that this argument, shared by the young Marx and the equally young Engels, may flick back to sting us. The barb here begins with the point that the secular state arises from and is a response to contradictions within the Christian state. In both Marx's and Engels' different reflections, it is possible to find a logic for the secular state within Christianity. Indeed, they claim that the secular state is the full realisation of the Christian state and the resolution of its contradictions. If that is the case, though, we suggest that the contradictions are not resolved but reshaped. Thus, the tensions between different religious traditions do not disappear, although the ways they now make their presence felt are different from how they appeared in the Christian state. To begin with, the assumption of the secular state that religion is a private affair faces the pressure within many religions for a very public, political expression of their truth claims. Further, tolerance or indifference may be a stated virtue of the state and its various working parts. But it also assumes and in effect tries to require that the religions themselves will operate with a similar level of tolerance towards one another. One need only consider the intolerant, usually conservative elements within each religion to see that such inter-religious tolerance is often maintained with difficulty.

However, the deepest tension of the secular state is rooted in its origins. If we grant Marx's point that the secular state arose as an attempted resolution of the tensions within the Christian state of the nineteenth century, then it follows that secularism cannot escape religion, since religion is the reason the secular state exists at all. In other words, religion and secularism are two sides of the one coin. Look at one side and it says, 'church and state, forever separate'; flip it over and you read, 'church and state, never to part'.

Let me put it in terms of a paradox: the more church and state are separated, the more they seem to be entwined. Of course, the awareness of this paradox comes with some hindsight after a reasonable history of the secular state. For example, in the United States the separation between church and state is, as is well known, enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. Initially a response to the established Church of England, especially after the American War of Independence, it has come to be interpreted as any act by the

[10] The separation of church and state would become standard socialist policy (See, Marx and Engels 1973c: 4, 1977a: 4; Engels 1972: 237, 1990: 229).

Congress and the legislature that favors one religion over another with the possible outcome that such a religion may become established. In practice, this really means Christianity and shows up with monotonous regularity in the area of state-funded education. The Bible is not to be taught, prayer is not appropriate and one cannot teach religious doctrines in state schools.

However, in the United States the separation of church and state has become a legal fiction. The more strictly the courts apply the First Amendment, the more pervasive religion becomes in public life. An external observer cannot help noticing that religion saturates public life in the USA: the founding myth of the escape from oppression to a land of freedom is drawn from the story of the Jewish Exodus and the Promised land, Presidents must be openly Christian, they make decisions with religious concerns in mind, whether on questions of sex education, stem-cell research and same-sex relationships, voting patterns follow religious lines, and, especially in the Bible Belt, there is a sharp polarisation over religion. One is either passionately Christian or passionately atheist. By comparison, states which still have an established church, such as Denmark, or those with only recently disestablished churches such as Sweden, are among the least religiously observant countries in the world.

A very different example of the paradox of the secular state may be found in Turkey. Ever since Atatürk in 1924, the separation of church and state has been central to the constitution of a secular Turkey. All levels of government and state-supported institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals, police and the army, must operate without influence from the Sunni Muslim majority. However, in Turkey there is a specific government agency, the Department of Religious Affairs, which watches Islam very closely. The content of sermons, statements and views must avoid political content, and, like France, all female state employees are banned from wearing the *hijab*. The state also restricts any independent religious communities and religious schools. At the same time the state supports mosques through taxes and subsidies. In other words Turkey has a situation comparable to the established church in some western European countries. The difference is that the recognition of Islam, even to the point of providing state funds, is designed to negate the effect of Islam in affairs of the state. The state supports religion in order to watch it and maintain the separation of church and state, or rather, mosque and state.[11]

This state of affairs has been severely tested of late. In 2002 and then again in 2007 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) achieved a majority in the Parliament with Recep Erdoğan as Prime Minister. The party's origins lie in a number of banned parties with explicit Islamic links. The Prime Minister claims that the AKP does not have a religious basis, yet some of its measures, such as relaxing the ban on the hijab and the invocation of Sharia, suggested to many that religion was now infringing on the state. In 2008 the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court filed a suit with the Constitutional Court, whose task is to protect the secular constitution of Turkey. The court has the ability to ban any party that undermines the principle of secularism at

[11] For Talal Asad (2003), secularism is another way for the state, especially in Muslim-majority countries, to control religion.

the heart of the constitution. In July 2008 it found that the ruling AKP had indeed breached the provisions of the constitution, but instead of banning the party (it fell one vote short of the seven out of 11 required to do so) gave it a severe reprimand and cut half of the funding to which it was eligible as a recognised political party. In effect, the court upheld the constitution while avoiding the massive political turmoil of banning a ruling party.

As for Marx and Engels, they were to find in their myriad journalistic pieces—let alone Engels's later concerns with early Christianity—that the complex issue of religion and politics turns up with a persistence that belies any effort to separate them. It may be the tensions between the Russians, Turks, British and French around the Crimean War,[12] or the French and English revolutions (Marx 1973b: 19, 24, 40–11, 47, 56–17, 81, 87–18, 94, 104, 1978: 55, 60, 77, 83, 92–53, 118, 131, 141; Marx and Engels 1973d: 12, 1978: 254–256), or even the revolutions of 1848–1849. On it goes, with comments on Puritanism in the United States (Engels 1968a: 560, 2004: 74), on Germany (Engels 1979: 14–15, 23–14, 28, 35), Russia (Engels 1973b; 1992), Poland (Marx and Engels 1973b: 321, 338–329, 341–323, 352, 362, 1977b: 339, 356–337, 359–361, 370, 380), Spain (Marx 1980f: 394–395, 402–395, 411, 435–396), Ireland Marx 1973a: 654, 1973f: 543, 1986a: 620, 1988: 4), Switzerland (Engels 1973a: 93, 1977b: 146, 1977d: 183), Hungary (Engels 1977a: 147, 1977e: 469–470), China (Marx 1979c: 93, 1980c: 41–42), India (Marx 1979a: 126, 1979b: 222) and the Slavic countries (Marx 1973d: 25, 1983: 21), on the Holy Alliance (Marx and Engels 1973a, 1977c) or the pope's dealings in Italy and France (Marx 1980b: 473–474, 1981: 430, Engels 1977c), and indeed Europe in general (Engels and Kautsky 1990: 597–598, 603). It was not for nothing that the 'religious idea' (and its relation to social, political and intellectual development) was important enough to be listed as part of the program for the Geneva Conference of 1866 of the International (Marx 1973c, 1973e, 1987a, 1987b).

I would suggest, then, that the persistence of these tensions belies the suggestion that they are occasional anomalies in the separation of church and state. Rather, they are inherent to it. The arguments of Marx and Engels would suggest that such endemic contradictions are the outcome of the origins of the secular state within the contradictory logic of the Christian state more specifically, as a Christian response to the plurality of religions.

4.6 Conclusion

So what is to be done? I would suggest that opposition of church and state, and indeed of religion and secularism, draws the line at the wrong point. One reason why the battle lines are drawn up at this point is the underlying assumption that secularism is a progressive program. Since religion is a regressive and superstitious business, or so the argument goes, a secular program that challenges this repressive

[12] Out of a very long list of such references, in this and following notes I provide a few samples (See, Marx 1986b: 86–87, 1986c: 178, 1991: 120).

system must be enlightening and progressive. But is secularism necessarily progressive? It may well be quite reactionary, as we find in recent examples from conservative politicians in Denmark and the Netherlands. In both places the argument goes as follows: we are a secular country, where gay couples live openly, where nudity is accepted, where women and men have equal rights, and where freedom of speech is protected, so we will not tolerate any religion that challenges those features (and others) of our society. That 'religion' is of course none other than Islam. So we find the bits and pieces of an apparently secular society marshalled in opposition to the perceived barbarism and superstition of a particular religion. Needless to say this convoluted position in the hands of conservatives actually justifies a resurgent xenophobia, Islamophobia and religious intolerance.

Perhaps the way forward is to recognise that secularism in not necessarily progressive and that religion is not a default reactionary position. Would it not be wiser to seek the progressive dimension of both so that the concerns of this age and this world might be addressed? Is it not possible that a politics of alliance might develop between progressive elements within various religions and secular movements? Perhaps a 'new secularism' is in order in which this politics of alliance takes place. I close with an example of how this might work. At the various anti-capitalist and anti-globalization protests, such as those against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in 2000 and then again at the G20 meeting in 2006, we found anarchists, greenies, ferals, socialists, feminists, various elements of the loopy left, and some religious groups for whom the protests were perfectly consistent with their convictions.

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Spirit Matters: Life After Secularism and Religion?

5

Johann Rossouw

5.1 Introduction

In his book *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, the American Christian Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart (2009: 185–93) gives a moving portrayal of the last pagan Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate (331–363). One of the striking aspects of Hart's portrait is how Julian tries to revive Roman paganism in the face of the inexorable rise of the energetic new faith of Christianity. Julian's ultimately doomed attempt of course involved a sort of syncretism of disparate fragments of the pagan order, even drawing on some elements of Christianity.

Inasmuch as the ideology that succeeded Christianity's domination of the West—secular modernity—seems no longer to have the cohesion, legitimacy and self-confidence that it once had, we moderns seem to have a similar sense of the fragmentation of the old symbolic order than Julian had. But whereas Julian arguably found himself facing a clear and powerful internal rival, for us no such rival seems to be on the horizon—unless we count the threat of nihilism, which I believe we must. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor compares our condition of spiritual and symbolic fragmentation to that of a 'nova,' implying that if some new form of integration was to succeed this disintegration, it is by no means clear what form it would take:

> [Our] present predicament offers a gamut of possible positions which extend way beyond the options available in the late eighteenth century. It's as though the original duality, the positing of a viable humanist alternative [to the traditional religions], set in train a dynamic, something like a nova effect, spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond. (Taylor 2007: 299)

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Of course, this is not to say that attempts at such integration should not be made, and perhaps this book is a sign of an attempt to contribute to such a project—or at least to consider the sources of this disintegration and how we might deal with it.

Another implication of Taylor's metaphor of the exploded supernova is that when we modern Westerners try to find common ground to address the challenges of this disintegration, these days we often—if not usually—start out from quite different backgrounds and assumptions. If these backgrounds and assumptions are not shared, at least acknowledging them may facilitate our common search. In my case, briefly, these are:

- I write as a former practising Zen-Buddhist monk and now Orthodox Christian for whom philosophy is not the vehicle but an aid in the practice of compassion, and for whom socio-political engagement is a natural extension of my religious practice;
- I write as an Afrikaner who spent roughly the first half of my life under apartheid and the second under post-apartheid, which left me with an indelible impression of the fragility and necessity of culture and institutions, as well as an awareness of community over, above and sometimes against the state and the market;
- I write as a relatively new arrival from South Africa to Australia, deeply under the impression of how liberal secularism is the dominant paradigm here in contradistinction to South Africa, where upwards of 80 % of the population of about 50 million call themselves religious, and where religion is much more present in the public sphere than in Australia;
- I assume that human beings have an innate longing for some source of transcendence; if this longing is not cultivated in a tradition representing such a source there is a real possibility that the longing may lead one to false representations of it, thus turning this longing into a source of suffering rather than the good;
- I view contemporary Western secularism as a quasi-religious tradition with its own quasi-theology (liberalism and human rights) and quasi-religious institutions (the state, market, universities and schools);
- I assume that against the background of Taylor's exploded nova and the threat of nihilism that we Westerners face, particularly with regards to a materialist denial or denigration of the spirit, those of us from a secular or religious background concerned with the fate of the spirit will and must look for an overlapping consensus where our common concern is of more importance than our various truth claims;
- I assume that looking for common ground will of necessity invoke our politico-theological differences and our different genealogies of the present; these differences, even if evoked in a comparative approach, will produce tensions, but this is preferable to a false liberal claim to tolerance;
- Last, since my own work is concerned with countries of exported European modernity, that is, countries constituted in their modern form through the exportation of European ideas, culture, religion, institutions and technology, my consideration of liberal secularism will be in the context of Western Europe and

countries like the USA, South Africa and Australia. What distinguishes secularism in these parts of the world is that it replaced Christianity as the frame of reference for the social order, and where Christianity partly remains a frame of reference, as in the U.S. or South Africa, it is often in a form or forms of Christianity so markedly redefined by liberal secularism that adherents to the Catholic or Orthodox traditions may not even see it as Christian. Inasmuch as the fortunes of liberal secularism are intertwined with that of Christianity it is not clear how the former can be discussed without the latter. A possible implication of this intertwinement of liberal secularism and Christianity, especially insofar as the former attempts to replace the latter, is that if liberal secularism cannot deliver what it promises—the good life in the form of infinite material and economic security—the modern Western social order is left with a crisis of legitimacy and meaning that demands a considered response. This is the situation that seems to have arisen in the wake of, first, the terror attacks of September 2001 and, second, the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. What such a considered response may look like is what I shall make a few remarks about in the final section of this paper.

To describe Western secularism and its genealogy is a daunting task, even if one confines oneself to those parts of the world that I do in this article. These tasks are not facilitated by the fact that the roots of secularism stretch back to, amongst others, the birth of the modern territorial European state and the legacy of Ockham in theology. But in an era where so much of a social order's legitimacy depends on its genealogy these tasks are unavoidable if we are to try and assess the phenomenon under consideration. In the case of Western secularism this genealogy has of course become intensely disputed since the terror attacks of September 2001. Like so many other aspects of Western modernity, Western secularism seems to also have been altered significantly by the events of World War I and II. Whereas Western secularism before these two wars seems to have been more about the separation of church and state and the concomitant division between politics as a public affair and religion as a private matter, the collapse of cultural self-confidence in Western Europe after the two wars seems to have been accompanied by a dramatic reduction in religious practice and an embrace of an economic liberal paradigm. This is what is often described as Americanization, but more strictly it should be described as the adoption of consumerist individualism in the West, a quasi-theology[1] that has come to fill the vacuum of belief left by the shrinking of religious or nationalist faith.

In what follows I shall try to do three things. First, some of the aspects of a possible genealogy of Western secularism will be given. Second, the ascent and eventual dominance of the more liberal form of secularism in the West after World

[1] Quasi-theology in the sense that consumerism feeds off a number of theological motifs such as promising its adherents a better life, a better self, an improved destiny and a good life, elevating the trappings of consumption to the centre of the adherent's life—but with the adherent in the place that God would occupy for the believer—and striving for the same type of authority that accompany religious beliefs.

War II and later on the end of the Cold War will be considered, especially with regards to Bernard Stiegler's concept of the hyper-industrial society and the role of attention. In conclusion some remarks on a possible social order after that of liberal secularism will be offered.

5.2 Some Aspects of a Possible Genealogy of Secularism: Ockham

In trying to account for the roots and ascendance of Western secularism three phenomena, amongst others, are important. They are of a theologico-philosophical, a technological, and an institutional nature. I refer to, respectively, the thought of William of Ockham in the fourteenth century, the invention of the mechanical clock somewhere between 1270 and 1330, and the appearance of the modern territorial state from, roughly, the fifteenth century. As will hopefully become clear, these three phenomena preconditioned the ascendance of (respectively) an immanentist ontology; of neutral, linear time; and of the usurpation of what used to be called the spiritual and the temporal powers by the state at the expense of the church, eventually giving birth to the twin rival siblings of religion and secularism as William Cavanaugh has described it (2009: 70). He elaborates:

> The very claim that the boundaries between religion and non-religion are natural, eternal, fixed, and immutable *is itself* a part of the new configuration of power that comes about with the rise of the modern state. The new state's claim to a monopoly on violence, lawmaking, and public allegiance within a given territory depends upon either the absorption of the church into the state or the relegation of the church to an essentially private realm. Key to this move is the contention that the church's business is religion. Religion must appear, therefore, not as what the church is left with once it has been stripped of earthly relevance, but as the timeless and essential human endeavour to which the church's pursuits should always have been confined.(Cavanaugh 2009: 83, his emphasis).

To understand the significance of Ockham, the mechanical clock and the modern territorial state, it may help to briefly consider the late medieval context in which they appeared.

5.2.1 Ockham and the Origins of the Secular

In his consideration of Ockham Michael Allen Gillespie (2008: 19–43) draws our attention to the integration of God, man and nature that was achieved in medieval scholasticism, particularly in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas' reconciliation of Christian theology and philosophy with the philosophy of Aristotle through Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle's four causes as the universals according to which God in his reason and love decided to create the order of being, laid the groundwork for the understanding of all of existence as analogous to God and thus as means to know God. Since for Aquinas we know through our God-given reason in the light of our faith, we have the basis of not only a realist ontology and

epistemology, but also of a respect for everything that exists and for the meaning of everything deriving from its God-given telos in the order of being.

Ockham, by emphasizing God's omnipotence and will over his love and reason, cast radical doubt on reality. For Ockham the order of being is primarily the product of God's will, and the only love that exists is God's self love (Gillespie 1995: 16). Given these notions, reason cannot guide us in knowing or understanding reality, nor can the unity between reason and faith be maintained. Inasmuch as we know anything it is by virtue of what God chooses to reveal to us individually. But since we ultimately have no recourse to reason and no means of knowing God by analogy through creation—including man and nature—we simply have to trust in blind faith what we think we know. Gillespie has shown how Descartes, who was very well-versed in Ockham's theology and philosophy, took up the task of countering the epistemological doubt engendered by Ockham's fearsome, dark God (Gillespie 1995: 32). But for the purposes of our consideration of the genealogy of secularism, it seems to me that Ockham provided two important sources for secularism.

First, since according to Ockham we cannot by reason know what is transcendent, the link between the transcendent and the immanent is broken, and it becomes possible to conceive of a social order that is as it were a thoroughly human construction, left to its own devices. From Ockham to Machiavelli, who implores the prince to pursue power for the sake of power, to use fear as a political tool, and who confines his theological reflections in *The Prince* mostly to the vagaries of Fortune that is as little in debt to man as Ockham's God, is not a major step.

The second important source for secularism is the lasting insecurity that this sort of thought contributed to. For example, if nature is no longer integrated with God and man, and created according to the same reason and love, nature becomes an unknown quantity that can easily be seen as a threat. Indeed, as Hans Achterhuis has pointed out in his monumental study of scarcity in modernity, some of the very first arguments justifying the subjection and exploitation of nature begin to appear less than 150 years after Ockham (Achterhuis 1988: 232–33). As far as social and political theory go, it seems that right from Hobbes's justification of the state's sovereignty on the basis of its provision of security up to Ulrich Beck's pertinent analysis of the 'risk society' (Beck 1992), the insecurity running through Western modernity is a powerful and persistent motive. Arguably the modern state's total claim on its citizens' body-minds through education, military conscription, taxation and the law would not have been so absolute if it was not for the on-going claims towards the provision of security as the *quid pro quo* of these claims by the state. But before we take a closer look at the modern state, let us now turn to the mechanical clock.

5.2.2 Neutral, Linear Time

In *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor develops the concept of higher time to illustrate what he takes to be one of the key aspects of religious traditions, namely their ability to provide a link between our everyday lives, broader history and some sort of cosmic order. By understanding our everyday lives and broader history as part of a

greater cosmic temporal order, our everyday lives become meaningful in a way they would not if they were 'just' our lives:

> In the pre-modern era, the organizing field for ordinary time came from what I want to call higher times … What did higher times do? One might say, they gathered, assembled, reordered, punctuated profane, ordinary time. Let me grasp a nettle and call this latter 'secular time' … 'Secular' time is what to us is ordinary time, indeed, to *us* it's just time, period. One thing happens after another, and when something is past, it's past. (Taylor 2007: 54–55, his emphasis)

A further aspect of higher time is its ability to link religious practitioners in the here and now with the founding events of their tradition, thus also transcending the everyday sense of time as a linear flow from yesterday to today to tomorrow. For Taylor it is especially religious liturgy embodied in rituals like the Eucharist or festivals like Christmas that allow the religious practitioner a sense of participation in the founding events of her tradition:

> This Easter Vigil, for instance, brings us back into the vicinity of the original Easter, closer than last year's summer day—although that was closer in terms of secular time alone. The original Passover in Egypt, and the last supper, are brought into close proximity by typology, although they are aeons apart in secular time.(Taylor 2007: 96)

Or, to give a Buddhist example, when the Buddhist practitioner sits down in meditation it is a reactualisation and a re-enactment of the founding event of the tradition, namely the action that the Buddha according to the tradition engaged in when he was enlightened more than twenty-five centuries ago.

Yet another important aspect of higher time is the fact that it provides the religious practitioner with an experience of the abundance of time: since the source of time is higher, transcending the practitioner, by actualizing higher time through liturgy and ritual she participates in and realizes the source from which everything stems. In the Buddhist tradition this is the cosmic order governed by interdependence, which also constitutes the practitioner, and which is consciously participated in and realized when sitting down in meditation. In the Christian tradition this is the order of being governed by God, and in which we participate when we accept God's grace and salvation in Christ.

In his monumental study of the history of the hour, Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum (1996) examines the invention of the mechanical clock between 1270 and 1330, and its gradual adoption over the next five centuries up to the Industrial Revolution. In this process, time as measured by the clock in fact came to displace the embodied, conscious time-keeping of ritual and liturgy in favor of quantified, measured time. Although Dohrn-van Rossum focuses most of his attention on the four or five centuries between the late Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution, he does show how the continued technological improvement of time measurement accompanied a growing sense of the scarcity of time, of broad history as the most important dimension of temporal experience, and of how the main unit of time shrunk from the week to the day to the hour to the second. It has of course often been argued that linear time is itself a legacy of Christian eschatology, for example by Karl Löwith. But to my mind the real issue for the genealogy of secularism is how this linear dimension

of time came to be absolutized, and how it went hand in hand with not only enormous disruptions in religious liturgy and ritual, but also with the rise of the modern territorial state. If higher time was the most important dimension of time in the pre-modern social order and its key institution, the church, then linear time is the most important dimension of time in the modern social order and its key institution, the territorial state. In this regard Dohrn-van Rossum provides many telling examples of how the adoption of linear clock time favored the standardization of events in different territories with different time-keeping; how time and time again the rising territorial states first took control of the clock towers in local conflicts; how church liturgies were adapted to the hour, and so forth. Whereas higher time previously mediated everyday time and history, imbuing it with what we moderns would call meaning, the ascendance of neutral, linear time cleared the way for time the meaning of which depended on us. This meaning-giving function was of course enthusiastically embraced from the late eighteenth century by the European nation-states that succeeded the confessional states of 1650–1800. Starting with the rather short-lived infamous revolutionary calendar of France after the Revolution, it was carried on in the long-standing practice of national festivals. These are gradually these days, like the surviving religious festivals, being remolded as important dates on the never-ending calendar of sales and special offers. But strictly speaking this last example belongs to liberal secularism to which we shall turn once we have dealt with the third root phenomenon of secularism, namely the modern territorial state.

5.2.3 The Modern Territorial State

Writing nearly 25 years after the groundbreaking historical research on modern state-building by Charles Tilly and his associates (Tilly 1975), Thomas Ertman (1997) surveyed the state of research in this field. For our purposes I only want to draw attention to, as I hinted above, the absolutist character of the modern state and its implications for secularism. In order to do this, once again it helps to understand the changes in the social order brought about in the light of the state of affairs in the medieval and late medieval social order.

I have already referred to the medieval 'two powers', the spiritual and the temporal. According to this arrangement, roughly, the church and the state were the two institutions that together provided for the spiritual, political and material well-being of the people in a social order that was Christian. It doesn't seem relevant to digress here into an assessment of the actual executive power of the two institutions. But it is important to bear in mind that given the very localized nature of political power in the Middle Ages we should be very careful not to equate the polities of that time with the states that began their ascendance from roughly the fifteenth century, an ascendance led by the cores of what would later become modern Spain and France. What is, however, of relevance for our purposes is that at least in principle that differentiation of religio-political power in a Christian social order provided clear demarcations of the domains of church and polity, and that more or less whenever

one of the two did not respect the limits it led to socio-political tension. One such example is provided by the hugely influential Lateran Council of 1215 under the politically ambitious Pope Innocent III. At this Council, it was agreed that what really mattered in the Eucharist was the transubstantiation of the bread and the wine, instead of the long-standing consensus of the Eucharist as a communal participation in and embodiment of Christ, the so-called *corpus mysticum*. Behind this decision lay an attempt by the pope to make the local priest seem more powerful over and against the local polity, more or less the wielder of what we moderns would call magical powers. Of key importance though is that, from a modern perspective, church and polity had clear limitations of their power and what they could legitimately aspire to.

However, these limitations were gradually removed from the social order with the territorial competition that began in the fourteenth century between the cores of the later Spain, France and Portugal, and that eventually drew in the Catholic Church, Prussia and England. Arguably this protracted territorial competition between Europe's states lasted up to World War II, when only the spectre of total mutual industrial destruction brought the parties back from the brink, perhaps making us more appreciative of the medieval differentiation's limitations on church and polity power. The papal historian and specialist of the Council of Trent, Paolo Prodi, provides us with a key to understanding what transpired in the fifteenth century. Prodi writes that perhaps the main reason why the Catholic Church from around 1450 started behaving like an early modern territorial state replete with Europe's first mercenary army, a diplomatic corps, a bureaucracy and the building of the Papal States that lasted until 1923, was the fact that the heavy taxation imposed by the sovereigns of especially early modern France and Spain on the populace caused tithes and other gifts to the church to dry up, thus threatening its economic self-sufficiency (Prodi 2006: 199). Composing *The Prince* a mere six decades later Machiavelli's injunction to the prince to pursue power and territory for its own sake was perhaps more a reflection than an invention of the modern political order than we are inclined to think.

It is against this background that two key early modern sources of armed conflict appear, that is, between the Catholic Church and the early modern states, and between the sovereigns leading these early modern attempts at state-building. We should not forget that another key thinker of the liberal tradition, who provided the doctrine of sovereign state power and its counterpart, the so-called free, autonomous individual, was the royalist Thomas Hobbes. But Hobbes wrote his *Leviathan* in the decade after England's parliamentary republicans finally succeeded in the English Civil War to curtail the efforts of King Charles I to drag England into the territorial conquest led on mainland Europe by his royal counterparts.

It is the convention in the liberal tradition and also many a contemporary exponent of liberal secularism, especially in the aftermath of September 2001, to refer back to the tumultuous two centuries between 1450 and 1650 as the time of Europe's so-called Religious Wars. However, it is historically more correct to consider these two centuries as those during which a fierce competition between the representatives of the spiritual and temporal powers ensued in the break-up of the medieval

social order. This was a competition that was decisively won at the rather ironically named Peace of Westphalia (1648), a 'peace' which built on the equally ironically named Peace of Augsburg of 1555, where it was first agreed that a European sovereign—in this case the Holy Roman Emperor—may determine the religious belief of his subjects.

In his survey of the latest specialist historical research of the so-called Religious Wars William Cavanaugh (2009: 142–151) points to a number of facts that are relevant to understanding the roots of secularism. First, although it is often claimed that the Protestant Reformation of 1517 set off the so-called Religious Wars a number of these wars were already in full swing at the time. Secondly, from roughly 1500 to 1650, and even up to the French Revolution, nearly every conceivable alliance between European sovereigns and religious factions occurred in these wars: Catholics with Protestants, Catholics against Catholics, Protestants against Catholics, Protestants with Catholics against Protestants, Catholics with Protestants against Catholics, with many factions sometimes changing alliance and allegiance during conflicts, and so on. Finally, from roughly 1650 to 1800 the so-called confessional states that preceded Europe's nation-states all cemented their control over the body-minds of their citizens, particularly through prescribing their religious beliefs and through the establishment of the modern school and university. These controlling tendencies of the modern state were of course to become much stronger from 1800 onwards. Perhaps only the rise of a consumerist economy against the background of liberal secularism after the Second World War came to genuinely threaten the state's hold over its citizens.

From these findings of Cavanaugh a number of conclusions may be drawn. First, what actually happened during the so-called Religious Wars is that various early modern states, including the then Catholic Church, entered into protracted territorial competition for which the moulding of citizens' total loyalty was a key goal. Secondly, with the collapse of the Christian social order, what appeared from its spiritual and temporal power fragments was, roughly, the secular and the religious, with the former the so-called neutral public domain of the state, and the latter the private domain of the church, something for which another key thinker of the liberal tradition, John Locke, provided the legitimation. Thirdly, if the state was henceforth to mould the citizen's body-mind, then religion was to become a purely interior phenomenon limited to the emotions and the conscience, with its socio-political dimensions greatly shrunk and in fact actively discouraged and made suspect up to the present day, since the modern state's power is partly built on this constriction. Fourthly, whereas the term 'religion' had limited use in the Middle Ages, for much the same reason that a fish is presumably unlikely to be aware of water before it is removed from it, it came to take on this separate but also private or interior meaning over and against the public, social and political dimensions of the secular state. Last but not least we should not lose sight of the fact that from the first ambitious modern territorial state builders of the fourteenth century up to George W. Bush, misusing religion as a means to further political goals and social control is always a temptation. Hence, for us moderns, especially those of a secular persuasion with limited personal experience of a religious tradition, it is certainly easy to associate religion

with injustice, intolerance and violence, while it has become very difficult to conceive of a social order where the religious and the political are two aspects of the same order devoted to the common good.

Up to this point, I have tried to show that there are at least three important strands in the genealogy of Western secularism. These are, first, the legacy of Ockham, whose thought clears the way for a social order that is no longer mediated with the transcendent, and in which it becomes possible to conceive of reality as a human construct instead of a divine given. The second strand is that of neutral, linear time, the conception of time as a straight line along which we inexorably move forward, and which is marked out by purely historical events with no transcendent meaning. The third strand is that of the modern territorial state that came to dominate the post-medieval social order, aiming for greater control over the body-minds of citizens than any preceding institution, and finding its symbolic grounding in the modern differentiation between politics and religion, respectively marking out the public and the private. Let us now consider the fate of secularism since World War II against the backgrounds of its roots as proposed here, that is, with regards to how these three strands of secularism unfold.

5.3 Liberal Secularism

As I have suggested above, secularism after World War II has evolved into a social order that may be described as the practice of politics by means of the economy. The relation between State and economics here is perhaps vaguely similar to how Europe's early modern sovereigns raided Catholic liturgy and theology to bolster their authority. Most of us are by now familiar with a variety of excellent critiques against this economization of everything whereby, as the late novelist J.G. Ballard put it, even politics become branches of advertising and the market (Ballard 1995: 4).

As I have suggested above, this shift of public faith from party politics to faith in the economy may have some roots in the massive disillusionment with politics and national identities engendered by the two great industrial wars of 1914–1918 and 1939–1945. However, as I shall now argue, the crisis of public faith was not resolved, but merely temporarily postponed by its transfer to the economy. This economization of political life, as I have hinted above, accompanies and in fact deepens the weakening of the modern state's hold over the body-minds of its citizens. If this interpretation is correct, it may point to a crossroads for the social order of liberal secularism of which it would be unwise to postulate what it may become, since we are very much in this process, but of which it may be wise and indeed responsible to ponder what new possibilities it may open up beyond the modern division between the secular and the religious.

Bernard Stiegler's analysis of the so-called hyper-industrial society may help us to deepen our understanding of the nature and roots of post-war Western liberal secularism. But before we turn our attention to him it could help to consider the further evolution of Ockham's legacy, of neutral, linear time and of the modern territorial state in the past six decades or so. In brief, I propose that the social order of

post-war Western liberal secularism may be described as the continuation of territorial political competition by means of the economy, with calculation, quantification, and efficiency being to this social order what the seven cardinal virtues were to the Western Christian social order. The sacred status that calculation, quantification and efficiency enjoy today is a result of the on-going skepticism about truth and reality that began with Ockham, and that even became a virtue in much of the influential social theory produced since the 1960s, especially in France. There is also something of a diabolical dialectic at the heart of the economic liberalism that now dominates the West: the more every part of the social order is subjected to the economic paradigm, the less efficient this order is in terms of its own goals. This is of course what Marxists used to refer to as the crisis of capitalist accumulation; the more every part of the social order is brought under the control of the economy in the name of greater stability, predictability and efficiency, the more insecurity it breeds. The absolute low-point of this dialectic is Western politicians elevating the economy and security to the highest possible status, whereas the absolutisation of the economy and security is accompanied by ever deepening anxiety, as well as by economic and military insecurity. This anxiety is probably linked to the on-going crisis of credibility engendered by this social order, as we shall shortly see with reference to Stiegler.

As far as neutral, linear time is concerned, we may state that in accordance with the already mentioned reduction of the main unit of time measurement from the day to the second, we now seem to have reached a sort of absolute limit where the measurement of time has become so infinitesimal as to lose all meaning. If our lived sense of time is a function of liturgy and action, then we may be living in a sort of diabolical non-time where neutral, linear time has dissolved into an eternal now of infinite events that happen to us, a sort of tyranny of immediacy. This tyranny of immediacy may be understood both in the sense of the absolutisation of the present at the expense of the past and the future; and in the sense of a completely unmediated experience of time, where time is the event or rather the plethora of events that now populate our everyday lives without much cohesion between them. It would seem that inasmuch as Ockham was one of the first to take the step towards the dissolution of the mediation between the transcendent and the immanent, the social order of liberal secularism lives by an immediate time that no human can sustain. It is no wonder that so many people now live for their holidays and their retirement, and that so much social unrest now revolves around these questions. It is also no wonder that democratic politics has become so subject to the slightest fluctuations in public opinion—what Paul Virilio has called an emotional democracy (Virilio 2004: 35–54)—as to be apparently unable to embrace any vision on a timescale of more than 5 years, that is, the maximum interval between elections.

A last and ironic dialectic that we may note in liberal secularism is the changed status of the individual and human rights. John Milbank (2009) has shown that Ockham, by posing the fiction of the completely individualistic nature of all beings, including the human being, not only undermined the medieval Christian balance of rights with duties. It also paved the way for the extension of the rights claims of the individual. If our rights are no longer grounded in a higher being but in ourselves,

and we all share in the same nominal status of individuals, then we potentially have infinite claims against each other:

> And once one projects a right from an individual to humanity as a whole, then the question becomes—who does humanity have rights against? The answer must be either a voluntarist, covenanting God, which helps no-one save religious fanatics, or else (and *always* in practical terms) humanity itself. Humanity itself has the obligation, or rather the collective right to fulfill an in principle infinitely expanding number of rights—rights to education, work, holidays, leisure, access to the countryside, even 'rights to sunshine' as Villey laconically noted—infinitely in all perpetuity. So this notion of human rights clearly provides us with no practical ethical guidance. In reality it leads to a state of anarchy which is only ended by an authoritarian power which will arbitrarily promote one set of rights over another—liberal capitalist states the right of property; State socialist authorities the rights to food, health, work and culture. The former will be at the expense of majority economic well-being; the latter at the expense of people's rights of free association and free choosing of roles and an order of existential priorities. (Milbank 2009: 26, his emphasis)

This is what Hobbes understood, and why he proposed the sovereign as the absolute arbitrator over our claims, which founds the ironic dialectic between the modern territorial state and its counterpart of the solitary individual.

It would seem that against the background of the loss of faith in the state and politics in the post-war era, the fiction of the autonomous individual has found a new lease of life in economic liberalism. Here the irony is particularly salient: The more all types of institutions adopt an economic liberal paradigm, making great quasi-theological claims about excellence, justice, equality and so on, the more we are turned into isolated, powerless individuals forced to compete with each other for resources of which the scarcity is entirely artificial, that is, the result of policies and politics serving an insatiable corporate order. As we shall now see, Bernard Stiegler's notion of the hyper-industrial society, which invokes such theological motifs as credit, credibility and the good add important nuances to what I have tried to argue about secularism so far.

5.4 Stiegler's Notion of the Hyper-Industrial Society

Bernard Stiegler's notion of the hyper-industrial society is a valuable tool for understanding what is happening to us now (Stiegler 2004, 2011). Against the myth of the post-industrial society according to which we would all have more leisure time as the economy shifts from manufacturing to services, Stiegler argues that we have less leisure time than ever, notwithstanding the already mentioned holiday and retirement industries. The main reason for this is that on the basis of an over-productive economy that derives its legitimacy from the myth of an ontological scarcity that must continually be kept at bay, our attention is constantly solicited by advertising and the media to induce us to buy or consume concrete objects and what Stiegler calls industrial temporal objects. These are objects that only exist for as long as they are performed, broadcast and observed. It includes music, programs, sports events, the news, films, books and so on. All of these industrial temporal objects depend for their consumption on an observer's captivated attention, and our

attention is constantly solicited by appealing to our longing for a higher ideal with expressions such as 'the time of your life,' 'your destiny,' 'life without limits,' 'be the best that you can,' and so on. These are all lofty expressions that have been stripped of their meaning through constant usage and betrayal by the leisure industry. For in fact, should the promise of the fulfilment of our longing be kept, then the rationale for our perpetual consumption of these objects will disappear, and with that an entire economy and power structure. To demonstrate this diabolic betrayal of faith and the crisis of credibility that it systematically produces, Stiegler often quotes a former French television executive who remarked on the mission of his industry in 2003: 'We sell available brain time to Coca-Cola' (Stiegler 2005: 85).

If it is correct to pose that human beings cannot live without the actualization of a higher ideal, reality and truth, then a social order that reduces us to our basest material needs and desires, that smirks about reality and glorifies fictions of all kinds, including 'lifestyle,' and that only concedes the existence of a positivist, factual truth, cannot last. Of course, the list of previous thinkers, artists and writers who took this position, more or less coming down to the famous wait-for-the-system-to-collapse-under-its-internal-contradictions is long, and if the remarkable resilience of the higher caste of economic liberalism, namely the financial capitalists that brought the so-called global financial crisis upon us, is anything to go by, it might be advisable to go into action, instead of waiting for the system to collapse under its internal contradictions. For this is a polished excuse for doing nothing. What can we do?

5.5 Life Beyond the Secular and the Religious?

In trying to answer the question of what we can do I propose that Paul Valéry, writing on the eve of the Second World War, provides us with a possible point of departure, a basis of an overlapping consensus between secular and religious people concerned about the state of Western societies today: 'It is a sign of the times, and not a very good sign, that it is today necessary—and not only necessary but even urgent—to interest minds in the fate of the Spirit, that is, in their own fate' (cited in Stiegler 2010: 22).

Notwithstanding the wide diversity of background assumptions and beliefs that people in the West today subscribe to, what Valéry refers to as 'the fate of the Spirit' is a motif that many contemporary secular or religious thinkers seem to be concerned about. If this is correct, I propose that what is now needed is a strategic alliance dedicated to a new politics of the spirit. Arguably, both those of us for whom the Enlightenment ideal of general cultural elevation is important, as well as those of us for whom a religious ideal of spiritual elevation is important, can ascribe to such an alliance. For the former, art and education may be the main vehicles of elevation, while for the latter, religious practice may be the main vehicle. In the medieval social order art, education and religious practice were integrated and there is no reason why a similar logic may not be pursued by learning from the past in the service of the present and indeed the future.

On a pragmatic note, it would not be surprising that such an alliance would generate persistent internal tension and disagreements. But that is arguably the nature of any healthy political movement and no reason to frighten us off. There is another pragmatic reason for such an alliance: arguably it would achieve more than any particular group attempting to impose its view on the social order. For Paul Valéry the blows dealt to the spirit came from the two great industrial wars. But for us, whether we are religious or secular, it would seem that secular modernity's succession of the medieval social order has been so challenging that neither secular or religious moderns can today unproblematically claim a popular legitimacy on which a new politics may be constructed. Perhaps the relative lack of popular legitimacy that both the secular and the religious struggle with today is in the first instance the result of the on-going rivalry from which they were born.

What would such a new politics of the spirit aim for? Drawing on the three motifs of the post-medieval fate of reality, time and institutions I propose the following with regards to these three motifs. First, for such a new politics the affirmation of a realist ontology is essential. Second, the affirmation of a liturgically mediated time is necessary. Third, our institutions should be steered in such a way that the balance between spirit and matter is restored.

As for a realist ontology, it would seem that one of the important lessons that may be learned from the post-Ockhamist skepticism about our ability to know reality as it is and align our practice with it, is that one inevitably ends up with competing constructivist projects without recourse to a norm by which they may be judged. From a Christian perspective a realist ontology would guide us to a politics where the true, the good and the beautiful is strived for, while from a Buddhist perspective such an ontology would guide us to a politics where justice and compassion are strived for on the basis of the interdependence of humans beings with each other and with all of reality.

When it comes to time, a liturgically mediated sense of time would not only relativise the overly quantitative nature of contemporary time, but also the persistent sense of scarcity that it engenders. It is helpful to bear in mind that the root meaning of liturgy in Greek is 'public acts of citizenship,' which we moderns may extend to include all rituals and practices that affirm our bond with each other as members of a political community on the basis of a consistent balance between spirit and matter. To give a small concrete example from the Zen-Buddhist tradition: when a monk was once asked what is permitted and what not, he answered that everything is permitted as long as it does not interfere with one's daily practice of mindful meditation. This example suggests that time is partly the function of right action, thought and speech, which are in turn based on a mindful alliance with reality as it is here and now, which is of course a lifelong process.

As for institutions, it is of crucial importance that the economic liberal regime must be curtailed. Denouncing this regime on the basis of how it betrays justice, fairness and equality is important, but not enough. In the first place public institutions must be run in such a way that the spirit and its cultivation are central. This has particularly important implications for institutions of education, which is perhaps the one social activity where the public elevation of the spirit is practiced as a

genuine common good. Arguably the near-complete neglect of contemplative practices and their transmission in our educational institutions is a key reason why these institutions are today so easily manipulated to serve the ends of quantification and calculability. Teaching students without offering them instruction in contemplative practices is to reduce knowledge to a mere cognitive activity instead of integrating it with the building of character.

In closing and in dialogue with a secular philosopher like Bernard Stiegler, I propose that the single most important contemporary socio-political terrain is that of our collective attention. There is perhaps no greater and more subversive political act today than the restoration of attention, which is the precondition not only of right action, thought and speech, but of participation in the social order and of the recognition of others. The regular cultivation of attention within a tradition is the precondition of attending to the world, here and now. For, as Dōgen writes: 'A person's duty always lies in the present' (Dōgen, cited in Kim: 153). Attending to the present is not only to receive what is presented to us from moment to moment, but to present the primordial response to That from which all presents are presented in both senses of the word: that of dynamic reality and that of the gift.

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Part III

Radical Orthodoxy

Counter-Secularism: Parsing the Theological Cure for Our Modern Malady

6

Dylan Nickelson

6.1 Introduction

Today, there is no shortage of political philosophers and social theorists who think that the world is in crisis. Secular humanists such as AC Grayling (2007, 2009) argue that liberal democracy is self-destructing under the threat of terrorism as Western societies legislate away their hard-won liberties. Paleo-conservatives or political skeptics such as John Gray (2007) argue that the world is rapidly deteriorating thanks to the revival of eschatological or End-Time thinking. The political Left—the traditional bastion of ideas of human progress—is dead, Gray argues, but their ideas remain very much alive in the New Right: neo-conservatives are now intent on bringing the world to a higher state of being known as democracy. Iraq is the result. Authors such as John Milbank and William T Cavanaugh of the Radical Orthodoxy movement in theology argue that God is dead, we have killed Him, and modernity is the worse for it. Modern society, they contend, though modeled on Christian institutions and thought patterns, lacks proper belief in a transcendent being. We now attempt to answer questions about ethics, politics and society by reference to nature and science. The wars of the twentieth century were one consequence.

Despite the fact that homicidal violence has declined dramatically since the sixteenth century (Eisner 2001), and subsequent work dispelling the myth that the twentieth century was the bloodiest in our history (Pinker 2007), diagnoses of a modern malady are common. Overt pessimists like John Gray are not alone in thinking that contemporary society is in a bad way. Nevertheless, the arguments of the Radical Orthodoxy movement are of particular interest. The movement's representatives employ a very specific form of argument to attribute the current state of society to

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the absence of religion from public life. The argument contains two components: one descriptive, one prescriptive (Milbank et al. 1999a; Cavanaugh 1999; Milbank 1990). In its generic form, the argument proceeds as follows.[1]

Descriptive component: The modern world is in a state of moral decay, evidenced by the nihilism that pervades contemporary society. This state of decay is a result of secularization—the gradual removal of God from the public sphere. Nevertheless, this modern transition of the last 400 years, whereby religion, once a publicly legitimate practice, became one ideology among many and one relegated to the private realm, has not been complete. Many of our modern public institutions and practices are modeled on pre-modern, theological institutions and practices. For example, the modern State's monopoly on violence replicates God's omnipotence, while participation in the body politic through democratic politics replicates participation in Christ's holy body through the Eucharist. As such, these modern variants are partially secularized theological institutions and practices. Stripped of their religious content (causing nihilism) but retaining their religious form, these public institutions and practices have ceased to function properly. Thus rendered dysfunctional, they have led to such horrors as the twentieth century.

Prescriptive component: We need to restore the religious elements to modern public institutions and practices if we wish to cure the modern world of its ills. This does not mean returning to the pre-modern variants of contemporary institutions. Rather, if the modern world wishes to remedy its ills it needs to recognize that it is indebted to a rich theological heritage—the very heritage on which many of the modern and ostensibly secular public institutions are based. Instead of fearing public religion, we need to recognize that returning God to the public sphere may provide the cure to our current woes.

The descriptive component of this argument agrees in large part with the secularization thesis, which in its various forms holds that modernity is defined by its attempt to remove religion from public life (Bell 1977; Wilson 1982; Chaves 1994; Sommerville 1998; Norris and Inglehart 2004).[2] What separates the Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of history from the secularization thesis, however, is the former's claim that this process has been unsuccessful. The movement gives two reasons for this lack of success. Firstly, as mentioned, religion is so ingrained in the modern institutional models and practices that it is impossible to strip them entirely of their religious elements. Therefore, as a piece of social engineering with the aim of banishing religion from the public sphere, secularization has failed (and cannot but fail). Secondly, this attempt to rid public life of religion has left

[1] A certain degree of rigor is lost by discussing these thinkers as a group. One inevitably glosses over the nuances in each member's ideas; however, members of the movement, I contend, share a common analysis of the history of ideas, a common diagnosis of the state of the contemporary world as one of malady, and a common prescription for how to remedy those ills.

[2] Secularization as a social-institutional phenomenon does not require a reduction of the religiosity of the individuals who make up that society (Chaves 1994: 752; Wilson 1982: 150; Bell 1977: 427; Sommerville 1998; Norris and Inglehart 2004).

modern society in a sorry state. If there is a dominant ideology now, that ideology is nihilism—a nebulous ideology defined at once by a focus on the immanent, natural world, a fixation on viewing that world objectively, and the lack of any true foundation or prior justification for maintaining that focus or seeking such a viewpoint (Milbank 1999: 26–32; Hemming 1999). The theological void left by the attempted secularization of public life was filled during the twentieth century by inferior political imitations of Christ and God. The Radical Orthodoxy movement asks: How can a process with two world wars to its name be regarded as a success? It cannot, they claim. Via the prescriptive, counter-secularist,[3] component of their arguments the movement offers its own solution to these modern failures: restore God to His rightful place.

This is the form of argument adopted by the Radical Orthodoxy movement in theology (Milbank et al. 1999a; Milbank 1990). As I shall contend, however, the prescription proposed by the movement is not the only one that follows from their arguments. If relegating religion to the private sphere while retaining the religious scaffolding of our public institutions has caused our modern ills, then just as restoring God to His rightful public place may offer a cure, so may removing the religious scaffolding that causes these institutions and practices to malfunction in God's public absence. Importantly, however, choosing this alternative solution would involve a leap into the unknown.

6.2 Diagnosing the Cause of Our Malady: Modern History as Conceptual Replication and Conceptual Perversion

According to the Radical Orthodoxy movement, Godless modern Western society is dysfunctional following secularization. Though modelled on thought patterns and practices inherited from its theological tradition, it lacks a proper public belief in God. These two elements of their analyses of modern society—its theological heritage and its lack of proper belief in God—combine to produce the conditional proposition or hypothesis that if Christian concepts or practices are present but integral components of that tradition are missing, then any institutions modelled on those concepts or practices will malfunction. This position comprises the Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of the current state of Western societies, and can be can represented as following:

C = Theological/Christian concepts and practices
G = Belief in/participation in a transcendent being
M = Social malfunction

$$(C \,\&\, \sim G) \rightarrow M \tag{6.1}$$

[3] John Milbank hints that his position is 'counter-modern' (1990: 6); however, it is the secularity of modernity that Milbank disputes. As such, I refer to his argument as 'counter-secularist'.

The edited volume *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* was the movement's first collaborative public statement of this position (Milbank et al. 1999a).[4] The volume sets out the movement's central claims about modernity and the state of theology in modern society. Emerging from their analyses of history, these include the claims that:

- secular modernity is the creation of a perverse theology;
- the opposition of reason to revelation is a modern corruption;
- all thought which brackets out God is ultimately nihilistic; and,
- the material and temporal realms of bodies, sex, art and sociality, which modernity claims to value, can truly be upheld only by acknowledgement of their participation in the transcendent. (Milbank et al. 1999a: ii)

These four claims challenge both the idea of modern secularity (the degree of secularization) and of secularism as an ideology (the doctrine that reasons for political action, laws and beliefs should be given without invoking God or religion). The volume's polemical introduction captures the reasoning behind these claims:

> For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment. (Milbank et al. 1999b: 1)

But, they add,

> …today the logic of secularism is imploding. Speaking with a microphoned and digitally simulated voice, it proclaims—uneasily, or else increasingly unashamedly—its own lack of values and lack of meaning. In its cyberspaces and themeparks it promotes a materialism which is soulless, aggressive, nonchalant and nihilistic. (Milbank et al. 1999b: 1)

On this analysis, modernity has been a process of relegating theology and religion to the politically impotent private sphere. Thus secularized, the modern world is soulless, aggressive, nonchalant and nihilistic—regrettable states indeed.

Behind the rhetoric lies a very specific theory of history—a view best summarized by William T Cavanaugh in his chapter from the same volume. Cavanaugh urges:

> It is not enough to see what is called 'secularization' as the progressive stripping away of the sacred from some profane remainder. What we have instead is the substitution of one *mythos* of salvation for another; what is more, the successor *mythos* has triumphed to a great extent because it mimics its predecessor. (1999: 190)

Cavanaugh is here claiming that some important element of pre-modernity is *replicated* in secularized modernity. Furthermore, the presence of that element in secularized modernity is the reason why secularism, as the body of myths associated with secularization, has triumphed.[5] Cavanaugh cites John Milbank's (1990) *Theology and Social Theory* as the inspiration for his position (1999: fn.33), a work

[4] For critical introductions to the Radical Orthodoxy movement, see Shakespeare (2000, 2007) and Smith (2004).

[5] Some sociological research disputes this association between secularization as a social-institutional process of removing religion from the public sphere and secularism as the ideology that defends the process. Secularization as a social-institutional phenomena does not entail the successful uptake of secularism, they argue (e.g. Chaves 1994). The high levels of individual religiosity in the US—a secular state—are the most obvious example.

in which Milbank's stated aim is 'to make it apparent that "scientific" social theories are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise' (1990: 3). For Milbank, the secularization thesis proposes to be a scientific theory of modern history when really it is a theology masquerading as science or anti-theology. Although stripped of religious content, the modern world has not been fully 'desacralised' (Milbank 1990: 9). A modern, secular body of myths has simply replaced the pre-modern theological body of myths. Appearing to moderns—secularist or otherwise—as the removal of metaphysical superfluities from contemporary life, secularization is actually the process of substituting secular mythology for theological mythology.

6.2.1 Secularization as the Replication and Perversion of Soteriology

Cavanaugh's work provides the clearest example of the political implications of the movement's argument (1995, 1999, 2001a, b, 2004, 2005, 2009). For example, Cavanaugh's most recent work argues that there is no specifically religious propensity for violence (2009: 20). Some religious believers may commit violence, but not all do. Religious believers can be violent, but they are not violent necessarily. Likewise, some adherents of secular ideologies may be violent, but not all are. Therefore, contrary to what some authors have argued (e.g. Hick 1987), there is no religious essence that makes believers particularly likely to commit violence. If there is something that drives religious believers to violence, it is not their religiosity.

This challenge to the 'myth of religious violence' builds on Cavanaugh's earlier challenges to the legitimacy of the modern State's monopoly on violence (1995). Drawing on the work of Charles Tilly (1985), Cavanaugh argues that the Wars of Religion were rather the Wars to Establish State Dominance. The modern separation of Church and State, far from an attempt to quell sectarian violence, developed as part of the attempt to establish the political dominance of the modern State. The separation had a political purpose, but not the one commonly attributed to it today. Rendering religious discourse illegitimate in the public sphere helped the powerful families of the early-modern period—the progenitors of the modern states—to secure their monopoly on legitimate violence within a given territory. In the process, they co-opted the social models that were on hand; namely, those of the Church. Political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean Bodin and, later, John Locke then offered, usually *post-hoc*, rationalizations for the new political arrangements. In reality, however, these new political forms were established through acts of physical violence (Cavanaugh 1995: 398–407).

The theological models co-opted by modern states remain embedded in contemporary political institutions and practices, Cavanaugh argues. To cite Cavanaugh's favorite example, the 'secular' ritual of participation in the body politic has replaced the original Eucharist—a salvation ritual enacted as participation in the body of Christ. Participation in the 'transcendent' body of the State now saves us from ourselves. Hence, Cavanaugh claims that pre-modern, Christian thought and modern, secular thought 'both agree that salvation is essentially a matter of

making peace among competing individuals' (1999: 187). For Cavanaugh, Christian thought and modern State theory both attempt to reunite individuals and reintegrate them into some larger body following the fall. Conceptually, the 'Christian *mythos* and the [modern] state *mythos* seem to coincide' (Cavanaugh 1999: 187). Furthermore, as Cavanaugh claims elsewhere, the modern 'supposedly "secular" world invents its own liturgies, with pretensions every bit as "sacred" as those of the Christian liturgy' (2005: 25). Modern, secularized political concepts and practices replicate Pre-modern, Christian concepts and practices.

This replication of conceptual content is historically significant for Cavanaugh. Thinking back to his Milbank-inspired position on the substitution of secular myth for theological myth, it is precisely because the secular body of myths mimicked its theological predecessor that it triumphed (1999: 190). The secularized soteriology of participation in the modern body politic succeeds because it replicates the soteriology of the Eucharist. Not only is the theological model of salvation through participation in a transcendent body common to pre-modern and modern societies, the success of the modern State—its near-unquestioned legitimacy—is due to the replication of that practice.

Precisely at this point Cavanaugh's challenge to the secularity of the modern State, and his attempt to undermine the legitimacy of its monopoly on violence, risks glossing over significant differences between the modern and pre-modern soteriologies. For example, when discussing the liturgical practices of the Church and the modern State Cavanaugh draws on the etymological roots of 'liturgy' to claim that liturgy 'is simply "an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals"' (2005: 25). If challenging the secularity of the modern State requires him to redefine theories of salvation to include the modern, secular variant then the terms 'liturgy' and, by implication, 'soteriology' become so all-encompassing as to lose their religious meaning.[6] However, the identification of *conceptual replication* forms only half of Cavanaugh's historical analysis. He circumvents the potential equivocation by introducing the notion of *conceptual perversion*.[7] While claiming a significant similarity between the theological and secularized soteriologies, he also claims a significant difference between them. The latter are, for him, 'ersatz substitutes' (2005: 29).

Further to the notion of conceptual replication, Cavanaugh claims, as does the Radical Orthodoxy movement in general, that we are suffering a modern malady. This claim is premised on the idea that there is some element absent from modernity

[6] This is precisely AC Grayling's response to John Gray's argument that modern politics is an episode in the history of religion. Gray blurs and confuses just when important distinctions are required (Grayling 2009: 185). In essence, categorising almost every institution and system of thought that comes after Christianity as 'Christian' is to commit a fallacy of equivocation. It is precisely the differences between the various Christian descendants and their progenitors that matter, not what they share.

[7] Cavanaugh never identifies these two notions as conceptual replication and conceptual perversion; however, without them he cannot simultaneously and consistently believe in modernity's degeneration and its only-apparent secularity.

that was present in pre-modernity. The absence of this once-present thing is the cause of modern degeneration. However, this now-absent element cannot be the same one used to claim that modern institutions and practices replicate Christian institutions and practices. That element is only historically significant *because* it is present in both pre-modern and modern societies. Consequently, Cavanaugh cannot then claim that that element—soteriology, in the example given—is now absent. Accordingly, he claims that the variable in question is not soteriology per se but participation *in Christ* as a particular version of soteriology. Participation in Christ is for Cavanaugh the only proper soteriological practice. Hence, he claims, State soteriology 'has tried to unify humankind by incorporation into a body *of a perverse sort*' (1999: 193, italics added). The claim is clear: although modern society shares the theological concept of salvation through participation in a higher-order body, the modern variant is perverse. Some important characteristic, present in the pre-modern version, is absent from the modern version. That characteristic is participation in 'God's very Body' (Cavanaugh 1999: 193). The modern, perverse body is the State, whereas the pre-modern, legitimate body is Christ. The modern perversion of this sacred Christian practice sees participation in the 'body' of the State replacing participation in the body of Christ (Cavanaugh 2005). For Cavanaugh, this modern perversion is captured by the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau (1995).

It is now obvious that Cavanaugh is claiming the significance to two 'variables': Christian practices and participation in Christ. One version of the Eucharist is present in modern society; another version was present in pre-modern society. But participation *in Christ* was only present in the pre-modern version. For Cavanaugh, this shift from participation in the body of Christ—the true Eucharist—to participation in the body politic—the perverted Eucharist—constitutes 'secularization'. Secularization is then *the process of removing Christ from the Eucharist while retaining the concept and the practice*. Secularization thus creates a void where Christ once was while retaining important aspects of Christianity.

6.2.2 The Radical Orthodoxy Diagnosis Implies a Theory of a Functional Society

By some accounts, even if individual religiosity is not in decline, the authority of religion over believers is (Chaves 1994). If so, then God may be sufficiently absent to warrant the Radical Orthodoxy claim that modern versions of belief are perversions, especially when compared to the belief of the pre-modern era when religion was understood as a way of life and not seen as one aspect of life separable from others (Cavanaugh 2009: Chap. 2). Nevertheless, the claim that the absence of God in contemporary society is causing our modern woes implies that at some previous time in history society functioned properly because it was both modelled on Christian theology and possessed a proper belief in God. As an hypothesis about history, the proposition requires its own historical evidence. However, despite the evidence for or against it, the hypothesis is inescapably and

undeniably implied by the prior claim that God's absence is causing our modern ills. The Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of history therefore implies a theory of a functional society:

$$(C \,\&\, G) \rightarrow \sim M \tag{6.2}$$

The notion of a time in which we possessed a proper understanding of humankind's relationship with God therefore implies (as stated in (6.2), above) that the presence of Christian concepts and practices in their proper form will produce a functional society. The initial Radical Orthodoxy diagnosis can now be combined with this theory of a functional society to reveal in full the Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of history:

$$((C\& \sim G) \rightarrow M) \,\&\, ((C \,\&\, G) \rightarrow \sim M) \tag{6.3}$$

If a society modelled on Christian concepts and practices lacks a proper belief in God (i.e. perverts those concepts or participates in those practices in a perverse way), then it malfunctions. But if a society modelled on Christian concepts and practices has an appropriate belief in God, then it functions well.

6.3 Curing Our Modern Malady: Restoring Christ to the Public Sphere

The Radical Orthodoxy analysis of the West's history contains within it their solution to our modern malady. To cure the modern West's dysfunction, we must restore God to His rightful place within society:

$$\therefore (C \,\&\, G) \rightarrow \sim M \tag{6.4}$$

The statement 'restore God to His rightful place' captures the Radical Orthodoxy idea that some variable, integral to the proper functioning of institutions and practices that are modelled on theological concepts, is absent from the modern, secularized public institutions and practices. The position constitutes the movement's prescribed cure for our modern ills.

Importantly for Cavanaugh's analysis of modern society, makeshift Gods in the form of political leaders too easily fill the void left by God's absence (2005: 28). Instead of participating in God through the Eucharist, modern societies turn to real but pseudo-transcendent beings who offer salvation through participation in the political body. So long as we retain Christian thought patterns and models we need some transcendent 'thing' to fill them out, Cavanaugh argues. Our attempts to fill this void with anything short of God are doomed to fail, he adds. Hence, what we truly need today is to return Christ to the public sphere. As Cavanaugh claims,

'the Church needs to reclaim the political nature of its faith if it is to resist the violence of the State' (1995: 409).

Christian anarchism is Cavanaugh's prescribed solution. By revising early-modern European history he hopes to undermine the common but, he contends, mistaken idea that the development of the modern, secular State served to civilise sectarian violence in Europe during the sixteenth century. He argues: relegating religion to the private sphere was necessary for the State to gain dominance, thus any attempt to revive religion while simultaneously recognising the State's legitimacy is doomed to fail (premised as that legitimacy is on rendering religion publicly impotent). Although he hesitates to state it as such in his more recent work (2009: 14), a caution absent from his earlier work (1995: 409), any attempt to solve our modern malady by restoring God and theology to the public sphere, therefore, must challenge the authority of the State. The State holds a monopoly on violence. In Cavanaugh's view this monopoly extends to a monopoly to determine what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate public discourse, because the renderings 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' are backed by the Sword of State. Anybody who wishes to propose an alternative discourse as legitimate in the public sphere, as Radical Orthodoxy does concerning theological discourse, therefore challenges the State's monopoly on violence. Those who wish to challenge what constitutes legitimate public discourse are, therefore, engaged in a zero-sum game with the State. Only one institution can hold a monopoly. This is the sense in which Cavanaugh advocates Christian anarchism as a theo-political cure for our modern ills.

To recap, Cavanaugh argues that modern politics replicates the pre-modern, Christian theory of salvation through participation in something transcendent or higher-order. Cavanaugh's move risks rendering vacuous the concept of soteriology. Using the term so broadly as to include any form of participation in a larger body strips the idea of its specifically theological meaning. Here Cavanaugh risks glossing over what may be very significant differences between the two theories of salvation and the practices associated with them. If the difference between these aspects are significant but the differences are ignored in an attempt to establish the significance of the theological origins of modernity, then his historical analysis deconstructs secularism by debasing Christian theology. Fortunately, Cavanaugh introduces the idea of perversion to his analysis of history, thus maintaining consistency. Conceptual perversion distinguishes the legitimate, pre-modern theological soteriology from the modern variant. According to his theory of history, secularization is just such a process of replacing proper, theological concepts and practices with perverse variants—thus creating a void where Christ once was. Modern states have filled this void with gods of a perverse sort: political leaders. The political violence of the twentieth century was the result. To rectify this problem, Cavanaugh argues, we must restore a proper belief in God to the theological models that malfunction in His absence. The ersatz substitute institution which is the modern State and its associated political practice of participation in the State via secular democratic politics must be replaced by politics as a way of life—a politics that requires recognizing the public legitimacy of theological beliefs.

6.3.1 Getting a Second Opinion

Cavanaugh represents a specific instance of the Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of the West's history and proposed solution to our modern ills. However, Cavanaugh's analysis, as a paradigm case of the movement in general, provides more than one possible solution to our modern woes. His historical analysis can be rearranged into the logically equivalent statement:

$$C \rightarrow ((G \rightarrow \sim M) \,\&\, (\sim G \rightarrow M)) \tag{6.5}$$

Restating his analysis in this new form, any society in which Christian concepts form an antecedent condition will function in the presence of a proper belief in God and malfunction in the absence of such a belief. Reconfiguring the Radical Orthodoxy analysis of history shows that the presence of Christian concepts is the clear antecedent to both a functional and dysfunctional society.

It would be very easy to conclude, based on the arguments presented by the Radical Orthodoxy movement, that 'the absence of Christ is the cause of our modern malady'; but this conclusion is only a half-truth. The true diagnosis to take from their argument is that 'the absence of Christ in the presence of Christian institutions and practices is the cause of our modern malady'. Cavanaugh, as the paradigm case, is in fact claiming that our modern malady is a result of possessing Christian institutions and practices which lack Christ (2005: 28). When the full claim is made clear, it becomes obvious that returning Christ to the public sphere is not the only possible cure for our modern malady. As well as bringing Christ back, we may be able to remove the remaining Christian aspects of modernity. That is, because it is strictly an absence of Christ in the presence of Christian institutions and practices causing our modern malady, removing those institutions and practices could provide an alternative cure. Once we remove the perverted Eucharist, Christ may no longer be a 'causal variable'. If we rid modern society of the institutions and practices that create a void, there may no longer be a void to fill, no need to bring Christ back in, and no inevitable demise of attempts to create a healthy society in Christ's absence. This is one alternative available to those of us who have not lost faith in modernity but who also realize that modernity has its failings.

Nevertheless, this possible alternative cure shows that, according the Radical Orthodoxy movement's own arguments, returning theology to the public sphere may be unnecessary. If a lack of belief (nihilism) is causing our sickness, it is only because that lack of belief exists in conjunction with a model that fails in the absence of belief. Remove the model and you may cure the malady. Accordingly, defenders of modernity can write a new and more complete diagnosis: 'The patient is suffering a lack of belief *within a society modeled on theological ideas*. There are two treatments available: reinstate God and a belief in Him, or create a society based on non-theological ideas'. In sum, one solution is anarchist Christianity, but another may be anarchism *simpliciter*.

6.3.2 Problems with the Alternative Medicine

So although one solution is to restore God to His rightful place in public discourse, we might also solve our modern ills by removing the Christian concepts that malfunction in God's public absence:

$$\sim C \vee (C \rightarrow ((G \rightarrow \sim M) \,\&\, (\sim G \rightarrow M))) \tag{6.'3}$$

$$\therefore \sim C \rightarrow \sim M \tag{6.'4}$$

This second solution, however, is epistemically and politically more radical than the solution offered by Radical Orthodoxy. One cannot infer from the Radical Orthodoxy movement's analysis of history that removing the Christian concepts and practices that malfunction in God's absence *will* solve our modern ills. That inference would overreach the epistemic warrant of the movement's analysis of history. Radical Orthodoxy only goes so far as to make claims about the function or malfunction of society *in the presence of Christian concepts and practices*. To claim that one could know that our modern ills would be cured by ridding modern society of those Christian concepts and practices would, therefore, go beyond the scope of Radical Orthodoxy's historical claims. Indeed, to infer from the movement's historical claims that ridding modern society of the Christian concepts and practices that malfunction in God's public absence would cure our modern woes is to deny the antecedent of their claims. Such an inference would, therefore, be fallacious. If we recognize the Radical Orthodoxast's claim that the origins of secularism are theological and that this fact matters, then any new thought patterns or models that we employ to solve our modern malady cannot be based on secular thought or ideas because secular thought and ideas are truly theological. That is, *if* we accept that the theological origins of modernity matter, we thereby accept that secularism must be (cannot not be) theology. Therefore, any new thought pattern employed would have to be completely original or taken from somewhere other than secularism.[8] As such, the alternative solution is less sound than that proposed by the Radical Orthodoxy movement. It may solve our modern ills, but based as the solution is on no historical evidence (whereas the Radial Orthodoxy solution is based on its analysis of history) to pursue it would require a leap of faith into the unknown:

$$\therefore \sim C \tag{6.'4}$$

[8] This may also mean that any secular proposal to do away with theological thought patterns is a performative contradiction. That is, if proposing non-theological thought patterns contradicts the non-contingent presuppositions of theological (and therefore secular) thought, then any (∼C) secularist proposal falls down, i.e. ((∼C & ∼G) → ∼M) and/or ((∼C & G) → ∼M) But I don't know whether or not proposing non-theological thought patters contradicts the non-contingent presuppositions of theology.

I do not propose this option as a serious alternative solution to our modern ills. By drawing attention to this alternative solution to the Radical Orthodoxy movement's arguments, however, I merely hope to show that their proposed solution is not as radical as they claim it to be. For example, Cavanaugh labels himself a Christian anarchist (1999: 182), but he chooses the former solution, advocating the restoration of God to His rightful place *within* the existing politico-theological structures. His solution is, therefore, primarily Christian. A Christian anarchist, properly speaking (that is, an anarchist who is also a Christian), would choose the epistemically and politically more radical solution over Radical Orthodoxy's stated position. The alternative solution undermines modern rules of inference and all existing political hierarchies—perverse or otherwise. Cavanaugh's failure to choose the alternative cure, I argue, makes him an anarchist Christian, not a Christian anarchist. His position, reflecting the mission statement of Radical Orthodoxy (Milbank et al. 1999a: 2–3), is reminiscent of the Latin derivative 'radicle' as used in botany to describe an embryonic root more than 'radical' as one would associate that word with a political position. Cavanaugh in particular, and the Radical Orthodoxy movement as a whole, look to the theological origins of modernity, to modernity's religious roots, for sources of theological inspiration—the inspirational figures whose contribution to public discourse was lost once the modern State achieved its monopoly on violence and rendered all religiously motivated thought illegitimate public-speak. But in seeking out these theological roots, the Radical Orthodoxy movement is more nostalgic than radical.

The movement may object (really assert (Shakespeare 2000: 166)) that it is never possible to have a healthy society *without* a belief in God. Think back to their third claim, as stated above: 'all thought which brackets out God is ultimately nihilistic' (Milbank et al. 1999b: ii). Given the analysis just presented, I do not know how to respond to this objection. However, some ostensibly secular thinkers agree with the objection and turn to society itself as a substitute transcendent being. What is 'society' if not a transcendent entity? As Cavanaugh (2005: 26–27) also argues, society is often the reason invoked for certain courses of action—war, self-sacrifice, other-regarding action—yet it is not quite 'real'. But for those people who are so inclined, secular society has its transcendent being—something bigger than any one of us, something that we can believe in and something we can readily invoke as the reason for action.

In a sense, this is the true secularist response *if we accept the counter-secularist claim that secularism is really theology presenting itself as non-theology*. In this case, the inherent (inherent because contained within the secularist roots) and thus inescapable need for a transcendent being to 'fill out the model' manifests as God-substitution. This is the very reason why Cavanaugh sympathizes with Thomas Hobbes (1999: 189). Hobbes recognizes the impossibility of reintegrating individuals into a social body in the absence of belief in—and participation in—a transcendent being. So although Hobbes places a Head of State in God's place, at least his political philosophy includes a soteriology or doctrine of salvation. But Cavanaugh here treads a very fine line indeed, between an authentic and an instrumental approach to religion. Here the task of treating our modern malady may

give way to the simple attempt to reinstate God to his or her rightful place. This tension in the counter-secularist project also appears in discussions about countering the modern myth of science-and-reason-as-truth with a new (although radically orthodox) myth (Milbank 1990; Gillespie 2008).

6.4 Conclusion

The counter-secularist shares with the secularist the view that history contains some form of meaningful change. For the secularist, modernity is progress to a higher state of being; for the counter-secularist, modernity is 'progress' to a perverted state of being. In this sense both the secularist and the counter-secularist give a history of philosophy *and* a philosophy (or a theology) of history—they both present accounts of the changes within history, but also fit these within a larger narrative of historical development or change. One could question the legitimacy of philosophies of history (Butterfield 1931), but I did not do that here. Similarly, one could have argued that the Radical Orthodoxy movement has mis-diagnosed our modern malady. Their claim that sickness is inevitable in societies that replicate theological thought patterns but which lack proper belief in God, like all hypotheses or conditional claims, is proven false if one can show that the cause or antecedent obtains but not the effect or consequent. In this case, the absence of a modern malady in a society that participates in a perverted mode of belief falsifies the Radical Orthodoxy claim. Recent work in criminology goes some way to providing falsifying evidence (Eisner 2001; Pinker 2011).

Nevertheless, in order to establish that the theological origins of modernity matter, the counter-secularist must, on the one hand, demonstrate that there is both a common link between the past and the present—pre-modernity and modernity—and, on the other hand, demonstrate that there is some point of difference between pre-modern society and modern society. Together, this similarity and this difference legitimate the counter-secularist claim. As we have seen, for the claim to hold the counter-secularist must employ the idea that our modern malady is the result of a *perversion* of past theology. But this model of replication and perversion leaves counter-secularists with a two-part diagnosis: 'The patient is suffering a lack of proper belief within a society modeled on theological ideas'. And so long as they are locked into this two-part diagnosis the possibility exists that if we strip modern society of its theological thought patterns a lack of belief (nihilism) may no longer be a problem, and health may be restored. However, that 'may' is doing a lot of work.

Looking back to the various philosophers mentioned earlier (John Gray, AC Grayling and the Radical Orthodoxy movement), with the same negative prognosis coming from such varied sources, each with their own diagnosis of the problem, you could be excused for thinking our modern malady is a figment of the doctors' imaginations. Our malady may very well be a convenient fiction employed by philosophers to get us to seek treatment. What would they do if we were well? If so, then maybe our problem is not an absence (Radical Orthodoxy) or excess (Gray) of

belief, or self-destructing liberalism (Grayling). Maybe our problem is exposure to philosophers who suffer the intellectual equivalent of Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome. These philosophers may derive their very meaning from perpetuating the idea that we moderns are ill. Maybe, in the relationship between political philosophers and the broader public, if one party needs the other it is political philosophers who need us, not the other way around. Such speculation aside, this chapter has focused on evaluating the Radical Orthodoxy account of the history of modernity. It has demonstrated that the solution they offer for our modern malady—returning God to public life—is not the only conclusion to draw from their premises. The conditions under which the Radical Orthodoxy movement's arguments hold up are the very conditions creating the possibility of two treatments: reinstate God and a belief in Him, or create a society based on non-theological ideas.

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‘In the Beginning Was … the Story’? On Secularization, Narrative, and Nominalisms

7

Matthew Sharpe

> For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet flows speech from his mouth. For though a man have sorrow and grief in his newly-troubled soul and live in dread because his heart is distressed, yet, when a singer, the servant of the Muses, chants the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods who inhabit Olympus, at once he forgets his heaviness and remembers not his sorrows at all; but the gifts of the goddesses soon turn him away from these. Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 90–103

7.1 Introduction: On Secularization, Narrative, and Nominalisms

This paper, appropriately enough, responds to a paradox. The paradox can be introduced by considering the reception of John Milbank’s work, and principally his magisterial 1990 *Theology and Social Theory*. Milbank is the foremost representative of the theological ‘sensibility’ or movement known as radical orthodoxy. Milbank has been described as the most influential theologian of his generation, and certainly he has generated amongst the most critical interest. Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*, and his later work, promotes a distinctly Christian, seemingly Thomistic or Augustinian, vision of a reconciled society, characterised by a ‘sociality of harmonious difference’ (Milbank 1993: 5), modelled on the tri-unity of the Christian God, and founded on ontology of primordial peace (Cheetham 2006: 85; Milbank 1993: 6). This ontology is opposed to the species of neoNietzschean perspectivism Milbank observes to be hegemonic elsewhere in the liberal humanities,

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and which he correctly sees are widely committed to positing forms of primordial *polemos* or violence.[1]

Milbank's position in *Theology and Social Theory* (hereafter, *TST*), and its presentation, has many evident virtues. The argument of *TST* is characterised by remarkable, sweeping learning, both theological and secular. Milbank's work draws as readily on secular, antihumanist critiques of modernity and Left-wing critiques of liberalism, as 'the other voice' of his narrative argues finer points in later medieval Christian theology. Milbank, and radical orthodox thinkers more widely, situate their theological works as a response to the problems which many social theorists have discerned, and citizens and social movements have felt and opposed, in liberal modern societies. These include the forms of alienation that are the flipside of liberal individualism, reification, bureaucratisation, managerialism, and the functional division of labour; the forms of anomie and social disintegration that are the flipside of consumerist hedonism, commodification, and the market mediation of all social life; and the forms of normative disorientation which result from the tendential lack of a unifying, public, metaphysical vision in liberal, pluralist societies. In this sense, alongside Milbank's attempts to align his work with the tradition of Christian socialism, Milbank's work would represent a hand graciously held out to secular or other nonChristian, critical or progressive thinkers to engage in a common intellectual and political project.

However the reception of Milbank's work, by theological and nontheological audiences alike, has been overwhelmingly hostile. Milbank has been widely accused of adopting a violent, polemical or 'martial' tone: an omnipresent 'rhetorical machismo' (Shakespeare 2000: 165). His work does not raise questions, one theological critic charges. It rolls out the unfalsifiable answers of an already established worldview, 'untouchable even by those sympathetic to a theological approach' (Richardson 2003: 272). Milbank has been charged with political and sociotheoretical extremism, a 'neogothic', nostalgic longing for an idealised premodern order (Hedley 2000: 291; Insole 2004: 235–236), and of harbouring overarching theocratic tendencies (Doak 2007: 377; Insole 2004: 234). Milbank's apparent Thomism, it has been argued, conceals a deeper, post-Bartheian fideism (Hedley 2000: 275), some species of esoteric gnosticism (Janz 2004: 397–400), or even a 'romantic Christian Cabbala' (Hedley 2005). Milbank has been arraigned before the court of scholarly standards, held to have committed a host of sins: from failing to cite adequately (Janz 2004: 372–381, Hedley 2000: 278–279, 291–293; Lash 1999: 436), to writing deliberately elusive prose (Richardson 2003: 272); to a systematic intellectualism which leaves his social, political, historical and ecclesiological claims an empirical-free zone (Insole 2004: 227–8; Joas 2000: 239, 41). Not least, Milbank has been repeatedly berated by scholars for having culpably, uncharitably, misrepresented the other thinkers his work addresses: in particular Aquinas (Lash 1999; Marendon 2005), Scotus (Cross 2005; Williams 2005), the political economists

[1] Here as elsewhere, one should be careful that there are exceptions to such sometimes helpful generalisations: for one, Emmanuel Levinas' position explicitly prioritises peace over violence. See Levinas *Totality and Infinity* Section III.

(Herdt 2004), Kant (Janz 2004; Michalson 2004), and much of twentieth century sociology (Joas 2000: 217–218).

So our starting paradox involves the contradiction these readers' responses attest to concerning Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*. On one hand, there is what one commentator calls the confessional voice of Milbank's redemptive theology (Cheetham 2006: 86). On the other hand, there is the polemical Milbank as radical, sweeping critic of the secular order, its philosophy, and its natural and social sciences, as all deeply imbricated in what Milbank calls 'nihilism'. The radical orthodox invocation of a peaceful unity-in-plurality, so it has seemed to many critics, is belied by the totalising nature of Milbank's critique of modernity and modern theology. Such a rhetorical posturing seems to these critics to bespeak nothing if not a vision of primordial *polemos* (e.g. Shakespeare 2000: 167; Cheetham 2006: 91), or in Milbank's own words from *TST*, a now-openly-declared 'struggle' of theology 'to oppose all secular reason, all secular social theory' (TST: 2, 321). The image of culture and debate here is that of a theoretical zero-sum game to reclaim theology's metadiscursive right to 'position, qualify, or criticise other discourses'. Otherwise, as Milbank warns in his opening salvos, 'these discourses will position theology: for the need for an ultimate organising logic … cannot be wished away' (TST: 1).

For my part, I can only write on Milbank as a student of philosophy. Since this is one of the discourses whose autonomy and sufficiency Milbank's theological position questions, this seemingly puts me in a delicate, partisan position. It is in order then to state from the start what I take to be the philosophical orientation, evident in both classical and some modern thought. This is a view at base committed to resisting the notion of the primordial, polemical incommensurability of different perspectives. The reason is that the philosopher holds to the elementary rationality or ordering of the world, available or open to the human mind, if not wholly then in ways sufficient to orient human thinking and conduct, and make good lives possible. It is only then to the, amply demonstrable, extent to which Milbank denies that there can be any such external, common measure or ground between different perspectives or narratives that I will be questioning the wisdom of his position here. Philosophers may begin with paradoxes, which provoke questions and sometimes wonder. But their vocation is to try as far as possible, if not to resolve them, then to show if they can the sources of the apparent *aporias*, so we can either accommodate ourselves to them when it turns out we must, or avoid them—and their polemical consequences—when we can. And so it is with this Chapter.

What follows has three parts. In Sect. 7.2, I try to come to terms with the divisions in Milbank, and with his hostile critical reception, by reflections upon *the form* of Milbank's argument in *Theological and Social Theory*, that of the *Geistesgechichte* (culture-history or history of the spirit) or, in the words of a less sympathetic critic: 'ideological historiography' (Janz 2004: 371). In Sect. 7.3, I argue that the root of Milbank's narratival turn in *TST* and elsewhere, quite explicitly, is his acceptance of an anti-realist epistemology whose relativistic—indeed nearly-explicitly nominalistic—consequences are as crippling for his positive proposals as they are for the modern discourses Milbank hopes to out-narrate (TST: 279). In the beginning of any attempt to account for the world, Milbank argues, is the *mythos*. And there can *always* be

more than one, indeed an indefinite plurality. I reply in Sect. 7.4 that this primordial narrativity presupposes exactly that form of world alienation Milbank's own story positions as the baleful outcome of later medieval nominalism, and takes itself to be opposing. In Sect. 7.5, I return then to some wider, less technical reflections on secularization, and the West's uniquely divided heritage, embracing both Athens (philosophy and the secular sciences) and Jerusalem or Rome (revelation).

7.2 Sound and Fury, 'Leading to Nihilism'

If, thinking about Milbank, we take a moment to reflect on all the different forms in which theologians and philosophers have chosen to write throughout the long history of Western ideas, something strange emerges. We see very quickly that the idea of re-narrating the entire cultural history of an epoch or a civilization, Milbank's literary form, appears to be something that exactly *no* thinkers prior to modernity undertook. Plato wrote dialogues, as did Aristotle, alongside lecture courses; the Stoics wrote letters, and kept handbooks addressed to themselves; Paul wrote epistles to different, specific audiences; Boethius is famous for his *Consolations*, alternating staged dialogue with poesy; Augustine wrote confessions, apologetics, and theological treatises; Aquinas is most famous for his *Summa*, structured around questions, answers, and objections; Maimonides wrote a *Mishnah Torah* and a guide ostensibly for a single, perplexed student; Descartes' most famous work was structured as a series of meditations; Montaigne wrote essays, Pascal *Pensees*, Kant critiques, and so on. It took Vico first, and after him Voltaire and Hegel, arguably *the* modern philosophers to institute the philosophical form of what in German is called *Geistesgeschichte*, but which we will translate here as 'culture-history'.

The art or form of the 'culture-history' has several characteristics, and practitioners differ in terms of substantive commitments, self-understandings, and in terms of which moments in the West's history are considered worthy of narration, and how. Nevertheless, as for instance Martin Heidegger argues explicitly near the beginning of *Being and Time*, the 'culture-historian' is animated by the sense that people's present thoughts and actions cannot be understood in abstraction from their historical context and inherited tradition (Heidegger 1967: #5–6). People's thoughts and actions, it is argued, are always shaped largely if not wholly by their historical contexts, in ways which far exceed their conscious self-awareness. Moreover, these transpersonal presuppositions of peoples' thought and action change periodically, behind the backs of historical agents. The task of the *Geisteshistoriker* is then to understand the nature of these presuppositions, and the nature of their changes, over the chosen period of the cultural reconstruction: whether the story begins in the twelfth century of the Christian era, per Milbank, or with the pre-Socratics, per Heidegger, or with Homer, per Adorno and Horkheimer, or with Pindar, per Agamben, and so on.

There are certain peculiarities of this literary form, which inescapably present themselves to the reader. First of all, the culture-historian will not be primarily concerned to debate the objects of his study, which are usually exclusively prior thinkers,

on their own terms. He will not for example seek to show that the presuppositions of a prior thinker are internally inconsistent, by their own lights. Or if he does (to think of Hegel), it will be to show how this contradiction begat a new, later spiritual configuration to be narrated. Nor will the culture-historian be occupied to show that the thinker is wrong or in error, in their first-order attempts to understand the world—for example by adducing contrary worldly evidence. Rather, the genius of the *Geisteshistoriker*, not unlike a modern epic poet, is to show the way that a given philosophic or theological position is positioned within the broader narrative s/he is constructing, leading to now. The significance assigned to each such position is conferred not by the truth or falsity of their depictions to the world or God these past thinkers generally have tried, in good faith, to describe. It is conferred, retrospectively, by the culture-historian in terms of a perspective unavailable to these thinkers themselves, enlightened as to where subsequent cultural history has led.

To illustrate these points and draw out some implications, let's turn now to Milbank and *Theology and Social Theory*. Consider for instance Milbank's opening reading of Hobbes. It is clear that John Milbank is no Hobbesian. It is tempting to say that for Milbank, Hobbes' famous, individualistic and pessimistic anthropology, is brutal and wrong. Yet Milbank does not say this. *TST* shows instead how Hobbes' view of the human animal is not inescapable, inevitable, or natural: indeed, in language whose strange rationality we'll return to, Milbank stresses that 'it is just as fictional as all other human topographies' (TST: 15). To the extent Hobbes understands his position as more than one more narrative, Milbank establishes that Hobbes is guilty of self-misrecognition. We note that this is not the same as being internal inconsistent or false relative to the world, although it is still a theoretical vice by most, post-Socratic lights. Milbank shows in addition how Hobbes' notion of an isolated individual capable of exercising his will in the service of his self-preservation is a 'secularization' of the voluntaristic God (in whom will gains priority over intellect) which was first posited, according to Milbank, by Duns Scotus (TST: 14; Milbank 1999: 23–34). '[T]heology helped to determine the new anthropology and the new 'science' of politics', Milbank asserts:

> …first of all, it ensured that men, when enjoying unrestricted, unimpeded property rights and even more when exercising the rights of a sovereignty 'that cannot bind itself', come closest to the *imago dei* … theology enters into the very construction of the new realities 'property' and 'sovereignty', helping to create a new human room to manoeuvre. (TST: 15)

Milbank then goes on to point out, firstly the long shadow Hobbes' political discourse casts over later liberal political thought and economics, despite the apparent opposition between Hobbes' authoritarianism and later liberals' thought. Secondly he tries to show Hobbes' influence on the wider construction of a 'secular' *factum* (the economy or the secular, public realm *simpliciter*) which the social sciences would study (TST: 11). After showing how Hobbes' and Spinoza's biblical hermeneutics were motivated by the political need to counter the authority of Catholic tradition (TST: 17–20), *TST* then proceeds to the next figure in Milbank's 'archaeology' or 'genealogy' of modern secularism, the neopagan Machiavelli, and the story moves on (TST: 21 ff.).

As Michalson comments, again and again as we pass down through these always-erudite and sometimes striking narrations of past thinkers, the reader can feel drawn to ask: 'why are we being told this?' (2004: 360). That the secular realm was a creation, not to be automatically posited, is amply indicated in the structuring of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Its culminating fourth Part is devoted to polemical criticism of the 'Kingdome of Darknesse', a polemic wholly unintelligible if Hobbes were not aware that he had *work to do* to overcome the previous cultural orthodoxies. True, there is a stronger claim Milbank wants to make than this: even these early moderns considered this struggle a work of 'subtraction' (I use Charles Taylor's word (cf. Milbank 2009)), peeling away layers of mythological, religious superstition to reveal the natural woman or man. Milbank's culture-history, in remarkable parity to that of Michael Gillespie (1996, 2010), is a revisionist history. It revises the predominant modern self-understanding. This is a self-understanding which Milbank claims '…altogether misses *the positive institution of the secular* because it fully embraces the notion of humanism as the perennial destiny of the West and of human autonomous freedom as always gestating in the womb of "Judaeo-Christianity"…' (TST: 9, italics added; cf. Blumenberg 1993: 17). It is in this polemical, 'counter-historical' (TST: 321) opposition to this modern narrative that, seemingly, nearly *all* of the implicit normative force of Milbank's renarration of the constructed contingency of the secular is derived[2]—for, to be clear, no one can doubt that *TST* is intended as a critical renarration of modernity, no less than say Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. It is indeed at times possible to think that Milbank (and Gillespie clearly lies here too) thinks that simply *showing* that modern social sciences have, heretical, theological antecedents should be enough to make the walls of the secular Jericho fall (cf. Michalson 2004: 373; Blumenberg 1993: 17–18, 24–25).[3]

Now, to the extent that this is true of Milbank or anyone else, it is clear we are in the presence of a genetic fallacy: the failure to distinguish between a discourse or

[2] Note that Blumenberg (1993: 18–25) tracks the origin of the term 'secularization' to the expropriation by secular powers of Church property, and process in which the Church was the 'legitimate' owner of the expropriated properties, and in which their secularization is coloured as illegitimate. Blumenberg argues that this taint of illegitimacy ('the odium of the violation of another's rights' (1993: 38) is carried in later expanded uses of the term as a 'background metaphorics', even when not explicitly spelled out, as in Milbank (Blumenberg 1993: 25).

[3] As Michalson points out, it is in fact demonstrably true that such a demonstration (as a premise) can lead to substantively opposed conclusions, as exemplified by Hans Blumenberg. The latter's *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* agrees with Milbank on the theological antecedents of the modern break with the medieval theological orbit, the self-forgetting of these origins in the predominant modern self-images—*yet* for all that holds to the legitimacy of the secular. Indeed, he claims that modernity only falls in to illegitimacy when it sets about trying to 'reoccupy'—as against secularising—argumentative territory staked out by foreign, theological questions. Just as Christianity is forced to the ardors of allegoresis in order to make revealed texts answer philosophical, Hellenic questions, so Blumenberg claims that modernity is forced into (e.g.) the philosophy of history because of a felt need or obligation ('a mortgage of prescribed questions' (1993: 65) to answer Christian questions, like the meaning of history as a whole (Blumenberg 1993: esp. 34–5, 48–49, 60, 137, 196–7; Michalson 2004: 371–374).

practice's validity-claims (or even its meaning) and its origin.[4] The claim would also seem open to a deflationary rebuttal: surely Christian theology too can be seen to have had origins in Greek philosophy (see Sect. 7.3 below) and the Christian God 'Christianises' for instance providential and theodical functions previously associated with the pagan deities and in Platonic *mythoi*, not to say the Jewish YHWH. If we ought to be sceptical about modern claims to absolute self-foundation *ex nihilo*, we should as rationally contest any implied, comparable claims on behalf of Christianity (e.g. Blumenberg 1993: 32–33, 37–39, 66–70).

However, Milbank's *Geistesgeschichte* is in fact more subtle than this.[5] In particular, there is a larger aim operating in TST, which Milbank here adopts from Nietzsche's and Michel Foucault's conception of genealogy. This is the aim to show how what seems inevitable and natural—the advent of the modern, secular age—was in fact contingent and artificial (cf. Milbank 2009: 90–91; Michalson 2004: 364). And if it was contingent—here's the rub—it could have been otherwise. In Milbank's narrative, if theological nominalism had been successfully opposed or nipped in the bud, in whatever ways, there might well have been a different, Christian or Dominican modernity, or no modernity at all. Glimpses of this alternative modernity Milbank—in a feature which again finds formal parallels in other culture-histories—sees in the baroque mannerists (TST: 11–12), in the French integralist theology of Maurice Blondel (TST: 210–219), as well as in the works of Jacobi and Hamann (Milbank 1999: 22–32; and 7.3 below). Clearly, the publishing of *TST* and the institution of the radical orthodoxy movement is meant to inspire contemporaries to now take up these paths not travelled.

However, what I want to emphasise here is the flipside of this redemptive reassertion of contingency in the *Geisteshistorikers*. This flipside is that the redemptive

[4] Take two counterexamples: (1) what does the claim that ethics have evolutionary origins do to, say, our evaluation of some good action in the present? If, concerning an action we admire according to a sense of its good consequences, the good character it reveals in its exponent, or the moral law it exemplifies, we are told by scientists also has 'selection value' for the type of natural creature we are, why should this latter claim detract from the former? Why could a neoAristotelian approach be excluded, wherein the same object or process could be described truly with reference to different *aitias* (material, efficient, formal, and teleological)? *Mutatis mutandis*, what hidden premises do we have to have accepted to take such a disclosure as 'undermining' ethics itself? Need we take our ethical house to be built on such easily shaken foundations? (2) What does Hegel, Nietzsche or Gibbon's highlighting of the slavish origins of Christianity speak against its truth? Can't this demonstration indeed be as plausibly countered by the position that it was precisely only those who had no status in the positive orders of their time could have accessed the ahistorical truth of revelation?

[5] First, critics have noted that Milbank is performatively *enacting* a theological renarration of the secular social sciences 'for positive appropriation' by other theologians (TST: 1). That is, he is acting as if the 'struggle' for metadiscursive hegemony that *TST*'s 'Introduction' announces as to be fought and won had *already been* so fought and won. This is why he can claim repeatedly that modern institutions and practices really amount to a counter-religion, and secular social sciences to a heretical counter-theology. 'In a sense, the simple thesis is that everything is theology', Douglas Hedley remarks—and that is where Milbank starts (Hedley 2000: 272). One critic has described this rhetorical strategy as 'realised eschatology', and it certainly represents an important dimension of Milbank's culture-history, which is also a polemical move (Richardson 2003: 275).

unearthing of the historical contingency of what has been falsely perceived, until now, to be necessary is matched by the G*eisteshistoriker*'s vocational claim—the claim to show how the very people who have misrecognised the contingency and naturalness of modern ideas and institutions were nevertheless themselves *subject to the deep, evolving historical and ideological necessities—something like the intellectual historian's equivalent of occult forces—of their respective times*. In a phrase which, somewhat ironically, comes from Immanuel Kant, the culture-historian *trades* by claiming to 'understand past thinkers better than they understood themselves'. And this means, specifically, understanding their ideas as the epiphenomena of these larger occult cultural-historical forces (cf., e.g., Michalson 2004: 364).

This is why, in one sense, scholars miss Milbank's mark who have claimed that Milbank's interpretations of Aquinas, Scotus, Kant, and others involve (to quote two representative critics) 'blatant misreading…that ignores the ordinary canons of scholarly inquiry' (Marendon 2005: 49); or, most strongly, the product of a 'new obscurantism' in postmodern academe, wherein 'such terms as "startling", or "radical", or "heavyweight", or "original", or "subversive" trump the older intellectual virtues of 'clarity, rigour, integrity, modesty, charity, or deference…' (Janz 2004: 369). To take one example familiar to this author (and we will return to the Greeks below): once we move beyond intellectual outrage, it seems clear that the only worthwhile critical task is to discern what new standards *could be* operating when someone like Milbank claims that Kant's *critique* of pure reason (to cite a title) represents 'the *attitude* of pure reason itself' (Milbank 1999: 32); or that Kant can be saliently aligned under the header 'all German rationalism' with Wolff, Spinoza, and later German idealists, guilty of allegedly 'leaving unperturbed the requirement that the real be only recognised before a court of irresistible rational necessity' (1999: 32). For such a perspective as Milbank's, it just *does not matter* that Kant is on record as lampooning his German idealist heirs for 'attempting to cull a real object out of logic', and that the *critique* of pure reason explicitly aims to 'make room' for extra-rational faith (Kant on Fichte, cf. Janz 2004: 374, 379). Much more important is to locate the hidden, subintentional forces that ingeniously allow us (alongside Stanley Rosen (1987: 24–35), George Grant, and other reactionary critics) to assert that Nietzsche's polemological philosophy of the will is the *inevitable* product, 'quite quickly' [sic.] of Kant's grounding of ethics in the rational will (TST: 279). Or what is decisive is to discern another thing Kant could not have known, and I suspect would strongly have protested: viz. that his ontological agnosticism about things in themselves, seemingly grounded in epistemological concerns, actually 'is the stance of nihilism', or that it 'in effect already taught nihilism', or at least—for qualification is thankfully demanded—that Kant's position 'might as well' have taught belief in 'nothing' (Milbank 1999: 32, 26, italics added)

The answer to what standards might animate such errors of scholarly fact, it seems to me, is indicated in Camus' marvellous *apercu* that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Geist* was a work of prophecy, which prophesied only the past. What is going on here is symptomatically indicated in Milbank's frequent recourse to qualifiers like 'might as well', 'in effect', and 'really'—as in my favourite, 'Spinozism was really nihilism' (Milbank 1999: 26). It is by the magic of these marvellous little words that

Milbank can 'see' entire intellectual positions leading 'quite quickly' into positions their progenitors thought oppose (witness Nietzsche on Kant, or Kant on Spinoza or Fichte above). Then there are the loaded, underdetermined verbal forms Milbank and other culture-historians use like A 'led to' B, A 'collapses into' B (as in 'an equality of freedom … collapses into the promotion of an inequality of power' (TST: 279)), or A 'slides towards' B (as in 'the slide towards a merely vacuous universalism' (TST: 329)) and the never-quite-defined master-term 'secularise', which serve to espy the hidden relations between intellectual positions (cf. Blumenberg 1993: 4–5, 7–11, 17–18). We are in the presence of a viewpoint in which all the thinkers adduced are selected and positioned, not according to the inferential consequences or presuppositions of what they did say, any more than their own self-understanding is important for discerning their real significance. The import of the tree of their thought lies in its alleged fruit—which for Milbank, like Gillespie, Strauss, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and many others, is 'nihilism', that uncanniest of rhetorical guests. Or, to cite John Bowlin's beautiful summary:

> Suppose we approach every other text, figure, and tradition with the same assumption, the same purity of heart. Telling the story of secular modernity is what matters most, and individual texts, traditions, and figures will come to matter only as they find a place in that story and confirm that assumption. Texts and figures that do not find a place will not matter, at least not much … and those that do matter warrant our attention precisely because they contribute to that story. Some, like Scotus, contribute by providing key resources for the emergence of secular modernity. These are the villains. Others, like Nietzsche and his progeny, provide the distinctions and arguments that lead to modernity's unravelling. These are the heroes. Others still, like Augustine, provide a vision of human life that the discourses of secular modernity can neither corrupt nor imagine. These are the prophets of the other city, the other country, the only alternative to secular reason after its nihilistic implosion. (Bowlin 2004: 264)

I want to stress here one thing about such a narratological position which seems, remarkably, not to have been remarked enough. To be sure, Milbank in *TST* wants to stress that the advent of Scotus and nominalism was avoidable and contingent. So too was the (self-forgetting) founding of the secular age, which then comes to be self-confirmingly studied, legitimised, and 'policed', by the modern social sciences (TST: Part II). However, what is clear in Milbank's epic is that, *once* the secularising momentum has been put in place by these fateful, founding gestures for Milbank the unravelling of modernity has followed *more or less inevitably*. Between the lines of the *Ordinato* of Duns Scotus, as we might say, Milbank would already have us see Friedrich Nietzsche's uncanny, moustachioed glare—if not 'quite quickly' or 'really', then down a centuries-deep slippery slope. With *TST*, that is, we are asked to credit a one-way 'secular' trend that lasts no less than 700 years, in which the unsalutary 'consequences' somehow already nested in neoscholastic theology are unfolded, and which culminate in today's farthest extreme, the moment before our neo-orthodox redemption.[6] Thinkers of the calibre of Kant or Hegel, William,

[6]The eschatological shape of culture-histories, pre-eminently Hegel's, should also be noted, although whether 'secularization' is the finally best term to describe the isomorphism between theological *Heilsgeschichte* and modern philosophies of history is a question we suspend here (see Michalson 2004: 366–367).

Calvin, Spinoza, Leibniz, etc., *per* this perspective, were unable to become aware of the ideological undercurrents that shaped their thinking before they even started, together with the disastrous nihilistic consequences they unwittingly and heretically abetted. Liberal theologians who have tried to synthesise theology with modern ideas, meanwhile, can be rebuked without great charity as similarly blind to what was really going on, and so part of the slide towards nihilism.

Now, whether ethically, politically, or religiously speaking, the locating in this way of all thought (and presumably all action also) as so many expressions, epiphenomena, or carriers of such invisible, fateful, cultural undertrends seems to me a profoundly disabling viewpoint. One is reminded of Walter Benjamin's famous category of 'mythical violence', expressing his Jewish-messianic hostility to the world of pagan fate and *mythoi* (Benjamin 2007: 293–300, 305–9). Certainly, if thinkers of the calibre of Kant, Spinoza, or Nietzsche have been unable to locate and shake the occult cultural necessities Milbank has espied casting us from nominalism to nihilism, the implication for we lesser souls is not encouraging. It seems that we would now need to be something like theological Atlases or Samsons—capable of lifting presuppositions centuries-old, bearing the weight of the hearts, minds, institutions and lives of myriad generations—to change anything of worth, and deliver ourselves from 'nihilism'. So I want to ask, now, about what is going on ontologically and epistemologically in order to lead us to such a fateful, mythical terminus.

7.3 The World Made Strange

It is an irony perhaps more worthy in this context of Hegel than of Socrates that the historicising turn in European ideas which Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* so clearly mirrors is so definitively modern (Michalson 2004: 366–367). The need for grand, legitimating historical narratives—most often, stories of humanity's inevitable progress like those Milbank, Gillespie, and Taylor mirror and overturn—responds to the early moderns' calling into question of the Western Europeans' traditional, and religious, sources of political legitimation. In Milbank's theological culture-history, as I have said, the key moment in the undermining of such traditional, religious authority, came from within. The fall was Duns Scotus' alleged overturning of Aquinas' metaphysics of participation: 'the greatest of all disruptions carried out in the history of European thought' (Milbank 1999: 23). Aquinas' metaphysics of participation, on Milbank's and the radical orthodox readings, both honoured God's essential difference from his creatures, and preserved the possibility that each creature could be spoken of as participating in His surpassing perfections, if only in the language of analogy. After Scotus, however, 'being' could be attributed univocally to both creatures and God—thus supposedly creating the possibility for the emergence of secular sciences, free from theological oversight (Milbank 1999: 23–24). At the same time, God's will and omnipotence became newly ascendant in neoscholastic theology, so that if He wished, God could intervene even to change all the laws of the order He had

created. Universal terms, which in scholastic philosophy veridically mirrored the stable, telic forms in created things, were now reduced to being solely linguistic terms without real or stable referents. The order of the world began to become uncertain to Western men, long before Kant would later draw the explicit consequence that things-in-themselves were unknowable to us. The West had begun the inevitable slide from nominalism to nihilism whose narratival presuppositions we examined in Sect. 7.2.

I'll return to Milbank's reading of Aquinas below, and I am not qualified to dispute his Scotus (Williams 2005). What seems more remarkable to us is that Milbank apparently fails to credit that the radical historicist, explicitly relativist ontology he develops to ground his own position in Part IV of *Theology and Social Theory* sits squarely within the orbit of the forms of nominalist nihilism he so passionately decries. It is an ontology that Milbank avows is a species of 'linguistic idealism', 'pragmatism' (TST: 5) or—later—'postmodern anti-realism' (TST: 296), although he also calls it elsewhere 'meta-narrative realism' and 'theological realism' (TST: 426). However it is named, it is to its substance that we now must turn.

Milbank's claims are these, developed first in the revealing chapter (Chap. 9) on the ontology of the modern sciences, then in his critique of Alisdair MacIntyre's attempt to rehabilitate classical virtue (Chap. 10), before being reaffirmed in *TST*'s closing chapter (Chap. 12). Humans have no unmediated access to things in the world, as Kant seems to have also maintained: there are no given, 'punctiliar facts or discrete meanings' (TST: 267). This position indeed situates Milbank firmly within the bounds of a philosophical lineage which runs from Plato and Aristotle, through Aquinas into Kant and Hegel, and figures like Sellars and Macdowell today. But the next claim is different, and we will be seeing how with it Milbank would bid farewell to any merely philosophic heritage. If there is no unmediated access to the world, Milbank does not argue that what then does allow us to experience the world as intelligible are the dianoetic categories of an active intellect, faculty of understanding, or intuitive *nous* or mind. No: the claim is that '*narrative* is simply the mode in which the entirety of reality presents itself to us' (italics added). This claim is indeed radical, in the sense that it goes all the way down. Milbank illustrates it with the seemingly empirical-idealistic assertion that, for instance, 'without the story of the tree, there is no distinguishable, ideal tree' (TST: 358). Narrative, Milbank contends, is prior to both the understanding of texts nineteenth century hermeneutics elevated as defining the humanistic sciences, *and* to the forms of explanation of causes characteristic of the natural sciences (TST: 267). 'To say "movement" or "causation"', Milbank tells us opaquely, 'is just to say "meaning", because something becomes of causal significance only when connected with a later or subordinate event which presupposes it' (TST: 267). Science then is allegedly narratival: and not simply because people are only motivated to practice it within wider economic, political, and cultural concerns, as the Frankfurt school and many others have noted. All the way down, 'we only apprehend nature as part of the narrative of our lives'. This means that even scientific theories and experiments would be only 'repeatable narratives' involving what Milbank feels licensed to gloss as 'a

certain narrative, a certain sequence of events' (TST: 270). Moreover, although no examples are given, Milbank clearly accepts something like Quine's highly sceptical claim about the underdetermination of theory by data: 'one can very often give different theoretical accounts of the same successful or unsuccessful experiment' (TST: 270). It is of course true, Milbank concedes, that we moderns can, using the natural sciences, repeatedly drive cars and produce nuclear energy. But this is not because we have come to know in any salient sense the true formal, efficient, or material causes of things: 'we only know, with "scientific' certainty, certain effects, not ultimate reasons, causes or natures' (TST: 270, inverted commas in original). The principled openness to falsification and the scientific renunciation of absolute knowledge, for Milbank, is not a token of its epistemic virtue or humility. It is further license for the overarching, relativising, and archetypically postmodern thesis he wants to run: that science is one more narratival, pragmatic practice amongst others, whose conceptual presuppositions actively *posit* from the start what it then claims to 'discover'. Science is just a particular form of narrative practice that has 'theorised internally its peculiar specificity, simply by concentrating on experimental knowledge' (TST: 270).

We hope now that sufficient textual evidence from *TST* has been cited to establish that, verifiably—as a discovery, not a projection—Milbank does hold to a highly epistemologically sceptical, primordial narratology. Such an epistemology, we note, well licenses the openly narratival form in which Milbank chooses to write. What though are the consequences of this highly sceptical, primordial narratology? Are Cupitt, Insole, Richardson, Hyman, Hedley, Michalson and others right to suspect it can only have disastrous relativising consequences: both for theology, which after all wants to claim that any number of things (for instance God or the incarnation) *are really true*, and for other discourses? Milbank at one point does try to reassure us. Although, in a way which sounds definitively nominalistic, he underscores that our basic 'narrating' of the world cannot be 'concerned with universal laws, nor universal truths of the spirit' (TST: 266), Milbank continues that this does not imply we can make up any old story we like. We could 'know', if that could any longer be the word, that Trotsky really was involved in the Red Army, that the Shoah occurred, that the French revolution began in 1789 and modernity with Duns Scotus. This is possible because 'if we are attentive', Milbank tells us that we can see that any text (and so, *ex hypothesi*, the natural and historical worlds) 'forms a loose and complex knot of resistance' for our stories. The issue is to work out what this resistance could be or involve, given that Milbank has told us that there can be no punctiliar facts, discrete meanings, Ricoeurian 'decisive historical causes', or—contra Bhaskar and the other critical realists—any 'regular lawlike connections [between things], which can … be represented in an atemporal, synchronic medium' (TST: 267, 275). Milbank's proffered clarification of what then remains, we confess, seems grossly inadequate at best:

> Always we feel the resistance, although this is from elsewhere, and we cannot precisely place it, although this is from a whole wider network of resistances and counter-resistances, which we ourselves, by our very intervention, are further adjusting and altering. (TST: 267)

Milbank elsewhere, with less obscurantism, bites the relativistic bullet. Alasdair MacIntyre's attempt to refound a species of neoclassical virtue, Milbank notes, is tempered by his awareness that different forms of virtue are praised in different societies, and that there are a plurality of different ethical worldviews (TST: 337–339). This could imply the relativistic claim that these worldviews are incommensurable and unable to communicate, as several sophists already asserted in classical Greece (TST: 337). MacIntyre, however, for his part withdraws from this possibility. He insists, in classically philosophical fashion, that disputes between competing perspectives should be resolvable by '…the dialectical testing of an assertion through comparison with a present, stable, and therefore non-narratable reality' (TST: 344). And tellingly, *it is for exactly this minimally realist assertion that Milbank rebukes MacIntyre*, rejecting along the way Donald Davidson's well-known denial of the very *coherence* of any assertion of radical incommensurability (TST: 340–343). It is simply impossible to adjudicate the claim that one viewpoint 'explains more' of reality than any other, Milbank claims (TST: 346). Considerations of meaning trump any search for a non-relativisable, extra-narratival truth: 'There are only undecidable questions of truth because truth is relative to a 'perspective', or a particular preferred syntax or figuration for construing reality' (TST: 343). We simply cannot assume, says Milbank, 'that different cultural discourses are approximations to the same external (even if not independently specifiable) reality…' (TST: 343).

How Milbank sees his denial here that human beings' plural narratives can veridically access any universal law-like structures of external reality sitting alongside his attack on medieval nominalism as *the* arch-villain behind modernity seems a veritable mystery. Equally shrouded is the issue of what we can make of Milbank's attempt to 'deny that postmodern anti-realism is a threat to theological objectivism' (TST: 296). What Milbank says is that his relativistic position opens a 'fissure' in postmodernism itself. It does this by allowing for the superimposition of a Christian, peaceable ontology on top of the postmodern critiques of modernity, in a gesture which would show that the (post)modern nihilists have opted, groundlessly, 'for violence, … [in] preference for, or resignation to, an imagined cosmic terror' (TST: 296). To want something to be true or possible, however, does not make it so. Milbank himself makes clear, *contra* MacIntyre who wants 'to *argue*' (Milbank's italics) against modern liberalism, that 'my case is rather that [liberalism] is only a *mythos*, and therefore cannot be refuted, but only out-narrated, if we can *persuade* people—for reasons of 'literary taste'—that Christianity offers a much better story' (TST: 330). Again, responding to today's neoNietzscheans' vision of primordial violence, Milbank comments that 'to counter it, one cannot try to resuscitate liberal humanism, but one can try to put forward an alternative narrative, equally unfounded, but nonetheless embodying an "ontology of peace"…' (TST: 279).

So the question here is: if per Milbank, Christianity's narrative of primordial peace is 'equally unfounded' as what it opposes, by what criteria or authority are we to choose it over its polemical others? Why peace? And is 'literary taste' enough to ground an orthodox Christian revival of whatever kind, rolling back centuries of secular thought and institutions? Although postmodern-influenced theorists like

Milbank seem persistently unable to see it, relativism equally robs any subordinate position of the conceptual resources to establish its *own* authority with the same gesture that it pulls the semantic rug from under the feet of the hegemonic positions it opposes. Unlike Robin of Loxley, relativism does not steal only from the rich. Epistemological relativism is in truth performatively self-confuting, as philosophers have seen since Plato's *Thaeatetus*. Yet even if we do accept its plausibility for long enough to choose a renewed Christian orthodoxy, what will then be left to us to prevent the Nietzschean genealogist from unearthing our story's 'equally unfounded' nature? What could prevent us from falling victim to the same strategies Milbank uses to relativise the modern social and natural sciences? More widely, if each perspective narratively posits the standards for its own verification, as Milbank insists (TST: 270, 275), what mediating standards could be left to arrest a bad infinity of competing bards, narrators, and narratives, each vying to wrest the metanarrative position so as to out-sing all the others, if only until the next more aesthetically or politically satisfying contender emerges?[7]

If no discourse can be authoritively checked by any prediscursive ontological or theological reality, the polemical success of one or other position to 'lay out the terms' alone remains to decide between the claimants. Such a postmodern perspectivism then, as Nietzsche knew, is a more likely recipe for perpetual war and the rule of force than for civic or cultural peace and an inclusive, newly charitable social justice. It is little wonder that Milbank, in the revealingly titled piece 'The End of Dialogue', can only advocate with what he acknowledges is 'an extreme degree of paradox' the claim that we should 'insist' on the 'finality' of a Christian view, as the only way to 'fully respect the other … as purely neighbourly difference' (Milbank 1990: 189). For again, Milbank stresses here that this 'insisting' and this 'finality' *cannot* in any way involve maintaining Christianity's 'privileged relationship to Being', or any other external standard, correspondence with which might persuade people of different persuasions to reweigh their commitments (Milbank 1990: 177). Milbank's Christian peace will be a very strange concord without dialogue between different perspectives, since as Milbank quite beautifully observes:

> …the event of dialogue, since its Socratic beginnings, assumes a commonly recognised subject matter and certain truths that can be agreed about this subject matter by both (or all) participants … The very idea of dialogue is then a passage for the delivery of truth … assumes that many known voices are conversing around a single known object which is

[7] One criterion, which Milbank's own, near omniscient culture-history would seem de facto to propound, would be the sheer *scope* of what one's story includes: 'Through an often daunting conversancy with a massive array of philosophical and literary texts, and through highly complex interplays of mutually supportive readings of these texts in the service of a particular ideology—such outlooks give the appearance of having established an independent authority or broader legitimacy…' (Janz 2004: 393). This coheres with a version of the truth as coherence outlook. But if no particular validity claims can veridically represent the real, neither will any proposed, holistic 'metanarrative realism' allow us to avoid what John Macdowell calls 'frictionless spinning in a void' characteristic of forms of idealism (MacDowell 1996: 11). By elaborating such total perspectives, the problem is deferred, or its scale is changed—but this is not to resolve the problem.

> independent of our biographical or transbiographical processes of coming-to-know. It … follows that the many different biographies (experiences [sic.]) and traditions can be appropriated by all as angles upon the truth, which are themselves radiations from the truth. (Milbank 1990: 177)

And, as we have seen, such grounds for genuine dialogue is what Milbank's postmodern anti-realism denies.

7.4 Theology and Philosophy

It is worth stating that the critique I have so far offered of Milbank is not new, radical, original, or startling. It mirrors and develops comparable criticisms in Bauerschmidt, Insole, Janz, Hedley, Richardson, and Michalson. In Bauerschmidt's words:

> On an uncharitable reading, which I do not wish to give, Milbank presents us with a postmodern philosophy tricked out in Christian theological language… On a more charitable reading, one must at least note that Milbank's commitments to certain philosophical views about language push him in directions that seem to run counter to the stories and practices of the church. (Bauerschmidt 1999: 249; cf. Michalson 2004: 369–72)

The paradox or, more truly, the contradiction here between Milbank's Christianity and his postmodernism—encrypted in its way in the almost-oxymoron 'radical orthodox'—can be shown by considering the role of Aquinas in Milbank's work, or the role he does not play. Although scholars continue to debate particulars within Aquinas' *oeuvre*, it is widely accepted that Aquinas' work represents a highpoint in Western thought, to be celebrated or lamented for the uneasy synthesis of Greek philosophy and revelation, Athens and Jerusalem, it institutes. This synthesis had been negotiated from much earlier: in Augustine, for instance, Christian revelation is brought together, as a reformulation and more veridical completion, of Platonic and neoPlatonic motifs. 'If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things that are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared', Augustine instructs readers in *On Christian Doctrine*, continuing,

> …in the same way, all the teachings of the pagans contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings and grave burdens … but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some most useful precepts concerning morals. (Augustine, quoted in Hedley 2000: 281–2)

In Thomas, more strongly, there is no sense that human, unassisted knowledge of the natural world is impossible, without being shaped in advance by theological or fideistic commitments. Indeed, Aquinas maintains that the intellect per se 'cannot be false', although we can be in error (cf. Jenkins 1991). Through the work of the passive and active intellect, we can come to know the formal causes of created things in the natural world: and hence the plural perfections in which created things participate, which can by linguistic analogy be attributed to God. Similarly, while the Aristotelian virtues need to be supplemented by the theological virtues if

complete happiness is to be achieved, Aquinas does not deny that these virtues represent real goods available to believer and non-believer alike. Reason for Aquinas, if left unassisted, certainly does not 'lead into nihilism', as Milbank and other culturally-pessimistic *Geisteshistorikers* have narrated. No: it ascends into natural theology, and (for Aquinas) truth-yielding arguments for the existence of God, starting from the rationally knowable order of the cosmos, whose wonders are observably available to all. It is worth remembering that the condemnations of 1215 and 1277, which assisted in shaping the intellectual climate for the ascendance of nominalism so decisive for Milbank,[8] responded to a sense that the schoolmen, if not Thomas himself, had become *too* indebted to pagan philosophy and natural reason (cf. Hedley 2000: 282). Secularism's roots, we see and remember, lie very deep in the West's story, and certainly predate the theological nominalists.

The importance of recalling these commonly known things comes when we contrast them with what Milbank says concerning the relation of theology and philosophy in the medieval period, to which his work's nostalgic criticisms of modernity ostensibly point us back. Milbank remarkably denies any neoPlatonic, Greek or philosophical influence on the Church fathers. For him, they 'conceded the utter unknowability of creatures which constantly alter and have no ground within themselves' (quoted in Hedley 2005: 278). Even more remarkably, Milbank's Augustine and Dionysius 'had already made the 'post-philosophical move' of separating difference from dialectics'. On this basis, they allegedly broke with the neoPlatonic One, instead 'ascribing all Being, and in consequence difference, to God himself' (TST: 429). In remarkable denial of the explicitly theological pinnacles of Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean, and Stoic thought (cf. Hedley 2000: 279), the other side to this revisionist claim is that:

> …philosophy in fact *began* as a secularising immanentism … The pre-Socratics forgot both Being and the gift, while (*contra* Heidegger) the later Plato made some attempt to recover the extra-cosmic vatic *logos*. Theology has always resumed this heritage, along with that of the Bible, and if it wishes to think again God's love, then it must evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics. (Milbank 1997: 50)

As Janz, Hedley and Lash each differently register, appeals to Scholastic participation aside, what is operating in Milbank is a view of reason for which 'it can never come to its own defence. It possesses no authority or goodness of its own—it has no intrinsic authority or goodness—with which properly to state the case. Indeed, it has no case to state' (Janz 2004: 397). Unlike even the fideist theologian Karl Barth, who allowed reason to have 'unquestioned validity within its sphere' (Milbank et al. 1999: 2), we should understand that theology ought to resist even such a claim to reason's limited autonomy. This autonomy, in a remarkable Milbankian turn of phrase, allegedly stands 'like an enormous slag heap, undermining the intent of neo-orthodoxy' in Barth (Milbank 1999: 21; cf. Michalson 2004: 368–371).

In the medieval period, Milbank maintains, 'all social action and understanding was subordinated to religion, the eventual gaining of the beatific vision' (TST: 228).

[8] Nominalism, which incidentally had been proposed as early as the eleventh century by figures like Berengar of Tours (c. 1010–1080) and Roscellinus (1050–1125).

But this is not to say, as Milbank does, that a figure like Aquinas believed as Milbank wants us to, that 'no human discourse has any "secular" or "scientific" autonomy in relation to theology' (Milbank, quoted in Hedley 2000: 293). Perhaps this is why, strangely, the heroes of Milbank's programmatic essay in the *Radical Orthodoxy* collection 'The Theological Critique of Modernity' are the modern, radical Lutherans Hamann and Jacobi. For Milbank, these 'conservative revolutionaries' are to be so prized because they went much farther against what Luther called 'the devil's whore' than Luther himself, in developing 'a kind of theory of "knowledge by faith alone" and "justification by faith alone"'. What they accurately saw, despite 'an era of treacherously humanistic theology', was that 'to reason one must already be illumined by God, while revelation is but a higher measure of such illumination' (Milbank 1999: 23–24). We must for Milbank understand that, as the fable of the secular Pontius Pilate's turning his back on Christ and sentencing him to death allegedly conveys, 'reason, pure philosophic reason' severed from such divine illumination is truly 'totally non-realist', since 'it abstracts from it, or takes from [the real] only what is clearly graspable' and 'leaves commonsense perception altogether behind' (Milbank 1999: 25–26 [sic.]). Worse than that, as the identification of reason with Pilate here surely suggests, reason when superordinate to theology can only be illegitimate and tyrannical.

7.5 Athens, and Jerusalem

Where then are we cast up, on these farthest shores of our inquiry into the surprising epistemology of John Milbank? We are left both with a radicalised gap between theology and philosophic and scientific inquiry, and with their radical assimilation: or rather, the subordination of rationality wholly to a fideistic theology. Reason, *contra* the medieval scholastic and classical philosophic tradition, cannot allow us to truly understand the formal causes of things in the natural world, let alone Aquina's final causes. A reanimated, theological perspective which has 'evacuated' philosophic reason alone would allow us to see, if not the truth, then what Milbank mystifyingly evokes as the 'natural unseen depth of things' which 'derives from an eternal permanence'. The evocation is mystifying, since we have seen that this depth can absolutely not involve the universal forms or laws of created reality available to unassisted human rationality, or sciences which are in 'truth' so many more modern narratives—or perhaps theologies (Milbank 1999: 27). At the same time, this is why a true Christian theology should not compromise with the 'immanent secularising' of philosophy and its modern-scientific heirs. Seeing the contingent, invented, and heretically-theologically-founded bases of the modern sciences shows for Milbank what his book enacts: that they are 'not at all something that theology must somehow "come to terms with"' (Milbank 2001: 367).

In this way, despite the appearances of Milbank's recourse to Thomas, theologians should now turn away from any kind of synthesis of reason and revelation, Athens and Jerusalem, like that which animated philosophically informed Christian theologians led by the great doctor—not to mention the Islamic *falasifa* or rabbis

like Maimonides. 'So shouldn't one follow Aquinas' example and apply what he says to modern social science?' *TST* at a key point asks, and answers with the exclamation mark: 'No!' (TST: 248). Jerusalem, Rome or Canterbury, or at least a particular, highly contested understanding of revelation, should if Milbank has his day submerge the secularising other half of the Western story: and, so it seems, attempt to retrospectively narrate away the distinct role philosophy has played in Christian theology in the past, out of hostility for the world of the present. A renewed, radicalised Orthodoxy should, like Milbank in *TST*, try to sing a grand perspective which would situate all other discourses, evacuating them of their seeming autonomy, triumphally establishing a new Jerusalem over Athens once and for all.

To say all of this is not to deny that narrative has its place in the human drama. Narrative and *mythos* is one, truly transhistorical, universal feature of human experience. However, it is another thing again to deny that any narrative—whether of the divine election of a people, the resurrection of a God-man, or the progressive liberation of mankind from self-incurred immaturity—can 'neutrally specify … a reality independent of biography', or make assessable claims about the same, for the alleged reason there *is* no such prenarratival reality (Milbank 1990: 177). Once this point is crossed, I have been arguing, we are left in an epistemic void as hostile to a reanimated theology as it is to scientific or philosophic endeavour, or a civic public culture. What we are left with, instead, is the strange spectacle sadly familiar to people who work in recent European thought, at least in its Anglophone defiles. Different charismatic story-tellers periodically emerge, each with totalising visions of the historical whole, and emboldened by different species of the type of rhetorical anti-realism it is Milbank's merit to spell out with unusual clarity when he observes that:

> In a rhetorical perspective, narrative really does cease to be a mere appendage, because here the story of the tradition—for example, in the case of Christianity, a story of preachings, journeyings, miracles, martyrdoms, vocations, marriages, icons painted and liturgies sung—really *is* the argument for the tradition … and not just the story of arguments concerning a certain X (for example the nature of human virtue) lying outside the story. (TST: 347)

Each of the postmodern prophets presents a different story—decked out in different technical language—which just is 'the argument' for that perspective, since it allegedly, creatively posits the standards of its own evaluation, at its founding moment, before the game of debate or presentation has begun. Attempts to pose the question of *from whence* or *on what basis* the competing stories arose (or to what they might refer) can only elicit invocations of Heideggerian-style epochal depths, deconstructive deferrals of sense, unforeseeable Badiouian events or miraculous Žižekian Acts. The analysis of texts and the history of the poetic founding texts meanwhile replaces argument: often with the consequence— since the texts evoked are mostly more familiar to the invested exegete than most of his auditors or readers—that a majority of the latter are excluded from doing more than receiving the story on trust, or continuing the work of translation and exegesis. Attempts to engage argumentatively from different perspectives are too easily rebutted by defensively locating which supposed, narratival position the respondent is speaking from—'of

course, your liberal …, Heideggerian, … Habermasian … religious … secular … presuppositions mean that…' And besides, 'your perspective does not register the important role of this particular text … passage … you have not read X … closely enough…' Debate atrophies, and instead of arguments, we are left to make creative 'interventions' that, when successful, dramatically realign all the terms under discussion according to our chosen theurgic vision.

The reader I hope will excuse this poem of my own. Like all stories, it overstates the case, or aligns too many things too inevitably. The point is to try to understand what false, excessive presuppositions make anything like such an 'end of dialogue' possible, whether in theological, philosophical, or wider culture. Then, we should, argumentatively, contest them. For as Milbank again notes in *TST*, the story of the emergence of philosophy in Greece is:

> …the story of the emergence of a discourse which transcends story, which indeed puts an end … (at least for a time) to the cultural primacy of *mythos* … through the dialectical testing of an assertion through comparison with a present, stable, and therefore non-narratable reality. (TST: 344)

That is a point well made. Before the contest between philosophy and revelation, the philosophers had already set their practice aside from the rhetors, the sophists, and the poets. If, accepting Milbank's own epic, post-Christian song, we would—in the extremity of our resulting despair about the present order—try to suppress the West's 'Athenian', philosophical heritage; and if, in doing this, we would try to narrate away the reality commonly given to people of different convictions which meaningful dialogue presupposes, the political order that will follow our liberal dispensation will indeed be post-secular. But it may not for all that be more lastingly peaceable or desirable.

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Part IV

New Atheism and the Post-Secular Theoretical Turn

Enjoy Your Enlightenment! New Atheism, Fanaticism and the Pleasures of (Other People's) Illusions

8

Bryan Cooke

8.1 Introduction

The critique of religion is not new. From Democritus and Lucretius to Spinoza and Voltaire; from Hume's *Dialogues* through to Marx's famous description of religion as at once 'the opium of the people' and 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the soul of soulless conditions … the heart of a heartless world' (Marx and Engels 1978: 54), questions of religion and of what, if any, role it might have to play in what both Nietzsche and Feuerbach called 'the philosophy of the future' have been at the centre of debates about the limits of knowledge, the fate of reason, and the link (as in Walter Benjamin's work) between revolutionary projects and theological longings.

But while we can trace a history of religious debates from neo-Epicurean execration, to Romantic resurgence; from Victorian ambivalence (see Wilson 1999), through to the mixture of revolution and reaction that characterises literary 'modernism', for many people who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, in the suburbs of rich, capitalist, nominally secular, soon-to-be-hyper-consumer societies like Australia and the United Kingdom, passionate arguments about religion might, at least until recently, have seemed like a dim memory of someone else's briefly televised past.

Thirteen years into what even a disavowed religious heritage makes us still call the 'new millennium' religion is, for good or ill, back on the best-seller lists. Among the various polemics, screeds, monographs, lampoons and encomia to a life without God, the least avoidable have been the best-selling books by Richard Dawkins (2006), Sam Harris (2005), Christopher Hitchens (2007) and Daniel Dennett (2006), four authors whose collective speaking engagements were once announced under the publicist's witticism of the 'four atheist horsemen of the apocalypse'. Even

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within the comparatively narrow confines of academic philosophy, religion and secularism are once again points of the fiercest contention (cf. Meillassoux 2008; Johnston 2011; Žižek and Milbank 2009).

In what follows, I want to address some of the reasons why, over the last decade, religion has once again become a topic to fill convention centres. I shall do so by way of both a critique of, and an attempt to contextualise, the 'new atheism'. Far from, however, condemning Dawkins et al. for intolerant 'Enlightenment' *hubris*, my own charge is that new atheists are *not nearly Enlightened enough*, i.e. they are insufficiently attentive to the Enlightenment's trenchant insistence on the need for vigilant self-criticism, if the would-be *Aufklärer* is to prevent a tradition of fearless thinking from ossifying into the defensive dogmas of an irrationally self-congratulatory present. In particular, I find the new atheists guilty of three mistakes, which I list below in order of increasing seriousness:

1. A fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and scope of theology. (This criticism, the least significant for my purposes, has already been pointed out by many others (see, e.g., Robinson 2006; Eagleton 2006).
2. More seriously: a tendency to ignore the dimension of the *idea* in rationalism, i.e. the way in which reason, while undoubtedly needing to operate through certain procedural or cognitive norms, cannot be reduced to a mere policing of these same norms without sterilising reason's defining capacity for self-critique, i.e. its capacity to direct rational scrutiny at what has *hitherto* been accepted as 'the rational'. From here I argue that:
3. The fundamental narrowness of the new atheists' conception of reason renders their own polemics, however well-motivated, blithely inattentive to the social, cultural and economic dynamics of late-capitalist societies and the role these dynamics play in shaping both the actuality of contemporary (un)reason and the latter's popular image. To attend to this social context would be to attend to those socio-economic conditions which underlie *both* today's seemingly inexhaustible market for trenchantly expressed critiques of (other people's) 'religion' *and* the rise of those fascistic religious 'movements'—like the U.S. Christian Right—which are correctly execrated by 'rationalists' of all kinds for threatening to overwhelm what might have once been a 'Great Republic' with bigotry, ignorance and superstition (cf. Hedges 2006; Bageant 2007: 161–193; Bunch 2010).

The chief marker of what I claim is the new atheists' narrowness regarding reason is the tendency among its major writers to persistently act as if words like 'reason', 'Enlightenment' and 'secularism' were the names not of *projects* (whose success, failure and even legitimacy could be held up to critical scrutiny) but of *accomplishments* grown mouldy with age. It is as if, far from referring to things whose definitions were necessarily contestable, these words were merely the names of virtues that were demonstrably incarnate in the average liberal, middle-class, secular reader of Ian McEwan's novels: virtues that would, moreover, undergo a global and permanent flourishing if not permanent flourishing if not for the constant threat of barbarian invasions from the rationality-deficient (who 'coincidentally' tend to reside in the poorest and most unforgiving places on the planet).

Against this, my claim is that neither scepticism (in the best sense) nor a 'critical attitude' can ever be adequately demonstrated by our capacity to reject what we take to be the illusions of others. Reason is present (or absent) in the *process* by which we arrive at conclusions; it cannot be determined simply from a glance at which *conclusions* we have affirmed or denied. Furthermore, one of the paradoxical consequences of an age where suspicion of authority has been, at least partially, culturally normalised (see Arendt 1993) is that purportedly 'critical' or even 'sceptical' gestures can sometimes be a prelude to, rather than a prophylactic against the proclamation of dogmatically held absurdities, as in the person who says: 'I don't believe *your* science—I have a sceptical and critical mind!' but who goes on to declare that the worldwide Jewish-Illuminati-Alien conspiracy is *a fact* because 'the amount of evidence is just…overwhelming'.

In taking, therefore, as the apogee of rationality the per se unimpressive act of 'disbelief', I suggest that the atheist books' primary appeal is the way they offer their readers images of their own 'enlightened', 'critical', open-minded sanity on the cheap: as if we could, after a quick read through Dawkins's breezy *God Delusion*, safely count ourselves paladins of science, labourers for World Peace, and unacknowledged heirs of Newton and Einstein simply by not believing in God—i.e. by dispensing with an hypothesis that we had long felt to be gratuitous, implausible and, at best, quaintly anachronistic. But this is a shockingly low bar to set for critique let alone for truth. In fact, it is so low that we cannot but ask questions about the motives of those who applaud themselves for stepping over it.

Following Alberto Toscano (whose book *Fanaticism* is pivotal for the ensuing argument) I will, in what follows, protest against what I see as the new atheist tendency to conflate, if not to *exchange*, the radical Enlightenment's demand for perpetual *self* and *social* critique for the far easier (and less obviously 'enlightened') task of criticising other people's illusions so as to better shore up our own (cf. Toscano 2010: 171).

Finally, I find the tendency to frame discussions of religion and secularism as a debate between reason and (willful) irrationalism to be constitutively blind to the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1996), i.e. to the way in which battles fought in the *name* of reason can, in the absence of appropriate critical vigilance, fall prey to (and be put in the service of) irrational passions and goals.[1] This dialectic has nothing to do with reason 'going too far' in its quest for the real, and everything to do with its self-shackling in the form of a 'rational' apologetics for the existing order of things. In this latter, distorted form, 'reason' becomes that

[1] Note that, in saying this, I do not for a moment endorse the Romantic-reactionary thesis that would suggest that reason goes astray because of some original sin or 'hubris'. Further, I reject any interpretation or aspect of Adorno and Horkheimer's account that would portray the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' as something inevitable rather than contingent. On this point, I am in fact, in complete agreement with Harris's statements on reason's alleged 'shadow-side' (cf. Harris 2005: 259 n47).

which advocates or legitimates *sacrifice* to those irrational powers (market, state, gods) which it has always been the Enlightenment's great Epicurean (or perhaps Xenophean) goal to contest (see Lucretius 1994: 10–15; on Xenophanes cf. Israel 2006: 437–444).[2]

Finally, a major source of what I take as the insufficiently critical notion of reason in new atheist writing is what I see as its marked tendency to equate 'religion' with 'belief' (and especially *unjustified belief* of a sort that has been gratuitously self-inured from critical scrutiny). Blinding these writers to what I shall call the 'religious' sense of what they take to be 'secular' phenomenon and the 'secular' sense of what they take to be 'religion', the major problem with this fundamentally *representational* conception of religion is that it leads its adherents to ignore the religious dimension of contemporary capitalist and consumer society, which, as Walter Benjamin correctly puts it, is best viewed as a 'cultic religion without dogma' (Benjamin 2004: 288).

8.2 The Ticking Bomb

A strongly pronounced feature of three out of four books by the above-mentioned Equestrian Order of Atheistic Evangelicals (Daniel Dennett's book is a different matter, which I will not discuss here) is the sense of an imminent *threat* posed by what these authors see as the *fons et origio* of all kinds of murderous madness: an enemy of peace, a manacle for the mind, the proximate cause of war, terrorism, and whatever spectacular atavistic barbarism is currently informing today's mass-media visions of a coming Apocalypse. More than anything else, it is this notion of the apparently clear and present *danger* of religion that the 'horsemen' most often cite in answering critical questions about why it is that they have felt the need to 'go on the offensive' in a way that has made contemporary atheism both militant and evangelical.

In Harris's and Hitchens' work in particular, the argument that religion is a wilful psychosis (or popular delusion) leading to murder, terrorism, and war is given far greater prominence than their arguments as to why, as Dawkins puts it, 'there almost certainly is no God' (2006: 111, cf. 49). Instead, the power of the atheist books lies primarily in the litany of examples that the authors proffer as to the stupidity, venality, bigotry and depravity of 'believers' past and present. And certainly, if there is a point where it is hard *not* to sympathise with Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris, it is in the indignation with which they regard the undoubted inanities, sophistries and cruelties of the nominally faithful on display in their respective books (cf., e.g., Dawkins 2006: 64–66, 254–256, 279–291; Hitchens 2007: 32–36, 41, 42–48; Harris 2005: 156–159, 224). But how representative are these catalogues of the horrors of 'religion?' And if they are unrepresentative, why would millions of new atheist devotees be so willing to believe the opposite? Who

[2] The paradigmatic case of rationalisation gone wrong is, of course, 'Kafkaesque' bureaucracy in which hyper 'rationalisation' ends up looking like a mystery religion without initiates.

benefits, in other words, from this equation of the greatest danger of our time with 'religion' and with 'religious people' who are, for the most part, likely to be separated from the audience of the atheist manifestos by time, space, language, culture and (usually) social class?

8.3 Abandon Reason, All Ye Who Enter Here

In the whole new atheist corpus, the sense of imminent threat is nowhere more pronounced—and more egregious—than in Sam Harris's claims about Islam in both *The End of Faith* (2005) and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006). In the latter pamphlet, Harris says:

> The idea that Islam is a 'peaceful religion hijacked by extremists' is a fantasy, and it is now a particularly dangerous fantasy for Muslims to indulge. It is not at all clear how we should proceed in our dialogue with the Muslim world, but deluding ourselves with euphemisms is not the answer. It is now a truism in foreign policy circles that real reform in the Muslim world cannot be imposed from the outside. But it is important to recognize why this is so—it is so because most Muslims are utterly deranged by their religious faith. Muslims tend to view questions of public policy and global conflict in terms of their affiliation with Islam. And Muslims who don't view the world in these terms risk being branded as apostates and killed by other Muslims. (Harris 2006: 27)

Thus, although Harris is certainly indignant about the Christian Right (cf. Harris 2006), much of his invective clearly derives from a sense that 'we'—decent, rational, liberal, secular, open-minded people, primarily living in the Western world—have an Enemy whose ostensible thraldom to a dangerous religion of violence (Harris 2005: 117–128) is apparently so total that *not* to arm ourselves against it is to risk letting a false 'moral equivalence between Our sins and Theirs' (cf. Harris 2005: 139–147) culminate in Neville Chamberlain-like surrender (also known as 'letting the terrorists win').

In naming this enemy, Harris both refuses and repudiates the distinction between 'Islam' as espoused by Al-Qaeda and Islam per se (cf. Harris 2005: 33–35, 113).[3] As has been pointed out elsewhere (e.g. in Hari 2005), the vision of Islam invoked, castigated, jeered at and ostentatiously *feared* by Harris, especially at the time of the first edition of the *End of Faith*, owes much to the works of Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis (Harris 2005: 34, 111–118).

The unmistakably demonological accounts of Islam propagated by these authors play a major and acknowledged role in Harris's thinking (see Harris 2005: 100–116). As a result, while Harris is prepared to acknowledge the *existence* of what he condescendingly (and in a question-begging manner) calls

[3] 'In Islam, it is the 'moderate' who is left to split hairs, because the basic thrust of the doctrine is undeniable: convert, subjugate, or kill unbelievers; kill apostates; and conquer the world' (Harris 2005: 113).

'*moderate*'[4] Muslims, he is also at pains to insist that nonetheless the truly representative figure of Islam is the (fictional) suicide bomber described in *The End of Faith's* opening vignette—a bomber whom Harris (in a moment whose Orientalist *jouissance* at the Other's apparently limitless capacity for 'inhuman evil' is unmistakable) portrays as the child of parents whose 'religious' impulse to applaud their son's martyrdom completely overwhelms any impulse to mourn his death (Harris 2005: 11–12).

Harris's decision to paint this inflammatory and de-humanising picture of Muslims as people whose religion has turned them into somnambulant killer-robots rests in his expressed conviction that no 'external' or complex causes (poverty, political impotence, futile rage, the legacy of Imperialism, desperation) are in themselves adequate to explain behaviour like 'suicide-bombing' (Harris 2005: 131–134). As such, Harris concludes that the efficient cause of such behaviour must be 'religion'—an 'X factor' which by licensing Reason Preventing faith unleashes *Unreason* in all its murderous depravity.

Understood by Harris, religion thus appears as a series of unjustified false beliefs connected to a series of morally abhorrent 'Bronze Age myths' whose blind acceptance acclimatises the believer to shutting off the voice of reason, whenever it cry out against murderous stupidity. But what is Harris's evidence for a picture of religion as something whose primary function is to turn out reason's lights—thereby giving free rein to the monsters that arise from its (enforced) slumber? *The End of Faith*, like Dawkins' *The God Delusion* stresses that this irrational 'switch' exists in the form of the religious approbation of faith, which both Harris and Dawkins maintain, is equivalent to a paradigmatically irrational demand that believers slavishly obey teachings that—to any 'fair-minded' reader of the Bible and the Koran—are so patently absurd that they couldn't be anything *other* than an invitation to give up thought in favour of a chilling and perverse self-zombification (see Harris 2005: 25, 29–32, 64–73, 86–87, 118–123).

In objecting to this, it will be useful to make a brief note about *hermeneutics* and the role it plays (or rather does not play) in Harris's repeated assertions that mad, murderous and misogynist movements can be legitimately counted as the truth and essence of Islam, whereas any emphasis on, for example, *jihad* as primarily an *inner s*truggle of the soul against its own violence (Ramadan 2004: 113–120) is considered peripheral, derivative and/or backsliding.

[4] On this *petitio principii:* in Harris's private theological taxonomy the term 'moderate' is used for those Muslims who are not prepared to kill themselves and murder others for the sake of making their allotted virgin quota in paradise. Harris's reasoning here seems to be that if mass-murdering for martyrdom is the beating heart of Islam, any rejection of such practices (along with the stoning of adulterers et cetera) must represent a *dilution* of the real religion. I would also like to note here, that several of the new atheists (as well as fellow travellers like the British novelist Martin Amis) seem to take a prurient delight in the dramatically indignant contemplation of the idea that not only Islamic terrorism, but Islam revolves around the promise of raping virgins in the afterlife (c.f. Harris 2005: 72; Dawkins 2006: 96). We will presume that hard-headed scientists do not proffer pseudo-psychoanalytic sexual aetiologies without the hardest of hard evidence.

The basis for Harris's idea that anything belligerent sounding in the Koran can be safely taken as the *essence* of Islam, derives from his stated assumption that any non-violent tendency in Islam is, like 'moderate religion' generally, the product of a forced concession to the apparently *foreign* and as it were 'imported' values of Enlightenment, liberalism, rationalism and modernity (Harris 2005: 18–23).

To gain an insight into Harris's perspective, the following passage is useful, especially because it is perhaps the only time in any of the atheist books where an important twentieth-century theologian is not only named, but invoked in relation to one of his fundamental theological *ideas*:

> Paul Tillich, in his *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), rarefied the original import of the term [i.e. 'belief'—B.C.] out of existence, casting away what he called 'idolatrous faith' and, indeed, all equations between faith and belief. *Surely other theologians have done likewise*. [my italics] Of course, anyone is free to redefine the term 'faith' however he sees fit and thereby bring it into conformity with some rational or mystical ideal. But this is not the 'faith' that has animated the faithful for millennia. The faith that I am calling into question is precisely the gesture that Tillich himself decried as 'an act of knowledge that has a low degree of evidence.' My argument, after all, is aimed at the majority of the faithful in every religious tradition, not at Tillich's 'blameless parish of one.' (Harris 2005: 65)

The problem here is the evidence by which Harris takes Tillich's definition of belief as sufficiently 'marginal' to count as an idiosyncrasy—Tillich's 'blameless parish of one'. Why, by contrast, isn't this passage of Tillich closer to the essence of Christianity than, say, the worst pronouncements of the Reverend Jerry Falwell? Harris's argument cannot, obviously, be the relative *numbers* of people who accept, say, Falwell's vision over Tillich's. This is because, while he can (and, of course *does*) justify *engaging* with, or polemicising against, a certain group (e.g., the rabid and powerful U.S. Christian right) on the basis of the latter's indubitable political influence and numerical support, these same facts do not, in themselves, count as evidence that the Christian Right *accurately* represents the *essence* of Christianity as opposed to a betrayal, a distortion or an abuse (cf. Hedges 2006: 1–36).

Apart from the problem (common to the new atheists *and* religious fundamentalists) of assuming that there is a natural reading of the Bible or the Koran in relation to which all theological discourse exists as little more than pathetic New Labour style 'spin' (Harris 2005: 17–23), it is telling that Harris's version of what constitutes *real* religion (i.e. religion prior to the fig-leaf of stammering 'modernism' or *semi*-religious sophistry) involves taking the most apparently bellicose, and to contemporary ears, scandalous passages of the Koran as practical injunctions for everyday life, while pushing those condemning suicide, or advocating fraternity between Peoples of the Book, as merely decorative anomalies invented by professional apologists put on the defensive by modernity. In railing against the stupidity that comes from such readings, Harris is at pains to see idiotic, bigoted and otherwise abhorrent behaviour by religious devotees as a direct consequence of what happens when one assumes that a particular book 'has been written by the Creator of the Universe' (Harris 2005: 24, 173). But does this, in fact, follow?

8.4 Hermeneutics: What the New Atheists Should Know About Literary Criticism

Against Harris, could the presumption that the author of the text is divine (or more accurately the text's religious status as a 'revelation') not lead to *precisely the opposite hermeneutic situation* to the one he describes? Could it not, in other words, lead to the assumption that the (mortal, finite) interpreter of an 'Inspired' text should be particularly *cautious* in her interpretation, i.e. particularly reluctant to claim that a given interpretation or stricture should be taken as an unambiguous injunction from God irrespective of its apparent lunacy?

The question of biblical or Koranic hermeneutics stands out more clearly if we make an analogy between Scriptural criticism and literary studies. Apart from the fact that particularly careful literary criticism is often compared to 'biblical hermeneutics' and sometimes even, significantly, labelled 'Talmudic' or 'kabbalistic' (see, e.g., Bloom 1975), it is also often the case that the more an author is considered great the more people are happy to accept arguments for constantly revising and reconsidering both older and currently hegemonic interpretations of their work.

Given that this expectation of laborious, on-going interpretation is considered necessary for works of *non-divine* origin, why would we not expect, *contra* Harris, that organising a religion around a Holy Book might lead to this book being constantly re-interpreted *by its devotees*? Put differently, if we believe that a book contains 'sacred truths' both moral and metaphysical, wouldn't we be *more* rather than *less* likely to demand self-critical vigilance on behalf of its interpreters, especially when, as an influential (and famously conservative) apologist for Christianity points out, in Christianity, 'It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God' (Lewis 2008: 187). At the very least, why would a belief in the 'sacred' or even 'divine' status of a given Book not give rise to a concomitant belief that any reading by a mortal, finite interpreter might be perilously short of the truth, such that to claim that any interpretation was 'natural', 'authentic', 'definitive' or 'straight-up' would be in severe danger of (heretical) *hubris*? Does not the very existence of heresies, heresiarchs, schisms, reformations, and conflicting scholars precisely attest to the fundamental role that hermeneutic issues have played in the history of religions?

At this point, it might be reasonably objected that a plurality of interpretations in no way precludes the emergence of interpretations whose pernicious, irrational or otherwise harmful nature might be all the worse for their air of holiness or authority. Undoubtedly this is true. But the reason that such interpretations are possible is connected to an essential feature of the three monotheisms whose implications are (at the very least) bivalent. Specifically, this danger stems from the fact that just as religious traditions can (and are) used to 'sacralise' particular moral and political outlooks, they are also used as a basis to *deny value* (holiness, goodness, justice et cetera) to a particular practice, institution, form of life, or conception of virtue, even and especially when this institution, practice et cetera has hitherto claimed a religious justification for its way of being.

For Harris, this 'iconoclastic' or self-critical aspect of religious tradition is non-existent where it is not simply a steel door to slam in the face of 'outsiders"

objections. But here Harris is (like Dawkins) led astray by his belief in the intuitively plausible (but nonetheless demonstrably false) notion that the *older the religious tradition* the more abhorrent it will be to secular, liberal rationalists of the twenty-first century (Dawkins 2006: 262–272).

This assumption makes several mistakes: first, it conflates *dogmatism*, which defers to authorities, like, say, the magisterium of the Catholic Church, with *fundamentalism*, which often begins with explicitly anti-authoritarian (and anti-traditional) gestures that ultimately give way to demands for even greater obedience to that which is alleged to legitimately endure the purging of past authorities. Confusing these terms leads almost ineluctably to a failure to see the *modernity* of religious fundamentalism, i.e., the fact that fundamentalism is more often the perverse product of 'Reform' (see Aly 2007: xv) rather than conservative deference to tradition. In particular, Harris ignores the way that various 'fundamentalisms' have been specifically *instaurated (if not invented)* to suit particular (modern) political struggles, regimes or governments.[5]

But in addition to dismissing the possibility that belief in the revealed nature of a text might make the devout reader *more* rather than *les*s open to debates about its meaning, Harris et al. also ignore the fact that each of the monotheistic traditions possess a particular philosophical-critical *language* for questioning and challenging what has been (hitherto) instituted as sacred (Gauchet 1997; c.f. Bloch 2009). I am speaking, here, of the language of 'idolatry'. Through this fundamental theological language, Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologies not only denigrate rival gods or systems of thought, they also warn their adherents about *their own* susceptibility to rendering 'divine' any number of earthly things that, as dangerous *simulacra* of God, are unworthy of devotion.[6]

8.5 Graven Images: The Spirit and the Letter

In the writings of Harris and Dawkins, religious talk of 'idolatry' is mainly interpreted as a consequence of the fact that the Biblical God is a kind of cosmic narcissist whose major commandment to the faithful is 'not to have more than one god', where 'god' can be safely substituted for the word 'idea' (Harris 2005: 13–14). But if the critique of idolatry has undoubtedly been used in this way, there is ample *theological* evidence of it being used precisely against the (very real) tendency within 'religions' to create monoliths of dogma which demand nothing but the silence (or prostration) of all criticism.

Explaining: the biblical critique of idolatry can be seen as the motor for theology; it is what makes theology necessary over and above (and sometimes in opposition to) dogma. Understood in this way, the critique can be traced to a culture in

[5] For an excellent account on this vis-a-vis Hizbollah and a particularly Shi'a definition of martyrdom, see Benslama 2009; cf. Hedges 2006.

[6] On this point, Karl Barth will speak of the 'unavoidable idolatry of all human worship' (Barth 1976: 125; cf. Altizer 2006: 87)

which the Abrahamic God was unknown—i.e. to Plato and the Greeks (Plato 1991: 281 (598b); cf. *Sophist* 260c8-9; Maimonides 1963: 29–31).

For this reason, it should not be surprising that in various theologies (as opposed to Scriptures) the critique of idolatry, has much less to do with the evils of 'statue-worship' and much more to do with Plato's (and Aristotle's) philosophically indispensable insistence on the difference between the mere *aspect* of something and what that thing is, essentially, or in itself. In this sense the constant Platonic warning about confusing the ειδος or ιδεα of something (both usually translated as *form*) with its ειδολον (aspect, image or simulacrum) begins to take on a pivotal role in both religious and non-religious traditions of philosophy (see Heidegger 1991: 186, 150–210; cf. Deleuze 2003: 291–303; Kierkegaard 2009: 169–178).

Moreover, the history of theology in any of the traditions reveals just how much Christian, Jewish and Islamic theology (all of which, at some point, have been touched by encounters with Greek metaphysics) take seriously this idea that human beings are prone to confuse aspect with essence, letter with spirit, and that we do so more than ever when it comes to the most important things (justice, love, virtue and above all 'God' conceived as the *alpha* and the *omega* of these things.)[7] For Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, 'idolatry' in the broad sense of taking for God for what is *not* God is conceived as the principle source of all sin (Niebuhr 1964: 124; Clough 2007; cf. Maimonides 1963: 21–31).

Furthering this point, we can also find numerous examples in theology where the iconoclastic imperative leads to a rejection of even those doctrines that would seem to be *fundamental* to the religion (for example, the existence of a divine, transcendent being to whom we owe worship). This is manifest, for instance, in many of the radical (and even happily 'heretical') theologies that make use of biblical concepts precisely to undermine interpretations that, from the vantage of these theologies, have become dominant precisely *through* domination as opposed to anything remotely divine.

For example, Emmanuel Levinas explicitly praises *atheism* in his writings on Judaism, not only because he sees the atheist's vaunted scepticism as an indispensable weapon in the believer's unending quest to avoid confusing the deity with 'human, all too human' idols, but because by attacking theism understood as *belief*, atheism helps to draw out what Levinas sees as the primary, i.e. practical-ethical significance of religion. For Levinas, the heart of Judaism does not consist in a 'creed' which in turn stands in for a set of 'beliefs' considered as representations of propositions in our heads but instead begins with the *action* of *paying attention* to the voice of a person 'wholly other' to myself (Purcell 2006: 60–72; Levinas 1997: 15–16, 143–146). Levinas holds that this *other person* whose existence interrupts my self-enclosure and calls me to responsibility is at once the 'face of God' and anyone whom I must address by the second person pronoun, i.e. any being whose

[7] The *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition* states (with unambiguously Augustinian accents) that: 'Man commits idolatry whenever he honours and reveres a creature in the place of God, whether this be gods or demons … power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money etc. Jesus says you cannot love both God and Mammon'.

mere existence as radically 'other' to myself is understood to call me not to a *particular* ethical doctrine or commitment, but instead into the ethical realm *as such*, understood as a place where I am 'always already' responsible *for* the other.

In Levinas's philosophical system—which declares the priority of *ethics* over ontology—Judaism is read as a primarily ethico-political rather than metaphysical-doctrinal. As such, Levinas denounces the assumption—essential to both the works of the new atheists and to many of their pious opponents—that religion is primarily a matter of *belief* (Levinas 1997: 142–146), understood as something like the presence or absence of a tick next to a box labelled 'God: existence of', out of which is supposed to flow (depending on whether the box is checked or unchecked) frequent bouts of lunacy or (in the other case) the kind of moral, rational and magnanimous behaviour that might befit an Enlightened humanity.

One can imagine Harris scoffing at what he would doubtless regard as the *unrepresentativeness* of Levinas's position, just as he would also scoff at the theological assertions in Catherine Keller's astonishing eco-feminist process theology (Keller 2003), or in Latin American liberation theology (see Löwy 1996).[8] But the question that these 'radical theologies' pose for the new atheists remains: on what evidence can we dismiss *these* theologies as *deviations*, while taking the rantings of Tea Party Dominionists as representative of the eternal centre (and truth) of a religion? One could assume, as Harris does, that religious traditions start by reading their Holy Books 'literally' (Harris 2005: 17–18), with interpretations only becoming more and more 'metaphorical' or 'theological' [sic!] once believers have been shamed into diluting the literal meaning of their sacred texts by being forced to contrast the absurdity of what these texts actually *say* with what is revealed about the world through extra-theological sources (like modern science, anthropology, et cetera) (Harris 2005: 19).

The first thing that can be said about this is that the implied *chronology* behind such statements is demonstrably false. Thus, it is simply not true that only recent or post-Enlightenment theology has done anything but read the Bible 'literally'. One of the first pronouncements by Thomas Aquinas, in his (hardly marginal or modish) *Summa Theologica* lays out the necessity of reading the Bible *analogically* (Aquinas 2007: 7). In addition, Aquinas's *Summa* explicitly opens up a dialectic with mystical theology (Hart 1989: 199–202) which, as in the kabbalah's relationship to Judaism

[8] At its most dramatic, the dialectical tension between both (metaphorically) 'iconodulic' and 'iconoclastic' tendencies can be seen to have resulted in theologies sufficiently radical as to undermine even those aspects of a given religious tradition that one might think were least dispensable. This includes those 'death of God' theologies—often indebted to Hegel's own immanentist theology—which dispense with the existence of an alien transcendent deity on the basis of the (orthodox?) notion that the whole point of Christianity is that the deity, the transcendent God of power and prohibition *dies* on the cross (Altizer 2003; cf. Žižek and Milbank 2009: 260–262; Kotsko 2008: 149–155; Bloch 2009: 130–140; Jung 1984). In fact, we could add to this, that the undoubted aggression with which many religious institutions throughout history have taken to persecuting heretics, shunning 'infidels' and other 'cult-like' protective mechanisms (rightly abhorred by new atheists) are transparent attempts to ward off those aspects of theological reasoning that threaten to explode defensively nurtured orthodoxies from within.

(cf. Scholem 1961: 14), also *begins* from the idea that there exist multiple levels through which the Scriptures must be read, all of which, are to be employed *simultaneously* if the reader is even to have a hope of cracking the nut of truth.

Even without self-consciously 'radical' or 'heretical' interpretations, however, the struggle against idolatry (in Arabic: *shirk*) is a constant theme for all three monotheistic religions. But if a religion can use the critique of idolatry in the name of dogmatism ('outside of these teachings, all else is idolatry'), the critique of idolatry can also be turned against dogmatism. Thus, the very idea of the dangers of idolatry adds a *dynamic* quality to a religious tradition, a potential for self-critique (and even self-transcendence) which can certainly be suppressed by the Grand Inquisitors of every age but which can never truly eliminated without raising the suspicion that the suppressers are guilty of precisely what they elsewhere denounce under the name of idolatry.

If this dialectical motor of religious thought has been frequently shut off (as in dogmatism) or used selectively so that one only attempts to crush the idols of perceived opponents (as in fundamentalism), then we must look for the roots of this suppression, not only in religious texts and traditions themselves, but in the cultural, economic and political reasons for why a particular religious community might have (for instance) recently begun to emphasise the passages of their Holy Book stressing a call to arms over those preaching peace and love (Benslama 2009).

Thus, the demand that the believer move beyond the text 'as it first appears to us' in the direction of what it might mean if the blindness and prejudice of past or present interpreters and all-too human authorities were removed, remains a latent, but also ineliminable force that time and again has rendered theology alternately sympathetic, hostile, but in either case open to (in the sense of 'responsive' to) 'modernity' such that key doctrines—even in such a famously pertinacious entity as the Catholic Church—have not only been revised in the light of modern science, philosophy, social movements and even the polemics of atheists (like Nietzsche and Freud), but have *themselves* played a role (albeit of disputed scope) in the development of such things (Taylor 2007; Gillespie 2009; cf. Blumenberg 1999).

8.6 Defending Against the Enemy: Fanaticism

At this point, a superficially cogent objection may be raised. Namely, why would anyone bother to defend 'religion' against new atheist criticism, if she was at the same time taking pains to defend those (often explicitly heretical) theologies in which religious traditions are seen to contain the seeds of their own self-critique and even downfall, for example, Bloch's reading of the Bible's subterranean rejection of religious 'otherworldliness' in the name of this worldly-political hope, or Thomas Altizer's assertion that the whole point of Christianity is to declare *the literal death of God*—that the transcendent Lord of Creation dies as the 'broken body … of an executed political criminal' (Eagleton 2001: 16) whose death means that 'God' will henceforth only exist as the 'spirit of the community' (Žižek and Milbank 2009: 29).

If these things can be counted as 'religion', why is it then necessary to attack the new atheists who, surely, are only attacking 'religion' in the sense of those movements in the contemporary world that would seem—*precisely* from the perspective of the kind of 'radical theologies' listed above—the least 'Christian' or 'Islamic', and indeed the most profane and idolatrous?

The first answer to this question is that insofar as the new atheists limit their attacks to various reactionary, bigoted, wilfully ignorant and otherwise overtly pernicious forms of 'religion' *I do not wish to criticise them at all*. For instance, the Horsemen deserve nothing but admiration for their principled rejection of the attempts (under the name of 'Intelligent Design') to bring wilful obscurantism into the natural sciences.

Having said this, however, what *is* wrong with the new atheism goes far beyond their limited comprehension of theology and of religion. To understand what I mean here, it is useful to turn to a section of Hitchens' *God is not Great*. Here, Hitchens, while (correctly) mocking the 'religious' notion that 'atheism is at the root of every modern tyranny' goes on to offer an equation between politics and religion which is at once so banal and so representative of a series of contemporary ideological platitudes that it is worth quoting in full:

> A political scientist or anthropologist would have little difficulty in recognizing what the editors and contributors of *The God That Failed* put into such immortal secular prose: Communist absolutists did not so much negate religion, in societies that they well understood were saturated with faith and superstition, as seek to *replace* it. The solemn elevation of infallible leaders who were a source of endless bounty and blessing; the permanent search for heretics and schismatics; the mummification of dead leaders as icons and relics; the lurid show trials that elicited incredible confessions by means of torture … none of this was very difficult to interpret in traditional terms. Nor was the hysteria during times of plague and famine, when the authorities unleashed a mad search for any culprit but the real one. (Hitchens 2007: 246)

Despite Hitchens' caveat, this passage directly invokes the idea, much beloved by the British historian Michael Burleigh among others, that the crimes of both Nazi Germany and the U.S.S.R under Stalin, may both be traced to the fact that these were crimes committed by regimes which rested on movements whose principal feature is the illegitimate channelling of religious, and in particular, *millennial* aspirations into the secular, i.e. political realm (see, e.g., Burleigh 2008; Cohn 1970; Voegelin 1987; cf. Harris 2005: 79; Toscano 2010: 210–235). A staple of this often repeated 'origin of totalitarianism' thesis (which traces fascism and Stalinism to a displaced religious impulse) is the frequent use of a term which seems designed for the purposes of drawing a connection between murderous stupidity of an overtly religious sort, to what, for Burleigh, Voegelin and the philosopher John Gray, are the *covertly* religious movements of Communism and Fascism. The word that is used to establish this connection is '*fanaticism*'.

Alberto Toscano has recently written a remarkable, provocative, complacency-shattering history of this term (Toscano 2010), in which he accomplishes the urgent task of historicising what in our contemporary ideological constellation is too often portrayed as a kind of trans-historical substance which, like a medieval scourge or a

horror-movie monster, rises after every seeming defeat as another of its seemingly inexhaustible supply of avatars. In historicising the political use of the term, however, Toscano shows how the *referent* of the term 'fanaticism' is variable and elusive in a way that the *function* of the term is not. The use of the idea of fanaticism is, he shows, almost invariably that of pathologising a political opponent as being beyond reason or morality and therefore someone with whom it is impossible to negotiate or understand.

Although this point might be lost amidst the book's dizzying detail and bravura analysis, the *paradigmatic* political 'use' of 'fanaticism' according to Toscano can be found in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In his 1789 treatise, Burke portrays 'fanaticism' as inextricably connected to 'abstraction', an abstraction which he in turn conceives as a hallmark of all *universalistic and egalitarian* political movements. For Burke, even the pre-Jacobin French Revolutionaries are to be understood as *fanatics*, not because of their actions so much as their (for Burke) disastrous willingness to apply 'abstract' principles, like liberty, equality, and natural right, to what an anaemic twenty-first century jargon would undoubtedly describe as the 'irreducible complexity' of culture, society and tradition (Toscano 2010: 6–7).

In our own time, this Burkean spirit is expressed in the familiar form of a political orthodoxy that holds that, after the disasters of the twentieth century, what is most important and urgent in politics is the 'humanitarian' task of *preventing evil*, (where 'evil' is considered to be a result of taking a good principle *beyond its proper bounds* (cf. Žižek 1989: 27–28)).

Problematising this thesis of what we might call (with an eye to paradox) the liberal roots of 'capitalist realism' (see Fisher 2009), Toscano shows how countless political movements (from American Abolitionists to anti-Colonial forces fighting various Empires, from revolutionary-Messianic preachers like Thomas Münzer to secular Communists like Lenin and Trotsky; rationalist metaphysicians like Spinoza, not to mention, we should add, *every feminist movement from the suffragettes to the present*) have been accused of 'fanaticism' defined as both an unworldly dedication to principles and a febrile, immoderate desire to *realise* these principles through means that go far beyond the bounds of respectable moralising (Toscano 2010: 6–17, 115–117).

In other words, what would seem to connect the very different movements denounced as 'fanatical' is their attempt to bring *reality in line with an idea*, as opposed to expecting ideas to submit to the apparently insuperable exigencies of what we have come to accept as 'reality'. Because of this, Toscano shows, 'fanaticism' has been defined as at once the result of 'reason' 'unchecked' by religion (as in Burke, Voegelin and Burleigh) and at the same time (as in Nikolai Burdaev, Bertrand Russell) as a consequence of the subordination of reason to 'religious' fervour (cf. Toscano 2010: 204–205, 132–148, 204–236).

In its convenience for denouncing diverse and, arguably, irreconcilable political movements (see Toscano 2010: 203–249), the term's primary function seems to be to execrate anyone who takes ideas and principles more seriously or consistently than ourselves, i.e. anyone who breaks with what 'we' might think of as the standard, everyday level of cynicism and hypocrisy.

Significantly, the 'anti-fanatical' appeal to 'proper moderation' is often used in what I regard as the worst argument put forward *against* the new atheists. This is the argument that Dawkins et al. (like their fundamentalist rivals) are too noisy, vociferous or 'offensive', and that they should instead take the 'respectful' position of the liberal relativist who sees disaster (gulags, terrorism, tyranny) on the horizon for anyone who moves away from the relativist's blithe combination of theoretical idealism ('if everyone emulated my benign indifference there would be no war or suffering') and practical cynicism ('if taking ideas seriously is the worst of all evils, then my cultivated vagueness must be morally and politically *exemplary*').

Having said this, Toscano also notes that although the association between 'fanaticism' and Abolitionists (Toscano 2010: 6) might reasonably tempt us to 'reclaim' fanaticism from its conservative despisers, the nature of the most glaring twentieth century valorisation of fanaticism (by the Nazi S.S.) should preclude any simplistic 'contrarian' rush to identify it with a royal road to the beautiful and the good (Toscano 2010: xxv). But if Toscano's project is not simply to offer three (or even as E.M. Forster gave democracy, two) cheers for fanaticism, he is keen to point out that the present a priori fear of fanaticism—visible in the multifarious pre-emptive strikes (rhetorical or otherwise) against those suspected of it—might reveal more about those who urge vigilance against fanaticism than those nominated as the carriers of the fanatical virus. Thus, we can ask, in what I take to be the spirit of Toscano's book: is 'fanaticism' really the greatest danger of our time? What if, instead, the *opposite* were the case? What if the very cynicism that makes us think that the world in our 'post-ideological' age cannot be changed without courting disaster poses a far *greater* danger than the apparent depredations of those 'fanatics' at whom all our figurative (and often literal) guns are pointed?

Could we not argue, instead, that there is something both pathological and *revealing* about how quickly we accept the idea that the people most likely to commit atrocities are those who believe too fervently? Could the fear of fanaticism not, here, serve as a way of unconsciously deflecting our blindness to the evils that can be done in the mode of 'minding one's own business'—i.e. from the evils of what Alain Badiou calls the imperative of today's dominant ideology to 'live without Idea' [sic] (Badiou 2009: 511)?

The point here is that while the neo-liberal phase of capitalism undoubtedly has its ideologues, the world in 2013 seems awash in suffering and degradation that would seem to have arisen precisely through millions of well-meaning people putting aside what is (ideologically!) labelled as 'ideology' through their, i.e. *our*, abandonment of the 'lost causes' of past epochs in the name of 'getting on with life', 'remaining *un-fanatically* "open to experience"', 'acting rationally' (i.e. 'in our own private interests') and generally being sober, realistic and thus devoid of any convictions—especially uncompromisingly egalitarian ones!—that might cause the present socio-economic order to tremble or even blink. In such a context, is it surprising that when passionate convictions do appear they often do so in wild, unthinking, paranoid forms?

To put the point differently: one of the most significant features of contemporary capitalism is that one can participate fully in the system without needing in any way to 'believe' in the system or its apparent virtues. In fact, we can, as Žižek suggests in his famous adoption of Octave Mannoni's formula, participate fully in capitalism in the ('cultic') mode of 'fetishistic disavowal': 'I know very well that this is an unjust system/that this shampoo won't make me sexually irresistible, but even so…' (Žižek 1991: 34).

But if in identifying fanaticism as the enemy of 'Freedom' our epoch has, as it were, its guns pointing in the wrong direction, this has fascinating implications for an attempt to understand the present-day *success* of the new atheism. This is because, as I have noted, a major part of these writers' polemics involves identifying 'religion' and 'the religious' as the guilty parties behind the greatest depravities of our age. In doing so, our horsemen contribute to what Toscano points out is a more general sense of fear-fuelled outrage against a broad, if shadowy class of 'fanatics' whose membership (religious or otherwise) would seem to consist in anyone whose apparently incorrigible (because irrational) ways are alleged to threaten everything that is great about 'our' [sic] civilisation, modernity, Enlightenment, 'freedom' and the apparently just and reasonable mores and lifestyles of the sober West as opposed to the Intemperate Orient (Badiou 2003: 149–152; Žižek 2002: 41, 111; c.f. Dawkins 2006: 272–72)

But what Toscano's book helps us do is to move from the pedestrian question 'what are the causes of fanaticism?' and its correlate 'how can we best arm ourselves [sic] against the fanatics?' to the far better question: *whence comes the prior consensus that 'fanaticism' is the problem?*

8.7 Conclusion: New Atheists in the Context of September 11

Any understanding of the success (as opposed to the *arguments*) of the atheist best-sellers cannot be achieved without evoking the cultural aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001.

To begin with, the connection between the atheist books and the post-September 11 social imaginary is made explicit by the new atheists themselves. Thus, Harris concludes *The End of Faith* by telling us that he 'began writing on September 12, 2001' (Harris 2005: 333). Unsurprisingly, the book thus contains very frequent references to the attacks that are the (avowed) spur to his efforts (e.g. Harris 2005: 28, 55, 67, 117, 134, 138, 141, 196). While Dawkins' later book has considerably *fewer* explicit references to the events of that day, his sympathy with Harris's interpretation can be seen on numerous occasions, most significantly in his article of September 15, 2001 in which Dawkins compares the planes that hit the towers as 'missiles' of religion (Dawkins 2001).

Finally, Hitchens describes September 11 as a moment at which he felt an 'exhilarating' sense of a decisive moment having arrived:

> Here we are then, I was thinking, in a war to the finish between everything I love and everything I hate. Fine. We will win and they will lose. A pity that we let them pick the time and place of the challenge, but we can and we will make up for that. (Hitchens 2003)

While it is a (vapid) cliché to speak of the September 11 attacks as 'changing everything', it cannot be denied, at least, in retrospect that the infamous attacks do seem, in retrospect, to mark a threshold between two distinct epochs, even if the evidence for this distinction does not so much consist in a list of contrasts between two periods as in the way actors in the 'post September 11' universe have understood their own past. Taking into account this issue of historical actors *perception* of their own historical position, one of the best books on the topic of the shift between the pre and post-September 11 worlds is Phillip Wegner's (2009) *Life Between Two Deaths: The Culture of the Long 1990s*.

Wegner's book is explicitly motivated by Walter Benjamin's insight that what we lose in the passing of the past is not so much 'what actually happened' (which is partially salvaged from the ruins of time by the historian's art) but instead the dream-life of an epoch, its hopes of self-transcendence or of another world: the utopian glimmerings that are present even in the darkest, tawdriest elements of everyday life and which point beyond the epoch not to its actual future, but to a *possible future* that was never actualised (cf. Benjamin 2006: 33–34, 43, 395–396; Wegner 2009: 2–3)

In a Benjaminian spirit, Wegner meticulously searches through the pop-culture of the 1990s for a series of utopian gestures, longings, and imaginings of the future that he argues constitute a '*late* post-modernism', that runs against the grain of post-modernism understood as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (cf. Wegner 2009: 5). This trend, Wegner suggests, is observable in a series of attempts, within the realm of pop-culture, art, politics and philosophy, to imagine ways of transcending the harsh social realities created by three decades in which the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism was consolidated (on this consolidation and its disastrous consequences, see Harvey 2005).

Wegner describes the impetus of his own book in terms of an efflorescence of utopian imaginings that took place in the 1990s. This blossoming, Wegner claims, was made possible by the fact that the 1990s are, in his terms, a space between the 'two deaths' of the Cold War world order (Wegner 2009: 24).[9] The 'first death' Wegner describes as having taken place at the end of the 1980s with the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and its satellites. The second death, by contrast, is marked by the events of September 11, 2001. *Between these two deaths*, he argues, we have a period whose varied cultural output continually attests to visions of the future that can flourish precisely because the future of the post-Cold War era epoch is—in the 'heterotopia' of the 1990s—*undecided* (Wegner 2009: 28–35).

It is only with the aftermath of the *second death* that Wegner thinks we see the defining features of the new, post-Cold War world order taking on definitive shape. This shape is given by the neo-conservative ideologies that emerge as a political supplement (however 'dangerous') to what had become orthodox neo-liberalism.[10] But Wegner's analysis of September 11 is not about the *actual* tragedy with its victims, villains and stunned spectators. Instead, he is interested in 'September 11' as

[9] On the origins of Wegner's concept of the 'second death' cf. Žižek (1989: 135).

[10] On the emergence of neo-liberalism and its uneasy alliance with 'neo-conservatism' see Harvey (2005) and Brown (2006).

the name for something that was declared and thereby retroactively rendered as an historical watershed of epoch-making importance, not through some inexorable logic implicit in the attacks themselves, but by political and cultural shifts that—often explicitly—set about *retroactively* to fulfil the prophecy that 'everything changed' that September morning by fashioning the future in a new, post 9/11 image.[11]

For Wegner, the culture of the 1990s is redolent with visions of possible futures that will be destroyed by their subsequent lack of realisation in the post September 11 world. Thus, to give only a fragmentary list of the topics he covers, Wegner reminds us that the 1990s were the time of the anti-globalisation movement, a time where the Internet (recently displaced from its original context as a military technology to help with surviving a nuclear attack) seemed to promise a revolution in communication, economics, global politics and even in subjectivity (Wegner 2009: 33–34). It was also time, he suggests, where the spirit of punk was reborn in Grunge and where novels, artworks, televisions shows, and academic essays attested (in ways that were both insecure and celebratory, ideologically self-congratulatory and mordantly self-critical) to a time whose own sense was that of being poised between a completed past and a socio-political future whose outlines had not yet become visible.

It should be noted that Wegner's point is *not* that the 'the long 1990s' were some sort of magical Xanadu of progressive politics and experimental art as against the dour, paranoid, divisive 'noughties'. Far from such sentimentality Wegner's point is that that the political and cultural shifts of the 'two thousands' were often preceded by an explicit *repudiation* of what was, retrospectively, branded as the 'values' of the previous decade. For this reason, Wegner thinks, that which went 'unrealised' in the previous epoch (the 1990s) becomes, following its repudiation, ripe for salvaging from the wreckage of its defeat by the actualised future (as opposed to the possible one that was groped for in the dreams and imaginings of the departed epoch.)

As an example, Wegner quotes 'Republican Party activist James P. Pinkerton' declaring that September 11 represented:

> …a crushing defeat for irony, cynicism and hipness [sic!] that had taught us all that there's more to life than nothing, that some things really matter. (Wegner 2009: 26; cf. Žižek 2002: 34–35)

In Wegner's account (as well as many other places) this is shown by the many instances in the years following the attacks in which the events of September 11 would be described (by pundits of both the left and the right) as a moment in which 'we' were forced to wake up, grow up, to abandon childish things and face the traumatic reality from which this same 'we' (the complacent capitalist West? America? Utopian liberals? Repentant 'post-modern' academics? Liberal Internationalists? Atheists?) were apparently jolted from 'our' happy dreams of frictionless Fukyaman *post-histoire* (cf. Žižek 2002: 34).

[11] On the Bush Administration's belief in its ability to *change the nature of the possible* c .f. the excellent essay by Whyte (2007).

The reason that I invoke this (necessarily sketchy) vision of the post-September 11 Zeitgeist is because I think that it goes some way to explaining not why people agree with the new atheists but why so many have thought over the last decade that it is *important* to agree with them. The point here is that the atheist manifestoes are—contrary to their authors' view of themselves as embattled iconoclasts—fundamentally *comforting* in an age of anxiety. They are comforting because they suggest a simple answer to some of the difficult questions that have not ceased to resonate in the minds of so much of the Western (particularly Anglophone) world since its denizens first gaped in horror at the ashes of the Twin Towers.

Thus, to the question, 'what kind of people could have done this?' the new atheists' answer—at once pleasingly direct and wonderfully vague—is '*religious people*', defined as those obscure, unknowable others whose irrational, inexplicable attachment to demonstrably false beliefs compelled them to think and act beyond the bounds of what any 'recognisable or sympathetic human being' would consider decent or sane (Dawkins 2001; Harris 2005: 138–142, 148–151).

What this answer occludes, of course, is the idea of any complicated, political factors that could challenge the sense that Western, secular liberals are the eternally embattled 'good guys' at the beating heart of Enlightenment, democracy, and reason. As such, the new atheist corpus follows one of the major imperatives of the post-September 11 world: the need to identify the Enemy who is responsible for ruining 'our' (embattled) enjoyment, i.e., from what we ideologically construe as what would, but for the disruption of the outsider, be our innocent pleasure in 'our' civilisation, modernity and even Enlightenment (cf. Žižek 1992: 42–48).

In painting its unambiguous picture of the enemy who-is-definitely-not-ourselves, the new atheists also unwittingly help to prop up a prevailing contemporary *irrationalism* of the post 9/11 epoch. Specifically, I am talking of that deep-seated irrational fear of those whose allegedly alien reasoning (or 'fanaticism') pushes them beyond the reach of compassion or comprehension. Having envisaged the other as an alien adversary beyond the reach of reason or feeling, we are then given the excuse to treat people inhumanly, because they have already 'revealed themselves' to be inhuman.

Ultimately, it is the failure of the new atheists to see the political context of their best-selling exposés of religious lunacy that leads to their complicity with the social irrationality of the present world-system. Specifically, this is the social irrationality of the neo-liberal world order whose contribution to violence, anxiety, despair and suffering goes unnoticed by new atheist rhetoric which manages to blame most of these things on 'religion' conceived as a trans-historical mental disorder rather than a properly historical social phenomena which, as such, is influenced by other trans-individual realities (culture, history, society, politics).

Thus, while Dawkins et al. should be applauded for their uncompromising championing of 'reason', this very advocacy is blind to the fact that reason must be more than just *adherence to* (or the policing of) certain cognitive norms regarded as unproblematic, transparent and unchanging. In particular, it is necessary to

differentiate reason per se from what merely appears as 'rational' by the norms of the present moment and all it takes for granted.

After Hegel, Freud, Marx, and the past masters of Critical Theory, we should have learned that when it comes to what appears as other people's irrationalism, the question is not, 'how can we explain to these people that they're so unreasonable', but rather, *what in our present reality allows irrationality to flourish anywhere?* If we see the passions of others channelled into movements and goals that seem insane, pernicious or expressing a desire for one's own oppression, the truly reasonable questions are (1) 'Why are these same desires not being channelled in the direction of liberation, of truth, or of justice?' and (2) 'What role do we—head-shaking observers of such irrationalities—play in their creation and propagation?'

Without attempts to answer such questions, philosophy's laudable defence of reason against its sophistic opponent is in danger of simply collapsing into the old, irrational and reactionary doctrine that reason and thought, instead of being, as they are, available to everyone (even to the slave (cf. Plato, *Meno* 81e)) are the special possessions of the right sort of people, of those for whom, moreover, the task of reason lies behind instead of ahead of them. It is to say that we may now have license to wag our fingers censoriously at all those longings, passions and, most significantly, those *ideas* which precisely *as such* will remain recalcitrant to our attempts to dictate their proper form in advance, let alone their content which will always, at least, seem to have come—like a zephyr from another planet—from beyond the worlds we know.

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Against Fundamentalism: The Silence of the Divine in the Work of Karen Armstrong

9

Petra Brown

9.1 The Sword of God: The Violent Return of Religion in the West

Three and a half centuries after the treaty of Westphalia ended the bloody religious wars in Europe, religious zealots are again threatening to undo the progress of Western civilised society, the achievements of science, the Enlightenment and liberal democracy. Such is the charge of the 'new atheist' movements of which Michael Onfray is but one example. Onfray's self-confessed task is to rekindle the Enlightenment, to shine 'Atheology's dazzling light' on the tyranny and darkness of monotheism. And in just 219 pages, Onfray exposes 4,000 years of evil and darkness perpetrated by the three monotheistic religions—or so his *Atheist Manifesto* claims (2007: 219).

It is the new atheists' rejection of the Enlightenment principle of toleration that prompted Karen Armstrong to write her book *The Case for God*. *The Case for God* is an argument and demonstration that all forms of fundamentalism represent a 'defiantly unorthodox form of faith that frequently misrepresents the tradition it is trying to defend' (2009: 7). As a modern twentieth century movement, fundamentalist movements are essentially pragmatic, 'modern, innovative, and modernizing' and have a symbiotic relationship 'with an aggressive liberalism or secularism' (Armstrong 2000: 178).[1]

[1] Karen Armstrong has also tackled the issue of 'religious fundamentalism' in *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (2000) and *Faith After September 11* (2002). The combination of her readiness to engage with these difficult contemporary problems, her comprehensive knowledge in the field of religious studies, and her craft as a writer enables Armstrong to write to an audience beyond academia. In this chapter I focus on Armstrong's *The Case for God*, with some references to *The Battle for God* (2000). *The Case for God* is intended to provide a rich

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From the literalism of Protestant fundamentalists, to the anti-imperialist ideology of Muslim and the voluntarist association of the ultra-Orthodox Jews *yeshivots*, the forms of fundamentalist movements reflect the preoccupations of modernity, writes Armstrong in an earlier work, *The Battle for God* (2000: 369). The 'new atheist' reaction to monotheistic fundamentalism reflects the same preoccupations. It is the mirror image of the uniquely modern form of 'rationalized' religion. Like their fundamentalist theist counterparts, the new atheists believe they alone are in possession of truth. Mirroring their counterparts, they read scripture literally, mine it for simplistic 'moral teachings' and have a 'literalist' idea of God where God is the Supernatural Designer. Both parties exaggerate their enemy as the epitome of evil, both are theologically illiterate and both claim there is only one correct way of interpreting reality. And like their counterparts, the new atheists have rejected toleration. Similar to the unorthodox form of fundamentalist faith, the new 'secularization' of reason, declares Armstrong, turns reason into an idol that destroys all rival claimants (Armstrong 2009: 296).

9.1.1 The Sword of God: The Triumph of Logos

Armstrong argues fundamentalism is a symptom of a modern society infatuated with *logos*, the cure for this ailment lies in a rehabilitation through *mythos*, a tradition found and nurtured in the mystic traditions of all religions. The dangerous polarity of modernity between atheistic and theistic forms of fundamentalism can be mediated by finding our way forward through looking backwards, by returning *mythos* as a way of knowing the divine and being human in the world.

Armstrong introduces *mythos* and *logos* in *The Battle for God* (2000). According to Armstrong, in pre-modernity *mythos* and *logos* were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth and each had its area of competence (2000: xiii) *Logos* was 'the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world' (Armstrong 2000: xiv). Modernity is the triumph of *logos*. It is the world of scientific rationality, economy, technology and capital investment. Because *logos* is forward looking and dynamic, the modern scientific period began to discard the mythologies of the past as superstition and an impediment to progress (Armstrong 2000: 3). The interiority or rich inner world of human beings began to fade away only to find a neurotic expression as the *mythos* of religion became the *logos* of fundamentalism. *Logos*, as the basis of our Western society, must be tested by whether it works effectively in the mundane world.

analysis of religion against the caricature painted by the so-called 'new atheists'. The book itself covers such broad ground that I felt compelled to tackle only one aspect of Armstrong's argument. In this chapter, I investigate Armstrong's positive understanding of 'apophatic theology' and her criticism of the Reformation, using the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, in order to argue that aspects of the idea that grew out of the Reformation do in fact share significant conceptual ground with 'apophatic theology'. I have offered this critique in an effort to encourage a more nuanced reading of the history of theological ideas.

The art of religion is the practice of *mythos*; religion and *mythos* mark the limits of *logos*. The limit of *logos* is that it cannot make sense of the rich inner life of human beings—the pain and sorrow, the contraction and tragedy of human existence. This is the realm of *mythos*, rooted in the unconscious mind and an 'an ancient form of psychology' that, unlike *logos*, was able to address the tragedy of human existence (Armstrong 2000: xiii). In pre-modernity, *mythos* took precedence over *logos* since it was concerned with the origins of life, the foundations of culture, and the deepest meanings of human existence. Sacred rituals, along with liturgy and practice, established *mythos* as an attempt to grapple with language-transcending reality through symbolic terms. A relation to music, dance and artistic endeavor, religion is an internalising of a skill until it becomes part of us. Myth is intuitive, expressed in art, music, poetry or sculpture; it looks back at the beginning and provides a 'conservative spirituality'. For Armstrong, religion is a 'practical discipline that teaches us to discover new capacities of hearts and minds' (2009: 4). Like music, religion is a skill that requires practice, discipline and hard work. According to this analogy, the modern age has become tone deaf and lost the art of religion.

Armstrong emphasizes that mythos and logos have had different fields of competence, and when they are confused, the result is bad science and inadequate religion (Armstrong 2009: 291). It is this confusion that has led to the current polarization of reason and faith. However, the opposition can be mediated by returning to *mythos* as a way of knowing the divine and being human in the world. *Mythos* functions as a therapy and can be found in our own religious tradition, particularly in the Greek Orthodox tradition of negative theology. Negative theology was a strategy developed by theologians as a way to safe-guard God's transcendence from our innate human desire to anthropomorphise and create idols in our own image. In this tradition, it is the recognition of the divine silence that brings humility to humanity and fosters compassionate action in the world. In this way, negative theology can act both as a therapy for a neurotic world and as a way to resacrilize an arid modernity. Through the discipline of 'silence' and the practice of 'unknowing', the practitioner is led to *ekstasis*, a stepping out of ourselves, and *kenosis*, the emptying of the self and the dismantling of the ego in acts of compassion. It is this joining together of *ekstasis* and *kenosis* that leads to an ethical and spiritual way of life. Taking seriously the idea of the transcendence and inscrutability of God, negative or *apophatic* theology recognises the radical 'otherness' of the divine. The aim of *The Case for God* is to highlight the particular trend of negative theology through the development of Western civilization as it addresses our religious experience. In so doing, it may 'solve many of our current religious problems' (Armstrong 2009: 8).[2]

[2] Armstrong's argument is grounded in her own existential journey, as described in her autobiography, *The Spiral Staircase*. Throughout her autobiography, she describes her own spiritual 'ascent' in terms of TS Eliot's poem, *Ash Wednesday*, the poem that is based on St John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul* and Eliot's own experience of the *via negativa*. For Armstrong the mystical ascent to heaven is a symbol of the furthest reach of the human spirit, which marks the threshold of ultimate meaning. (Armstrong 2004: 217).

9.1.2 Rehabilitating 'Neurotic' Logos Through Mythos

In addition to highlighting the negative theology tradition, Armstrong also sets out to rehabilitate some of the loaded modern meanings of concepts such as ritual, myth, miracle, creation, scripture, revelation, faith, reason and mystery in terms of its birth and grounding in *mythos*. Armstrong does this in two parts. The first part, *The Unknown God,* covers the deity of *homo religiosus*[3] from 30,000 BCE to 1,500 CE. Beginning with the earliest recorded expression of religion, Armstrong follows a Platonic ascent from the cave into the light of modernity and reason. However, for Armstrong, it appears the ascent ceased at the end of the medieval period (2009: 128). The early history of *homo religiosus* that continued to animate the major confessional traditions to this time began a descent when, what Armstrong calls the 'Modern God' was born around 1,500 CE. The result was the gradual triumph of *logos* over *mythos*, and the overturning of many traditional religious presuppositions. This is the theme of the second part of *The Case for God*. We will now follow Armstrong's trajectory, with an emphasis on the development of negative theology. Armstrong's chapter, *Silence*, is the peak of the ascent from the cave, and presents for modernity the possibility of recovery from our neurosis through a reinvigoration of *mythos* and the discipline of unknowing as developed through negative theology.

9.2 The Unknown God: The Ascent to the Divine Through *Mythos*

In Armstrong's narrative, *homo religiosus* was born in the womb of the underground caves of Lascaux in the Dordogne. The ascent begins when human beings 'desire to cultivate a sense of the transcendent'. This Armstrong describes as the defining human characteristic (2009: 19). The ascent begins through religion and art, which were inseparable in disciplining a different mode of consciousness that enabled *homo religiosus* to reach for *ekstasis* or a 'stepping outside' the norm (Armstrong 2009: 19). Early religious rituals in various ways enabled our ancestors to ascend from the disorienting darkness of their literal and metaphorical caves through two principles: the conception of the nature of ultimate reality as both transcendent and simultaneously as manifested within all creation; and through grappling with this reality that transcended language in symbolic terms.

For Armstrong, the primacy of *mythos* over *logos* is demonstrated in ancient initiation rituals which did not exist simply to turn young men into 'efficient killing machines,' but to train them 'to kill in the sacred manner' (Armstrong 2009: 17). If *homo religiosus* is pragmatic, or utilises *logos* in its life of *mythos*, it is in this sense only: 'if a ritual no longer evokes a profound conviction of life's ultimate value, he

[3] A term Armstrong borrows from Mircea Eliade, for whom homo *religiosu*s indicates the human as motivated by an irreducible religious intentionality.

simply abandons it' (Armstrong 2009: 19). This surprisingly pragmatic definition of myth and ritual draws attention to the function of myth in Armstrong's account: they must foster a deep sense of life's ultimate value and push human beings towards transcendence. Armstrong argues that once myths and rituals cease to point to the beyond, cease to assist with transcendence, *homo religiosus* abandons one myth in favor of another. Indeed, in Armstrong's vision, this process of abandoning myths in order to pass to others is part of the progress of ascent, of the transcendence of our primitive ancestors towards modernity.

According to Armstrong, the ultimate reality for early *homo religiosus* was not a personalised God, but a transcendent mystery that could never be plumbed such as that seen in the Brahman who was 'the unseen principle that enabled all things to grow and flourish' (Armstrong 2009: 21). Armstrong spends considerable time rehabilitating fundamentalist interpretations of Scripture from 'historical accounts' into descriptions of 'ritual experience' which express the *coincidentia oppositorium* where, during an encounter with the sacred, things that seem normally opposed coincide to reveal an underlying unity (Armstrong 2009: 37). In this vein, Armstrong describes the Eden story as a chance for Israelites to have intimations of a lost primal wholeness through their participation in temple rites.

Continuing its cosmic trajectory, *The Case for God* next deals with the birth of 'reason' in the *phusikoi*, or Milesians, who had encountered Eastern cultures during their trade missions. They were drawn to impersonal, uniform laws and saw the universe as evolving according to inherent natural principles. Even so, the later Greeks did not discard *mythos*. According to Armstrong, Socratic dialogue is a spiritual exercise of initiation,[4] while Socratic dialectic is a rational version of the Indian *Brahmodya* that leads to a direct appreciation of the transcendent otherness that lies beyond the reach of words (Armstrong 2009: 67). This appreciation guides one to an experience of conversion (*metanoia*) based on doubt (*aporia*) rather than certainty. Armstrong also reads Plato's allegory of the cave from *Republic VII* in this way. But the older Plato, in Armstrong's account, loses sight of the inscrutability of the divine and his vision 'deteriorates' and becomes 'more elitist and hardline' (Armstrong 2009: 73) while Aristotle she contends had 'no interest in leaving Plato's cave' (Armstrong 2009: 75).

At the close of the third chapter, Armstrong reminds us that the theme of ritual, practice and discipline remained an intimate part of the lives of the early 'rationalists' of Western civilization:

> The rationalism of ancient Greece was not opposed to religion…*Philosophia* was a yearning for a transcendent wisdom…and held that the highest wisdom was rooted in unknowing and its insights were the result of practical meditative exercises and a disciplined lifestyle. (Armstrong 2009, p78)

[4] Here Armstrong references the work of Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1995), in which he devotes two chapters on spiritual exercises in the Greek and early Christian traditions. See the same work for a chapter on Socrates and the Socratic influence on Soren Kierkegaard. Also see Hadot (2004) for a chapter on dialogue.

Having firmly set the foundation of *homo religiosus*, the *God* of the Israelites and the *Reason* of the philosophers, the Christian savior of the world is born in the chapter entitled *Faith*—significantly wedged between the *Reason* of the Philosophers and the *Silence* of the Greek Orthodox fathers. Yet, far from the Christ of the Christian faith as later understood, Armstrong's Jesus provides an ethical model who made no claims to his divinity, nor did he ask others to 'believe' in him. Instead, he asked for *pistis* or commitment to his mission, for disciples who will give all they have to the poor and 'live compassionate lives, not confining their benevolence to the respectable and conventionally virtuous' (Armstrong 2009: 90). Similarly, Paul of Tarsus who created the Christian faith in Armstrong's assessment did not write treatises of doctrine but letters of moral instruction. If Armstrong is right, Jesus lived a life of *kenosis*, self emptying humility that must become the model for the lives of his followers. For Armstrong, Christian doctrine makes sense only when it is translated into a 'ritual, meditative or ethical programme' (Armstrong 2009: 88). What Christians call the gospel accounts of Christ's life were exercises in creative *midrash*, akin to the joint enterprise of Socratic dialogue. Like Judaism and later Islam, early Christianity promoted 'orthopraxy', right practice, over 'orthodoxy' or right teaching. It was not until the fourth century that Christianity began to be preoccupied with 'abstruse dogmatic definitions', in part due to the 'mixed blessing' of Constantine's imperial support (Armstrong 2009: 103–4).

9.2.1 The Silence of God: At the Peak with the Unknown God

The axis of Armstrong's case comes to us, then, in the fifth chapter in the *Silence of God*. Armstrong describes the discipline of negative theology as it develops alongside the doctrinal formulations of the Church post-Constantine. The *apophatic* vision and practice was shaped by the Greek Orthodox leading lights: Athanasius, the Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor.

While Anselm of Canterbury defined the Incarnation in terms of the doctrine of Atonement, which became the norm for the West, Maximus the Confessor spoke of the Incarnation as necessary in order that 'the whole human being would become God, deified by the grace of God become man, soul and body, by nature and becoming whole God, soul and body by grace' (Maximus the Confessor, cited in Armstrong 2009: 110). It is this view of Incarnation that led Maximus to develop the spirituality of silence, 'not dissimilar to the Indian Brahmodya' (Armstrong 2009: 112). Those who practiced the spirituality of silence lived in solitude, practicing spiritual exercises similar to the Epicureans, Stoics and Cynics. By the mid fourth century, some of these desert monks had pioneered an *apophatic* or 'wordless' spirituality that brought them *hesychia*, or inner tranquility.

Unlike the Eastern Church, the West did not develop a full bodied 'spirituality of silence' until the ninth century, when the writings of the unknown Greek author,

Denys the Areopagite were translated into Latin.[5] Writing towards the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, Armstrong claims that Denys affirmed creation as *mythos* and a continuous, timeless process in which God was eternally 'enticed away from his transcendent dwelling-place and comes to abide within all things' (Denys the Areopagite, cited in Armstrong 2009: 124).

In his treatise, *The Divine Names,* Denys established a spiritual exercise in the form of a 'dialectical process' consisting of three phases. The first phase is to affirm God exists, but if we listen carefully, we fall silent 'felled by the weight of absurdity of such Godtalk'. Therefore, in the second phase we deny each of the attributes of the first phase. The 'way of denial' follows the 'way of affirmation' but leads to the third phase, the denial of the 'way of denial'.[6] Just as we cannot know what God *is*, so we cannot know what God is *not*. The purpose of the exercise is to come to the realisation that God transcends the capability of human speech and is beyond every assertion and every denial (Armstrong 2009: 126). Quoting Denys, Armstrong concludes, 'It is as inaccurate to say that God is "darkness" as to say that God is "light"; to say that God "exists" as to say that God "does not exist", because what we call God falls "neither within the predicate of existence or non-existence"' (Denys the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, cited in Armstrong 2009: 126).

This exercise of dialectical process leads to *apophasis*, the breakdown of language before the absolute unknowability of God, and this is a form of kenosis that drives us out of ourselves. For negative theology, our thought is an idol, a simulacrum, a projection of our own ideas and desires. We stand as Moses shrouded on mountain Sinai. We are silent in the presence of the unknown God. This is not only an abstract idea, but one reflected in the liturgy, in the community of faith that plunge together into the darkness beyond intellect. In Denys' words:

> Renouncing all the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, [Moses] belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing. (Denys the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, cited in Armstrong 2009: 126)

Even the Eucharist is not simply a re-enactment of the last supper but an allegory of the soul's ascent to God, a 'dialectical process' that led the congregation to experience God as 'immeasurably other'. Due to the influence of Denys the Areopagite, by the medieval period the apophatic idea was engrained in Western consciousness, Armstrong claims (2009: 128).

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[5] Armstrong draws on the work of Denys Turner, in her discussion on Denys the Areopagite. Turner prefers the archaism 'Denys' to the more modern appellations, 'the Pseudo-Dionysius' or 'Pseudo-Denys'. Turner argues the identity behind Pseudo-Denys remains unknown. Turner himself respects the author's wish to be identified with the Denys the Areopagite mentioned in Acts17:34, and reminds us the author of *The Divine Names* was credited with sub-apostolic authority in the High and Late Middle Ages (Turner 1998).

[6] David R. Law points out it was this 'second step' that led Dionysius the Areopagite to introduce the term apophatic theology (Law 1993).

It is unclear to what extent Armstrong changes Denys in order to support her *own* account and place of *mythos*. Here is just one of the many places where Armstrong's interpretation of a Christian tradition hints more of her own desire to create a narrative, than a depth of knowledge of that tradition that comes with indepth scholarship. For example, Andrew Louth (2001) writes of Denys the Areopagite that he remains firmly rooted in the Christian theological tradition of which he was an heir. In this context, St Basil the Great's distinction within the teaching of the Church between *dogma* and *kerygma*, doctrine and proclamation, is helpful. Liturgy is part of the *dogmata*, the tradition of the apostles handed down secretly, in a mystery that prevents anxiety and curiosity 'so as to safeguard by this silence the sacred character of the mysteries' (St Basil the Great cited in Louth 2001: 27). Basil's distinction between *kerygma* as something persuasive, something to be proclaimed and *dogma* as the experience of the mystery of Christ hidden in the bosom of the Church and mediated through the experience of liturgy seems to mirror Armstrong's *logos* and *mythos*. Yet, Armstrong speaks of Basil's *dogma* (particularly that of the Trinity) in terms that are outside the 'liturgical experience', or mystery, in the language of *kerygma*, persuasion, or even *logos*.

In any case, Armstrong argues the Western appropriation of the apophatic idea became subordinated to logos with Aquinas. Where Denys' theology was firmly based on liturgy and practice, Thomas Aquinas' apophaticism was rooted in the 'new metaphysical rationalism' whose 'tortuous analysis should be seen as an intellectual ritual that leads the mind through a labyrinth of thought until it culminates in the final *musterion*' (Armstrong 2009: 140). It is not long after the death of Aquinas that John Duns Scotus, with a 'preference for a natural, almost scientifically based theology' begins to herald a new way of knowing God when he insisted that the word 'existence' was univocal. Meanwhile, his contemporary William of Ockham 'no longer saw doctrines as symbolic; they were literally true and should be subjected to exact analysis and inquiry' (Armstrong 2009: 148).

Armstrong laments this time as the descent from the peak of the 'Unknown God' to the birth of the 'Modern God'. By the fourteenth century, mysticism became separated from theology and became a 'privatised type of prayer that was devoted almost exclusively to the cultivation of intense emotional states, which they imagined were an "experience" of God' (Armstrong 2009: 149). The theology of 14th-centruy theologians Duns Scotus and William of Ockham was

> incomprehensible to all but a few experts. The theology of unknowing had encouraged humility; the new speculations of the schoolmen seemed to inflate their conceit and could be imparted to anybody who had the intelligence to follow it, regardless of his moral stature. (Armstrong 2009: 154)

Thus it is with the intimation of the loss of an irretrievable age that Armstrong begins the second part of *The Case for God* with the herald of the modern period and the birth of modernity's God. It is this sense of loss that sets the tone for the second part of the book.

9.2.2 The Word of God: Birthing the Modern God

In Armstrong's narrative, the modern period began in the year 1492, when Christopher Columbus set sail across the Atlantic and discovered the Americas (Armstrong 2009: 159). This voyage was made possible by the new scientific discoveries that gave the people of Western Europe an 'unprecedented control over their environment', a world where 'creative *mythos* would soon be a thing of the past' (Armstrong 2009: 162). The sixteenth century saw the beginning of a process of secularization that was influenced by three connected movements: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution.

But early modernity brought with it profound social changes that led to individuals feeling existentially disoriented. The old mythology that had given structure and significance to their ancestors had crumbled, leaving individuals in a 'paralysing helplessness before the trials of human existence and…convinced they could contribute nothing towards their own salvation' (Armstrong 2009: 167). In this context, God's absolute power became a lifeline for these individuals who felt essentially impotent. Through desacrilizing the cosmos with *logos*, the humanists, reformers and scientists all began to differentiate between sacred ideas and the profane objects of everyday life. What the Reformation contributed theologically, the printing press contributed technologically. The printed page itself became an image of precision and exactitude that spoke to the importance of accuracy and efficiency. Printing helped to secularise the relationship of the reader to the truth they needed to acquire and increasingly encouraged a more systematic and pragmatic approach to knowledge (Armstrong 2009: 169). For religion this was disastrous. The word replaced the image and icon; ritual and ceremony were replaced by the pulpit. The Protestant emphasis on *Solo Scriptura* dispensed with the mediating role of tradition and the Church:

> Instead of trying to get beyond language, Protestants would be encouraged to focus on the precise, original and supposedly unchanging word of God in print. Instead of reading the sacred text in a communal setting, they would wrestle with its obscurities on their own. Slowly, in tune with the new commercial and scientific spirit, a distinctively "modern" notion of religious truth as logical, unmediated and objective was emerging in the Western Christian world. (Armstrong 2009: 170)

The impact of the Protestant Reformation reverberates today. In our own age, fundamentalists have come to interpret scripture with an unprecedented literalism. We are left with rationalised interpretations of religion that can only lead to atheism and fundamentalism—or such is the way Armstrong argues we must see the contemporary situation.

The following chapters of *The Case for God* in any case chart the impact of the new emphasis on *logos* in Galileo's 'mechanistic science', Descartes' 'quest for autonomous certainty' and Newton's 'cosmic laws', which by the eighteenth century led to the *philosophes*, whose 'rational ideology was entirely dependent upon the existence of God' (Armstrong 2009: 205). In fact, through three chapters Armstrong follows the increasing tyranny of *logos* through 'Scientific Religion', 'Enlightenment', and 'Atheism'. Through their reliance on the new modern,

scientific logos, the churches made themselves vulnerable to attack. The *apophatic* method had become so alien; it had become the norm to speak 'of God as a being and substance located in the universe' (Armstrong 2009: 217).

According to Armstrong, the tyranny of logos instigated a split between the heart and head that degenerated into emotional excess on the one hand and a fervent desire for certainty on the other. In religious terms, the emotional excess found expression in the 1734 First Great Awakening in Massachusetts, led by Jonathan Edwards. Three hundred people were 'born again', experiencing soaring heights and devastating lows that accompany undisciplined spiritual rituals (Armstrong 2009: 208). The reactionary desire for certainty found its religious manifestation in Hodge and Warfield's 1870s development of the Protestant doctrine of the literal infallibility of scripture, and the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility, defined in 1870 (Armstrong 2009: 312–3).

For the pietist spiritual enthusiasts, only the *ekstasis* remained of the older mystical tradition, while the difficult ego dismantling discipline of *kenosis* and self-restraint was left behind in the dark pre-Enlightenment days of distant memory. For the theologians inspired by rationalism, religious language came to mirror the univocal, clear and transparent language of scientific discourse. The theology of 'unknowing' that acknowledge the transcendence of God as beyond language was all but lost.

9.2.3 Returning the Unknown God to Modernity: The Hope for Humanity

According to Armstrong, 'unknowing' returns to the West in the twentieth century in the wake of the First World War. But this unknowing is no longer the 'Unknown God' of pre-modernity. For Armstrong, it is the modern physicists who returned unknowing to modern consciousness and who are evidence that human beings seem structured 'to pose problems for themselves that they cannot solve, pit themselves against the dark world of uncreated reality and find that living with such unknowing is a source of astonishment and delight (Armstrong 2009: 297).

Alongside the physicists, Armstrong contends, it is the post-modern philosophers and theologians who are the negative theologians of our age and return *mythos* to its rightful place. Armstrong's final chapter suggests post-modern thinkers rediscover the practices, attitudes and ideals that were central to religion before the death of the 'Unknown God' and the birth of the 'Modern God'. Armstrong names Mark C. Taylor, John D. Caputo and Jacques Derrida as following in the tradition of Denys the Areopagite in different ways.[7] And it is these postmodernists that attempt to overthrow the grand narrative of the omnipotent and omniscient God, and the

[7] Armstrong places these philosophers, who have often confused and confounded the English-speaking world, in an historical tradition that helps to engage a dialogue between often-hostile camps. See Hart (2000) for an in-depth discussion of Derrida and the negative theology tradition.

deification of *logos* that gives rise to the equally absolute totalizing claims of atheism. Quoting Caputo, Armstrong is optimistic of the possibility before us:

> If modern atheism is the rejection of a modern God, then the delimitation of modernity opens up another possibility, less the resuscitation of pre-modern theism than the chance of something beyond both the theism and atheism of modernity. (Caputo, cited in Armstrong 2009: 302)

For Armstrong, the beyond of the theism and atheism of modernity is the ascent to the divine that finds its rest in the final paragraph of the Epilogue, in the Buddha sitting in contemplation under a tree. 'Are you a god, sir?' asks an astonished Brahmin priest. The Buddha replies that he has come to reveal a new potential in human nature, that of living with each other at peace and in harmony, at the peak of our capacity as fully enlightened human beings. '"Remember me" said the Buddha, "as one who is awake"' (Armstrong 2009: 316).

9.3 Armstrong's Divine Silence: A Protestant Rejoinder

So far we have read a synopsis of Armstrong's magisterial work by following her account of the place of *mythos* and *logos* in the development of Western civilisation. Because most English speaking philosophers are familiar with the ideas that gave birth to Armstrong's modern God, the chapters dealing with the birth of modernity, through the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment and the rise of atheism have been mentioned only in passing. We have focused on her account of negative or *apophatic* theology in the Greek Orthodox tradition because it is becoming increasingly attractive to serious thinkers in the West who seek to overcome the polarization of faith and reason that Armstrong has argued developed since the fifteenth century.

Armstrong's work is most valuable to English-speaking academics in the way she shows us the forest when we cannot get past the trees. Her particular gift is to weave a rich tapestry out of the disparate threads of our own history. However, this ability to create a cohesive whole is achieved only through generalising and skipping blithely through centuries of history in order to craft her tale. Philosophically, her separation between *logos* and *mythos* seems overstretched. Early in her book, as we saw, she suggests myths and rituals are ultimately pragmatic: they serve to foster a deep sense of life's ultimate value. Therefore, they are discarded when they cease to operate in this way. On her own account, this is a function of *logos*. Indeed her unique style of writing is decidedly more *logos* than *mythos*, and indicates that *logos* and *mythos* are more like conjoined twins, than rivaling siblings.

In addition, Armstrong's affirmations of myths as 'symbolic' and not 'a factual account of an historical event' (2009: 34) and her continual insistence on myth as 'essentially a program of action' that put you into 'the correct spiritual or psychological posture' (Armstrong 2009: 3) begins to sound suspiciously like self-help therapy against Eliade's more robust account of myth as primordial revelation that is the 'irruption' of the sacred into the world, of a creative energy that overflows and

establishes the world as a reality (Eliade 1987: 95–97).[8] This sense of 'irruption' is deepened by Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum,*[9] which greatly influenced Eliade's own account of the holy. Otto in turn discovered this in Luther, whose living God was not the God of the philosophers, the idea or moral allegory, but 'a terrible power, manifested in divine wrath' (Eliade 1987: 9) The *mysterium tremendum* brings not only a 'tranquil mode of worship' but may also

> burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. (Otto 1950: 13)

Through Luther, Otto discovers the God who is wholly a 'God of revelation' and at the same time the God who, in the awful majesty of His Godhead, is 'unrevealedness' and before this God we tremble as the creature in its 'uncovered' creaturehood (Otto 1950: 98). It is this unrevealed part of God that leads to a 'numinous horror':

> For God is a fire, that consumeth, devoureth, rageth; verily He is your undoing, as fire consumeth a house and maketh it dust and ashes. (Luther, cited in Otto 1950: 99)

The unrevealed God is hidden away from all reason, knows no measure, law or aim and is verified only in the paradox. For Luther, this paradox is the distinguishing characteristic of the nature of God.

9.3.1 The 'unknown' Protestant God

Can we imagine a more unknown God than Luther's God who is wholly Other (*Das Ganze Andere*), referred to by Armstrong as the 'Modern God', the idolatrous god that has led to the cleavage of human beings and our Western civilisation? In *The Case for God*, Armstrong referred to Luther and his fellow reformers as simply expressing the disorientation of modern individuals who feel impotent and need a powerful God to be their lifeline. In this way, these Reformers more than the humanists or the early scientists, appear to be responsible for the neurosis that plagues Western Society. In a previous work, Armstrong is much less measured when she describes Luther as 'a firm believer in witchcraft', 'a disturbed, angry and violent man' whose 'vision of a wrathful God had filled him with personal rage … it has been suggested that his belligerent character did great harm to the Reformation' (Armstrong 2004: 275–279). Not surprisingly, some of the doctrines central to the Reformation also come under attack in this earlier work, particularly that of the

[8] Similarly, Armstrong's definition of *coincidentia oppositorium* as an encounter with the sacred where things that are normally opposed reveal an underlying unity, lacks the depth of Eliade's characterization as 'the very nature of the divinity, which shows itself, by turns or even simultaneously, benevolent and terrible, creative and destructive…it is this *coincidentia oppositorium* which is the starting point for the boldest speculations of such men as the Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, and Nicholas of Cusa' (Eliade 1958: 56).

[9] *Mysterium* denotes what is hidden, what is beyond conception or understanding. The closest word in English to *tremendum*, says Otto, is 'awe' or 'aweful' (Otto 1950: 13).

'guilt and sin, struggle and strain in the religion of God in the West' (Armstrong 2004: 354). There is no mention of sin in *The Case for God*, although Augustine's doctrine of original sin is 'one of his less positive contributions to Western theology', it is a 'doctrine born in grief and fear' and has left Western Christianity with a difficult legacy that has alienated men and women from their humanity (Armstrong 2009: 122).

We should understand that while Armstrong may view sin as an unpalatable, inhumane aspect of the past that points to the neurosis of modernity, by refusing to engage with the category, except in these terms, Armstrong simply does not engage with the ambiguity of human nature that is part of the meaning of sin in the Augustinian Christian tradition. It is precisely the recognition of their own dark side that propels Augustine and Luther to emphasise the holiness, or otherness of God. Yet we have seen it is this unknown aspect of God that Armstrong wishes now to resurrect through the tradition of negative theology.

Following Armstrong's theme of an ascent to the divine, I will draw on the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard to paint what might be thought of as a Protestant ascent to the divine. For Kierkegaard, the motif of sin, or dis-relationship, subverts the mystical ascent to God, and indeed, to truth. I do this with some justification, for the Danish theologian and philosopher follows closely in the footsteps of Augustine and Luther. To put it into John Caputo's tight script:

> Kierkegaard can be clearly inserted into a theological line that extends from the Pauline letters through Augustine and mediated to him by Luther, which accentuated the theological motifs of fallenness, guilt, sin, grace and faith, on the one hand, and the radical transcendence of God in eternity, on the other. (Caputo 2007: 71)

Right throughout Kierkegaard's corpus, his famous pseudonyms attempt and fail to transverse the infinite distance between the two hands, between sin and God. Kierkegaard's relentless use of his method of 'indirect communication' or existential dialectics led David R. Law to write a study titled *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*. Therefore, it is with Kierkegaard the Protestant theologian, existentialist philosopher and Kierkegaard the negative theologian that I hope to redress the maligned Protestant's neurotic invention of a distinctly 'modern God', in order to correct Armstrong's own somewhat sanguine interpretation of *apophatic* theology.

9.4 Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian

Law (1993) points to three fundamental characteristics of negative theology: the emphasis on the transcendence of God, the inadequacy of human language and reason and union with the divine. Law finds a significant number of parallels between Kierkegaard and negative theology's fundamental characteristics. The emphasis on the transcendence of God that is captured by Meister Eckhart's declaration that 'God is something that necessarily transcends being' (Eckhart, cited in Law 1993: 18) can be compared with Kierkegaard's insistence on the qualitative difference between God and humanity. For both negative theology and Kierkegaardian

existentialism, this qualitative difference between God and humanity speaks of a radically transcendent God, in whose presence conceptual reason, language and knowledge break down.

Because nearing the radically transcendent God leads to a breakdown in representational language, indirect communication and negating positive statements are important disciplines for both Kierkegaard and negative theology. Through these disciplines, the individual reaches the highest form of knowledge, a 'learned ignorance' through which we approach the mystery of God. Both Kierkegaard and negative theology emphasise Christ as the paradoxical revelation and hiddenness of God. For Law, it is the role of paradox that provides another important link between negative theology and Kierkegaard. Eckhart emphasised the transcendence of God through employing paradox as a means of breaking down our dependence of images and concepts. Similarly, Kierkegaard's 'Socratic paradox' arises from the incompatibility of eternal truth and existence. Existence is the sphere in which truth must be established, a feat possible only through suffering and guilt, through sacrificing one's hold on understanding in order to relate to truth through Socratic ignorance (Law 1993: 137). Note here that the paradox belongs to an ethico-religious order. It is not a logical contradiction but Paul's stumbling block (1 Cor 1:23). For both Eckhart and Kierkegaard, the paradox that drives human beings beyond reason to the hidden place of God is a process of 'crucifixion' of language and thought (Law 1993: 208).[10]

Law argues that while Kierkegaard stands in a very different tradition from the Neoplatonic negative theologians, if we consider the results of negative theology, we find Kierkegaard *more* apophatic than the negative theologians (Law 1993: 210)—rather than a symptom of the West's loss of the apophatic heritage, as Armstrong would argue. Yet what makes Kierkegaard more apophatic is not finally the ascent to the divine, but the paradoxical ascent to the divine through the descent into the human condition of sin. Sin is the ontological dis-relationship between humanity and the divine. It is therefore necessary to consider more closely the idea of sin in the work Kierkegaard the Protestant theologian and philosopher.

9.4.1 Kierkegaard as Protestant Theologian and Philosopher

Kierkegaard's pseudonym *Johannes Climacus* is named for the sixth century monk *St John of the Ladder* (Gk. *klimax*) who described the thirty steps by which the ascetic individual ascends to union with God, through an intellectual encounter with

[10] Kierkegaard's 'martyrdom of understanding' is similar to Eckhart's 'detachment' and '*destruktion*' of will, language and thought. Another to follow in the footsteps of Ekhart, Luther and Kierkegaard, is the early Heidegger. See Crowe (2006) on the link between Heidegger's use of *Destruktion* and Luther's latin *destructio* which renders foolish the 'wisdom of the wise', a direct attack on Aristotle's 'theology of glory', replaced by Luther's 'theology of the cross'. Also see Caputo (1986), for an in-depth study on the relation between Eckhart and Heidegger.

the Word who is God, motivated by love.[11] *Climacus* embodies the individual who ascents to truth through *via negativa* in the monastic tradition. Yet for Kierkegaard, the intellectual mystical tradition advocated also by Armstrong, remains in the existence-sphere of Religiousness A where sin is understood as ignorance or inability. In this existence-sphere, Socratic or maieutic education into ignorance, or Armstrong's 'unknowing', can lead the individual out of the cave into the presence of the divine light. Instead of John of the Ladder's conception of a continuation or a relationship between God and creation based on natural affinity, the Protestant Kierkegaard argues the only relationship possible between God and creation is a *dis-relationship* based on the discontinuity between God and creation, a discontinuity posited by sin.

Far from petty moral transgression, sin in the Christian tradition speaks to the fallenness of our human condition. It is this sense of fallenness that leads to the awareness of the radical otherness of God and the creatureliness of the human being who stands before God in fear and trembling. It is also precisely this category of sin that places the value of infinity on the individual as 'the anguished conscience' (Kierkegaard 1967: Vol. I: 521). Kierkegaard's category of the solitary individual is testament to the unique difference between human beings.

The 'solitary individual' (*hiin enkelte*) is established through positing sin. The solitary individual *is* the anguished conscience. This is most powerfully demonstrated through the 'Christian' counterpart to the 'Socratic' *Johannes Climacus*: *Johannes de Silentio*. De Silentio's knight of faith, in *Fear and Trembling*, is described by Caputo as the Protestant Ideal (2007: 51) who maintains the perfect equilibrium between the finite 'this' world and the infinite 'other' world. Yet, the Protestant Ideal or the Knight of Faith is Abraham, who presents a 'paradox that makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops' (Kierkegaard 1983: 53). Throughout *Fear and Trembling*, John the Silent One is perplexed by the silent faith of Abraham. De Silentio approaches him with a *horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mount Sinai. (Kierkegaard 1983: 61) Like his philosophical counterpart, *Johannes Climacus, Johannes de Silentio* displays the 'anguished conscience' that apprehends the Otherness of truth or God. Far from requiring therapy, *Climacus* and *de Silentio* in their despair exist in truth or in a true relationship to truth. It is the subjective thinker who becomes the solitary individual, and who is established negatively through un-truth in the philosophical sense (*Johannes Climacus*) and through sin in the (Protestant) Christian sense (*Johannes de Silentio*). The subjective thinker, says *Climacus*, is always just as negative as he is positive, he is aware of the negativity of the infinite in existence and 'he always

[11] Other important references to the ladder in the mystical tradition include Jacob's dream of a ladder stretched between earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending. In the Rule of Saint Benedict, Benedict describes Jacob's ladder as 'our life in the world, which, if the heart is to be humbled, is lifted up by the Lord to heaven…we descend [from God] by exaltation and ascend [to God] by humility.' Benedict also spoke of the goal of monastic discipline as becoming a whole human being in whom action and thought are in harmony (Howland 2006: 11).

keeps open the wound of negativity, which at times is a saving factor (the others let the wound close and become positive—deceived)' (Kierkegaard 1992: 85).

There is much of the denial of positive knowledge in the *via negativa* in this, particularly the discipline of maintaining the negative with the positive. In response to the divine ladder of ascent, Kierkegaard describes a new ladder, a unique ladder that leads away from the divine to a deeper understanding of human inadequacy. Kierkegaard's entire pseudonymous work (and here Kierkegaard is surely the master of *mythos*) and his existence-spheres lead the individual to the truth of her dis-relationship with God. Kierekgaard's divine ladder begins in aesthetic experience, moves through the ethico-religious life to an awareness of sin or dis-relationship, which prevents any mystical union (non-conceptual knowledge of the divine) or rational relationship (through conceptual knowledge of the divine). It is this that leads the individual to a sense of *horror religiosus* and brings her to the threshold of faith. The world takes offence at the *horror religiosus* of God's divine command to Abraham, just as Christ on the cross is the *horror religiosus* that exposes the corruption of *this* world.

Therefore, for Kierkegaard, the love of God revealed in the Incarnation always both terrifies and comforts. 'To be a Christian, humanly speaking, is the greatest wretchedness' (Kierkegaard 1967 Vol. 1: 139) because far from being assured of salvation, the Christian lives in a dialectical tension with Christ, whose self-sacrificial love discloses our ontological identity as a sinner, creating the anguished conscience, and through this reveals the need for divine forgiveness. However, once forgiven, we must strive to conform to Christ, our Prototype of self-sacrificing love, a task in which even forgiven sinners fall short. For the true follower of Christ, the equilibrium is between these two impossibilities. This is the Christ of the paradoxical ascent to the divine through the descent into the human condition of sin. This is the dialectical tension of Christian existence. Kierkegaard's divine ladder finds its rest not in the tranquil repose of mystical love, but in the passionate movement or leap of faith.

9.5 Redirecting Armstrong's Ascent to the Divine

Kierkegaard's Christ is far removed from Armstrong's moral exemplar who even on the cross had a 'kindly word for one of his fellow victims' (Armstrong 2009: 315). As Armstrong recognizes, the radically transcendent God is the unknown God, the God beyond all human description and understanding. However, we have seen against her characterization of Protestantism as a neurotic symptom of modernity, that it may well be Kierkegaardian dialectics, with its roots firmly in Protestant soil that acknowledges the true Otherness of the divine. The radical transcendence of God leads Kierkegaard to develop a philosophy that has at its foundation the structure of existential dialectics, a form of dialectics that expresses the negativity of existence—it keeps the 'wound of the negative open' through holding the positive in tension with the negative and preventing the appropriation of positive concepts without immediately qualifying these with negative oppositions. It is precisely the

category of 'sin' that Armstrong rejects which enables Kierkegaard to acknowledge the true transcendence of the divine.

If we follow Armstrong's narrative, the modern fundamentalist movements are an attempt to resacralize an arid secular modernity. This is a modernity that refuses the restraints imposed by the sacred, which will continue to feed the polarizing tendency of fundamentalist movements. Armstrong argues we can remove the current of fear and rehabilitate this sick modernity through our own religious traditions, particularly the mystic traditions of all religions. Central to Armstrong's position is the claim that all faiths have practiced a deliberate and principled reticence about God and the sacred. We have now seen that the Protestant Kierkegaard may find a place in Armstrong's mystic tradition. If that is so, we may also find the distance between the 'Unknown God' and the 'Modern God' is not as great as Armstrong's book, *The Case for God*, suggests. And if, with Law, we conclude Kierkegaard is more *apophatic* than the negative theologians, than Armstrong may wish to qualify her unstinting praise of a tradition that finds its own expression in the 'darkness' of God in Luther's religious legacy. Armstrong's account might not finally do justice to the deeply held faith of religious people, a faith that is potentially life changing, and therefore always deeply disturbing to the human desire for order and certainty.

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Secularism Stuck in the End-Times: From Alexandre Kojève to the Recent Messianic Turn

10

Rory Jeffs

10.1 Introduction

…the Messianic has not yet been completely neutralised. (Agamben 2005: 101)

Although he called himself an atheist, Alexandre Kojève surprisingly flirted with religious philosophy throughout his life. When we look at what kind of atheism he identifies with, it becomes clear that he is no 'new' atheist as we might call such a figure today (e.g. Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens), who denies all religious propositions. Kojève wrote on the relationship between religion and atheism throughout his life and sought to shape his atheism in close dialectical relation to Christian theism such that it becomes post-Christian rather than anti-Christian, or what he himself called an 'anthropotheism'. For example, Kojève is most interested in the religious conception of the human being as a 'free and historical individual'. But Kojève's atheism also negates the admissibility of many religious propositions concerning objects of faith such as a transcendent God, immortality, eternal damnation, and divine miracles. In that sense, his critique of religion starts out in line with the Feuerbachian 'humanist' project of transforming theology into anthropology by presenting religion as an 'unconscious anthropology' which does not fully grasp its true content as human self-consciousness (Feuerbach 1986: 5; see also Feuerbach 1957, Preface; cf. Kojève 1968: 201).[1] Because Kojève's work is always in dialogue

[1] I will be citing from the French edition of Kojève's *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, except for those parts already translated in the English edition. The English translation *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1980) is an abridged version that was selectively edited by Allan Bloom. Notably absent from this version was the whole section on Religion (1968: 196–264). All other English translations from Kojève's French writings are my own. Further, many of the key terms in the chapter will be written in capitalised form, such as 'State', 'Science', 'Reason' and 'Man', as they are written by Kojève, Hegel, and Schmitt.

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with theology—the issue arises whether it becomes *too* shaped by it and results in its inversion, rather than its overcoming.

For Kojève, the dawning of secular modern societies entailed not just the death of God (or at least, the decline of God's authority in the modern world, let us say), but what he notoriously called the 'end of history'. Kojève's believed, following his teacher Alexandre Koyré, that no philosophy of history or System of Knowledge could be possible or final without history first reaching its end (see Koyré 1971: 189). As for Hegel himself, he never claimed his own time to be the end of all history strictly speaking, but he did think that history had culminated in his own time with the 'realization of Spirit'. From Hegel's perspective, the whole of history 'is nothing but the development of the Idea of freedom' (Hegel 1956: 456–57). As a result, the modern and secular nation-states that arose in Europe in the wake of the Napoleonic Revolution in the early nineteenth century assured Hegel that secular reason could 'govern the world' and create fair and objective 'conditions of freedom' for all citizens (see Hegel 1975: 27–44). But Hegel never claimed the establishment of modern freedom to necessarily entail the 'end of time' or any eschatological Last Judgment as such, but only 'the justification of God in History' (Hegel 1956: 457). Kojève's 'update' of this idea was that the end of history lie not simply in actuality and the rule of reason in modern secular states, but sociopolitically in the resolution of the Master-Slave dialectic that was the cause of historical conflicts. Kojève's reading of Hegel draws out the significance of this dialectic from one part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977: IVb) as central to the whole philosophy of history. The dialectic begins with a struggle for recognition between two human beings that reaches the point of each risking their lives. These struggles include those between individuals, between communities, and between nations, and they can only end for Kojève when there is a 'universal and homogenous State' (UHS)—a global 'classless' society wherein wars and revolutions will no longer be fought. In terms of the history of the twentieth century, Kojève speculated that the universal and homogenous State could be realised through a variety of modern political ideologies and regimes, such as communism, liberal democracy, even the European Union, all of which for Kojève were not essentially different in their overall objectives.[2] Hence, for Kojève, the end of history signalled not just a

[2] Kojève made several 'sketches' of the universal and homogenous State [UHS], neither of them definitive, and at times even contradictory. During the Hegel Course itself (given between 1933 and 1939), he did not refer to any actual political State at the time embodying the principles of the UHS, and only gesturing that with Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Jena in 1806, the 'germ' of the UHS began to disperse around the world and offered itself as a 'project' to be realised in the future. In 1943, he drafted a more concrete outline of the UHS in the manuscript *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (2000), foreseeing it as a 'Socialist Empire' that reigned on the authority of international law and administrative justice. After the War, his outlook became more ambiguous, and considered communism was just one of the 'programs' on offer for the UHS, the other being American liberal democracy ('American way of life') (See 1970: 41–42, 1980: 158–62, fn.6, 1991: 256). Towards the end of his life, he considered that no singular nation state could implement or embody the UHS, but instead would be realised through the actions of the international institutions and unions formed from 1948 onwards. Of biographical note, is that Kojève himself actively participated in realising his vision of the UHS, by being one of the architects of the European Common Market in 1957, which later became the European Union.

vague or idealistic idea in Hegel's writings, it promised something rather messianic itself, an answer to theology's utopianism—one that could overcome religious Christianity *without* having to lapse into Paganism. In Kojève's Hegelian vision it was considered theoretically possible to have a *post*-Christian and unified world society that comprised of universally equal *citizens*. It is for reasons like these that Christianity represents the 'true' and 'positive' religion in Hegel and Kojève, because it not only was a 'revealed Religion' that unites God and Man in the figure of Jesus Christ, but also brings about the end and deconstruction of religion itself, or at least, the possibility of a secularisation of religion. Hence, it is pivotal to note that Hegel's model of secularisation differed from the earlier Enlightenment model of separating faith and reason, in that it sought to sublate Christianity and derive the modern State that ruled by reason and law from religion. In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel observes how in Protestant Prussia, secularisation happened in the 'interest of theology', while in Catholic France, their form of *laïcité* emerged out of a hostility to theology. Hence, in leaning to the German experience, Hegel believes '[s]ecular life is the positive and definitive embodiment of the Spiritual Kingdom' (See Hegel 1956: 442–45). Therefore, it was important for Hegel that philosophy and the modern State did not *replace* nor completely isolate the role of traditional religions, as both shared universal content. For him, however, it is only the State which can give this content 'universal form' through knowledge and objectivity as distinct from authority and faith (Hegel 2008: 251). Part of his reasoning was based on a critique of the Romantic philosopher-cum-catholic Friedrich von Schlegel's argument of 'the unity of Church and State'. With Schlegel's position, Hegel argued in the *Philosophy of Right*, there is the risk of religious fanaticism which rejects rational objectivity and 'discards all political institutions and legal order', and consequently would lead to despotism. Therefore, he says, 'religion, as such, then ought not to be the governor' (See Hegel 2008: para. 270). Towards the end of his life in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel still maintained that secular State constitutions could be compatible with religious convictions. However, he was aware that a 'one-sided' view which isolated religious feeling from public life would end in civil conflict (see Hegel 1984–1987: Vol. 1, 451–60). Kojève's 'atheist' critique of religion goes further than Hegel's secularisation model that was based on a dialectical synthesis and the element of 'identity-in-difference'. The key change is that Kojève will draw out stronger implications from Hegel's dialectic of Faith and Reason (1977: Chap. VIb) by revealing the need to overcome the Enlightenment model of secular Reason, not in order to reunite it with faith, but to reach a purely atheistic modern State.

In this chapter, we will first examine how Kojève himself makes the transition from theology to the secular 'atheist' State, and how the latter ends up becoming vulnerable to *re-theologisation*, or, at least, provoking the theological critique of secularism. To demonstrate these connections and the issues they contain, I will first discuss the origin of Kojève's doctrine of the end of history as it arises from a synthesis of the religious eschatology of Vladimir Solovyov and his famous 'atheist' reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Secondly, I will outline the implications that Kojève's critique of religion has for modern secularism in how it goes

beyond the terms of the model of Enlightenment *laïcité*. And then I will counterpoise this view with the recent explorations of Agamben into Pauline theology as a way out of the deadlocks of a secular modernity that has disavowed its theological origins. Finally, this chapter will consider whether framing secularism's problems in terms fuelled by eschatology suffices as an adequate measure to escape its pitfalls.

10.2 The Theological Origins of Kojève's Secular Eschatology

A crucial part of Kojève's critique of religion is not so much about what Hegel said and appraised about religion, but derives from the apocalyptic thought of Vladimir Solovyov, a nineteenth-century Russian philosopher, poet, Gnostic mystic, and political commentator. Kojève wrote on the religious philosophy of the Vladimir Solovyov for his dissertation at the University of Heidelberg in the 1920s and later summarised the contents of this thesis in two articles written in the 1930s.[3] The importance of these documents relating to Solovyov has not been lost on many commentators of Kojève, with Michael Roth even saying, 'Kojève's points of focus are crucial, as they remained at the center of his work over the next two decades' (Roth 1988: 86; cf. Geroulanos 2010: 146; Darby 2001: 39; Nichols 2007: 13). In his analysis of Solovyov's philosophy, Kojève focussed on the metaphysical relation between eternity and the historical becoming of the world, or as he refers to it more directly with regard to Solovyov's terms, the 'doctrine of God' and the 'doctrine of the World'. Solovyov's work then fits into a key theme of secularisation theory—the relation between the divine and the worldly. Through a theological metaphysics, Solovyov attempts to conceptualise a mystical intuition and 'vision' of the future unification between an eternal Absolute as represented by God and an empirical and temporal Absolute in human history. This vision as Kojève notes was inspired by three personal epiphanies Solovyov had of the mystical figure of '*Sophia*'.[4] *Sophia* represented to Solovyov the principle of unity and 'integral knowledge' that is immanent to the multiplicity of empirical and fragmentary experience. His encounters with Sophia reassured him of the links between the divine and the secular and that the life of Jesus Christ was genuinely that of a 'divine humanity' and the future Kingdom of God was a real historical possibility. Hence, Solovyov's eschatology

[3] During the years 1934 and 1935, Kojève published a two-part article for *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* under his Russian name, 'Kojevnikoff'; he changed his name to 'Kojève' when he became a naturalised French citizen in 1937. The two articles I will use as my sources: 'La metaphysique religeuse de Vladimir Soloviev', [Part I] *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* vol. 14, no. 6 (1934), 534–544, and Part II in vol. 15, nos. 1–2 (1935), 110–152. The original thesis written in German under the supervision of Karl Jaspers is held in the *Fonds Kojève*, Boxes V-VI, at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits Occidentaux.

[4] Solovyov claimed to have experience three visions of 'Sophia' throughout his life. The sites of these revelations were Egypt, Moscow Church, and the British Museum in London. He characterised this figure as a divine being with a feminine human form.

underpins his views on the crisis of Reason afflicting Western secular societies that have wrongly separated philosophy and faith, and assumed these as two opposed and antagonistic spheres. Zenkovsky says the essence of Solovyov's vision was 'not an overcoming of secularism, or an elimination of its presuppositions, but merely a persistent bringing together of philosophy and faith' (Zenkovsky 2003: 491). Solovyov therefore sought to merge the religious eschatological tradition with the rationality of the German idealist philosophies of Hegel and Schelling. Solovyov shares in common with the idealists the notion of an Absolute immanent to historical becoming and how this truth was bound by wisdom, or in Hegel's words, reason, which adopts a divine and providential presence in the world. Roth argues that Solovyov's arguments obviously struck the young Kojève as significant for a philosophy of history, as Solovyov sees 'the Absolute as incarnate in Time (Humanity), he places great importance on human history. The structure of history's progress is determined by its End' (Roth 1988: 87). Solovyov provides the philosophical platform from which Kojève had in part sought and would develop himself the prospect of an end to human history and modern atheist anthropology.

The critical turn Kojève takes is to argue that *Sophia* represents the 'fallen' state and 'becoming' of the human condition itself and, therefore, we cannot deduce a priori from the basis of the doctrine of God, the divinisation of the world. Kojève concludes, 'there is therefore a contradiction between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the World' (Kojevnikoff 1935: 126–27). Here we have Kojève suggesting for the first time that we can find truth and a teleological process within the world and historical events, without recourse to a transcendent or external Absolute in God or extra-worldly origin. The contradiction between the spontaneous creativity of human freedom and a divinely created and pre-determined universe for Kojève cancels itself out. We can utilise the principle of *Sophia* and the metaphorical myth of the 'God-Man' as the basis for an 'ideal humanity' within an anthropological framework that provides its own immanent criterion, whether or not God exists. '[T]he most important point' in Solovyov's philosophy for Kojève is that 'man is independent vis-a-vis God, for he is essentially free and realized himself in absolute freedom. He is not only master of his actions but his very existence: he is free to decide for or against God' (Kojevnikoff 1935: 116). That Kojève argues human beings can choose against God and *still* achieve spiritual salvation appears to be an interpretive leap—and leads his secularisation thesis onto dubious ground—for without the content and objects of religious belief, can the formal anthropological aspects of secularisation mean anything? We can see then how Solovyov offers Kojève's interpretation of the Christian religion and consequently secularism a different standpoint and genealogy than Hegel's Protestant-influenced arguments. Solovyov's philosophy emerges out of both the Eastern Orthodox tradition with its emphasis on the Theanthropos ('God-Man') as well as a theological interpretation of the Russian idea of '*sobornost*' as the goal of a Universal Church (See Solovyov 1948, 1995). The starting point of Kojève's whole Hegelian reading of anthropotheism that will later unfold is how to resolve the antimony of the relation between eternity and temporality without requiring God or an account of transcendence. The problem this then raises regarding his later Hegelianism is that Kojève has taken the

contradiction embedded in the form of the unity as the *only* limit of religious thought in understanding its socio-historical world realising atheism. The *eschatological* factor in Solovyov of a complete fulfilment and reunification with God by way of historical progress through the formation of a universal community still fuels Kojève's critique—hence we have a difference of *means* towards the fulfilment of history and deification of the world, rather than a simple renunciation of such a process.

It is significant though that in his writing on Solovyov Kojève downplays the former's late *fin de siècle* turn against the historicised eschatology between Man and God through *Sophia*. This late turn is exemplified in a classic messianic short story called 'A Brief Tale about the Antichrist'.[5] Set in the twenty-first century, it tells of a mysterious messianic and youthful figure, 'The Man of the Future' (based on Nietzsche's *Übermensch*), who wishes to become the Emperor of the World. This messianic figure becomes the head of the 'United States of Europe', ensures world peace and security with his supreme force, and utilises the magical powers of science to solve the social-economic problem of poverty. From these events, Solovyov's narrator says, 'there was established firmly among all humankind the most fundamental equality—*equality of general satiety*' (Solovyov 2000: 275). After having solved the socio-economic and political problems of the world, the story unfolds when the Emperor attempts to solve 'the religious problem' of spiritual unification between the different Churches. He has trouble getting all the remaining figures of major Church hierarchies to sign a new peace treaty that will recognise the Emperor as the sole sovereign of the world. The three remaining Church figures, who dismiss the Emperor's claims for unity because he is not the 'real' Second Coming of Christ, unite themselves despite their differences, and successfully 'restrain' the Antichrist, *à la* Saint Paul's account of the '*Katechon*' in the second letter to the Thessalonians (2:6–7).[6] It appears Solovyov may be sending a similar allegorical message about his initial vision of an end of history, without the 'true' Second Coming, history's

[5] 'A Brief Tale about the Antichrist' was Solovyov's last written text as part of 'Sunday Letters' series (1897–1898), also known as 'The Three Conversations'. Kojève calls Solovyov's late writings produced before his death in 1900 and after his conversion to Catholicism as 'pessimistic' and not representing his true 'path of thinking' (Kojevnikoff 1934: 536).

[6] One of the Biblical sources of Solovyov's story is the letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, which told of a similar event, where the Apocalypse was heralded. The passage in question is: 'And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness [*anomos*] is already at work; but the one who now holds it back [*ho katechon*] will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way' (St. Paul, cited by Agamben 2005: 184). I will be using Agamben's citations of Paul's Letters due to the inclusion of him in this article. Earlier in this letter Paul speaks of the 'the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, the one opposing and exalting above all things called God or object of worship, so as for him in the temple of God to sit, demonstrating himself that he is God' (Thessalonians 2:2–4). In this letter, Paul was writing to his converts in Thessalonica who were persecuted by the Roman Empire, and believed the end of the world was upon them. Karl Löwith cites the Catholic Church, under the influence of Saint Augustine, acted as a neutralising force à la the *Katechon* against 'the anarchical potentialities of the radical eschatology of the early Christians' and whose spirit would be revitalised by Joachim and his followers (Löwith 1970: 156).

successes or progressions and the satisfactions they bring will be meaningless—if we were going to have an end of history, we would need the end of the world, but for Solovyov, this is conditioned on the unification in a Universal Church rather than a Universal (secular) State. In such a tale, Solovyov reveals his growing concern about the emerging secular humanisms in Europe, in particular, radical socialism, that see themselves as curing the world of its ills without God (see Solovyov 1995: Lecture 1). Here we also witness a theme that later opponents of Hegelian-Marxist historicism and secular liberalism would also wield. In particular, the political theology of Carl Schmitt, whose key figure of the Sovereign re-enacts the role of the *Katechon* by guarding the State from impending lawlessness that will bring about radical changes to society and potentially the end of history (see Schmitt 2003: 59–62).[7] Solovyov's reservations about salvation within his stage of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century were due to his belief that the distinction between good and evil could not be overcome until the Last Judgment took place. It was a belief that he felt warranted after witnessing both the nihilism and revolutionary fervour of his times in Russia that had spoken in the name of materialism and atheism.

10.3 The Messianic Anti-Climax: The Death of God and Transcendence

It was during Kojève's famous Hegel Course in the 1930s, which was called interestingly enough, 'The Religious Philosophy of Hegel', that his critique of religion reached its culmination.[8] Kojève's thoughts on religion pervade many parts of the six semesters of the Hegel Course. But it may be that his ultimate argument on religion would emerge in his analysis of the penultimate chapter of the *Phenomenology* (Book VII: Religion). To distance himself from the 'Right' Hegelians who believed Hegel was a religious thinker, Kojève often claims Hegel is an atheist, despite the lack of evidence to suggest that such is the case. Defending his claims on the basis that 'Hegel is not atheistic in the usual sense of the word, for he does not reject the Christian *notion* of God and does not even deny its reality. And so, one often finds

[7] *Katechon* will be a term Schmitt uses quite frequently, especially in *Nomos of the Earth* (see Part I, Chap. 3, B), where he argues that it is essential for a Christian understanding of history (2003: 60). Hoelzl says Schmitt used the term throughout the war and more frequently between the years 1950 and 1957, which 'explains the apologetic and defensive tone in his writings' (2010: 102–03; See also Taubes 2004: 103). Agamben discusses Schmitt's use of *Katechon* in *The Time that Remains* (2005: 109–110) and *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011: 7–8).

[8] Kojève had taken over the course on Hegel from his fellow Russian émigré and friend Alexandre Koyré. Between the years 1926 and 1932 Koyré taught on the relationship between science and religion, with reference to Nicolas De Cusa, Calvin, Jacob Boehme, Friedrich Oetinger, and culminating in the 'Religious Philosophy of the Young Hegel' (1932–1933). These courses were taught in the Ve Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, which was titled the 'Religious Sciences'.

theological formulas in Hegelian philosophy' (Kojève 1970: 22).[9] Kojève admits that he thought Hegel was 'deliberately equivocal' on the issue of atheism. Nevertheless, he thinks there is enough room to extract from his writings the foundations of a uniquely heterodox 'Christian atheism', a move bizarrely revived in Slavoj Žižek's more recent engagement with Christianity (See Kojève 1968: 75, 108, 197–98, 213–14; cf. Žižek 2003: 171).[10] Kojève summarises Christianity as Hegel had in reference to the figure of the 'unhappy consciousness', who arises after the initial struggle for recognition. This shape of spirit is conscious of their opposition to the world. As a result, in Kojève's terms, a split arises between two worlds, the hostile and empirical world of earth, and the ideal world of heaven. Kojève notes how the 'unhappy consciousness' projects their fear of the 'real' living Master onto a 'metaphysical' Master in the form of God. By doing so, the unhappy consciousness 'is now the equal of the [living] Master, in the sense that he and the Master are equally slaves of God. But he is not *really free*' (Kojève 1968: 66). Before the Hegel Course, Kojève had written a manuscript entitled *L'athéisme*, wherein he had spelled out the difference between the theist and the atheist as being determined by their respective attitudes to death, where the former projects a 'Man-outside-the-World' (i.e. God), and the latter sees nothingness itself (see Kojève 1998: 94–96, 118–21,199).[11] Yet despite its self-imposed slavery, Christianity creates a new discourse regarding freedom, sin, utopia, and a morality of becoming that distinguishes human beings from the natural world and thus leads to a decisive break from the Ancient pagan worldview.

[9] Kojève wrote this in response to Henry Niel's book, *De la médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel*, which put forward the idea that Hegel was fundamentally a theological thinker. Kojève differs from the left Hegelians, who from Feuerbach and Marx onwards, have accepted that Hegel's philosophy was too influenced by theology (see Feuerbach 1986: 36). In 1955, Kojève wrote to Carl Schmitt that one could not understand his interpretation if one did not understand Hegel's anthropotheism (2001: 96), admitting that no 'Right-Hegelian' for example could recognise such an interpretation. Hegel though clearly rejected the concept of atheism in the final *Lectures on Religion* (See Hegel 1984/1987: Vol. 1, 139, 377). Kojève acknowledged that Hegel continually wrote on religion, but added, this was only part of his effort in '"suppressing" it' (Kojève 1970: 40, fn.6). Georg Lukács (1975: 461–64) also acknowledges the ambiguous character of Hegel's thoughts on religion, and cites Heinrich Heine's theory that Hegel's published views were only 'exoteric', concealing his 'esoteric' atheism. Interestingly, Kojève had also read Heine's studies on Hegel (see 2001: 97).

[10] The passage in Hegel that Kojève claims is 'equivocal' is paragraph 672 of the *Phenomenology* (1977: 410) where Hegel discusses '*das absoluten Wesen'* (Absolute Being). Like Kojève, Žižek in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* makes quite an astonishing claim that to become a 'true' dialectical materialist one must go through the Christian experience (2003: 6). Of note also, is Žižek's debate with the radical orthodox thinker John Milbank in *The Monstrosity of Christ*: *Paradox or Dialectic?* (2009), which coincidentally reflects the subject matter of the Kojève-Fessard exchange (Kojève 1991/1992) on the relationship between Hegelian dialectics and Christianity as well as Marxism and Catholicism.

[11] Kojève's critique of religious transcendence also dominates *L'Atheisme* with his arguments about 'pure theism'. We should also note that his writings on atheism prior to his interpretation of Hegel are filtered through his understanding of Buddhism (which he calls an 'atheist religion') and Heidegger's phenomenology ('atheist philosophy'), defining it in sum as the full acceptance of the finitude of existence.

The significant part of the Hegel Course and Kojève's view of religion in general came in the year 1937. For the 1937–38 semester of the Course, Kojève focussed solely on Chap. 7 of the *Phenomenology* with particular attention paid to 'Revealed Religion' of Christianity. For Kojève, Hegel in this part of the book 'attempts' to eliminate the dualism between the religious ideal of a 'Kingdom of God' and the reality of post-Revolutionary Europe by equating the human *ideal* with the human *reality*. The human ideal is realised in the world, when 'Man becomes God himself: in and through the Science of Hegel' (Kojève 1968: 207). The religious projection of the future ideal of community of souls in heaven is 'ultimately, *illusory* (since the non-realised ideal, and its transposition as God, does not exist), the dualism cannot be *eternally* maintained (as in this case it would be *real*)'. Religion then for Kojève, on this basis, 'is a passing phenomenon' (Kojève 1968: 213). At this point, Kojève is more in tune with Left Hegelian *causal* claims regarding religious belief that he inherits from Marx and Feuerbach than Hegel's actual text, by claiming that it is no more than a 'projection' symptomatic of socio-economic alienation. However, Kojève misleads us on these points as he also claims religion's durability even after the end of history and the advent of secular societies worldwide. Overall, the moment of transition from theology to atheism is one Kojève does not (or perhaps cannot) demonstrate in terms of rational necessity, nor as a 'demand for their real happiness' as Marx would say (see Marx 1975: 244).[12] He is puzzled that Hegel says little about any 'conversion' of the Christian into an atheist, perhaps because he never said there was one, for Hegel clearly did not reject religion. Kojève has a different agenda, for he wants to maintain the anthropological critique that presupposes there are *real needs* behind religious belief that can be satisfied in a secular context, but he is also aware that human beings can refuse satisfaction (even if rationally construed). The identity of the substance between theology and anthropotheism allows the secularisation theorist enough terrain to critique this contentious point of 'conversion'. On what he considered to be the 'essential page' of his *Introduction*, Kojève claimed, 'Hegel could say the *only* difference between his Science and Christian Theology consists in the fact that the latter is *Vorstellung* [picture-thinking], while his Science is *Begriff*, a developed concept'. Therefore, Kojève proposes: 'it is enough to say of Man everything the Christian says of his

[12]There are then two contradictory messages Kojève gives us on religion in the Hegel Course. Firstly, in 1934–1935, he said, 'the "conversion" of religious man to Hegelian atheism (more precisely: to anthropotheism) is not *necessary*, that religion is indefinitely viable'. For the religious person 'can take pleasure in unhappiness. Hence the possibility of religion's unlimited duration'. (1968: 73; See also 206, 212) Towards the end of the Hegel course, from 1937 and onwards, Kojève is more Marxian in his views, for example, claiming 'Religion is thus the epiphenomenon of human Work' and 'real' history (390; and 217–18), ideological, and 'a sort of ideal super-structure' (See Kojève 1970: 34, 2000: 51, 188), which can be overcome. Kojève derives the 'projection' thesis in part from Hegel's association or religion with 'picture-thinking [*Vor-stellung*]', but perhaps more importantly, from the work of Feuerbach and Émile Durkheim (see Kojève 1998, 2000: 188) Geroulanos argues that during the Hegel Course Kojève departs from the more 'materialist' terms of Marx and Feuerbach's positivist critiques of theology (2010: 362, fn. 62).

God in order to have the atheistic anthropology which is at the root of Hegel's Science' (Kojève 1968: 215). Kojève adds that the secular Hegelian Science must be a 'conscious atheism' that understands the full implications of a *dead* God, i.e. the impossibility of transcendence, which, he notes is forgotten by the secular bourgeois society of the Enlightenment. Moreover, even the idea that man becomes God at the end of history can only be understood metaphorically (see Kojève 1968: 256, 215, 1980: 120, 2001: 96).[13]

It is at this point of Kojève's critique of religion that the work of Carl Schmitt offers a critical comparison. Schmitt himself scrutinised this same 'essential' passage in Kojève's *Introduction* which emphasized the anthropological content of religion, and recognised that if it were right, 'all present philosophy would change' (Schmitt 2001: 95).[14] Schmitt himself understood all modern political concepts as nothing more than 'secularized theological concepts' (Schmitt 1985: 36). And for that reason, he saw at stake with Kojève's vision of modernity a threat to the tradition of political theology, a tradition that seeks to preserve unity between religion and the State. For Schmitt, the Sovereign and the concept of the political (i.e. the friend-enemy distinction) were sacrosanct. In his key 1922 work, *Political Theology*, Schmitt provocatively called the Sovereign 'he who decides upon the exception'. The 'state of exception [*Ausnahmezustand*]',[15] furthermore, for him, was 'analogous to the miracle in theology', which he says 'reveals the essence of the state's authority', and with which the single Sovereign of the state is invested *extra*legal powers as omnipotent as a God who is inside and outside the Law (Schmitt 1985: 5, 13, 36). However, for Schmitt the modern constitutional State that arose in Germany in the wake of Hegel's time attempted to displace the uniqueness of the exception in

[13] Kojève claims that those who understand the '*dure parole* [hard saying]' that God is dead possess the wisdom of a post-historical Sage (1968: 256). The part of the Hegelian text Kojève is interpreting here concerns the unhappy consciousness and its knowledge of a 'total loss' of a dying Christ on the Cross (Hegel 1977: Para. 752, 455). It is a phrase Hegel continues to unpack later in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, '"God himself is dead", it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the weak, the negative, are themselves a moment of the divine, that they are within God himself… This involves *the highest idea of Spirit*' (1984/1987: Vol. III, 326). In a letter to Schmitt in 1955, Kojève says about the 'dead God', 'how few understand that!' (Kojève 2001: 97)

[14] The correspondence between Schmitt and Kojève began in 1955 and lasted up until 1957 (See Kojève 2001: 91–114). Kojève does not engage directly with Schmitt's theory of the state of exception, although he agreed with the latter's concept of the political (see Kojève 2000: 134, 410). Jacob Taubes recounts Blumenberg telling him in respect to his surprise at the Kojève and Schmitt correspondence, '[y]ou and Kojève and Schmitt, you're concerned with the same thing' (Blumenberg, cited by Taubes 2004: 101) Taubes adds that he considered Kojève the 'most important philosopher of that generation' (101) and Schmitt to be 'the apocalyptician of the counterrevolution' (69). The controversy surrounding Schmitt relates in most part to his decision to become a member of the Nazi Party in 1933. He had been a constitutional lawyer during the Weimer Republic years, and once the Nazis assumed power Hermann Goering appointed him as Prussian State Councillor.

[15] Schmitt cites the presence of the State of Exception in Article 48 of the 1919 Weimer Constitution, which he notes is problematised by a conflict over the use of such emergency powers between the President and the Parliament (1985: 11–12).

favour of the norms of positive law and 'conceptions of immanence' (Schmitt 1985: 49). This pivotal change in the political theological framework had major ramifications according to Schmitt, for the fate of the concept of the political which underlines the essence of national sovereignty and identity is for him connected to the fate of theology itself—Schmitt's bottom line being that, '[p]olitics needs theology' (Schmitt 1985: 34, cf. 2007: 80–96). As Jacob Taubes says, '[s]ecularisation thus is not a positive concept for Schmitt. On the contrary, to him it is the devil' (Taubes 2004: 66). Hans Blumenberg, whose *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* specifically targeted Schmitt's secularisation thesis, observed how '[t]he assumption of secularisation allows the 'political theologian' to find ready to use what he would otherwise have had to invent' (Blumenberg 1983: 101). In the Schmittean scheme of things, secular societies are considered homologous to theocentric societies with an exceptional or non-rationalisable foundation at their centre, regardless of whether or not it is named God or the State Sovereign, divine right or popular sovereignty. From this perspective, Kojève's Hegelian critique of religion as an 'unconscious anthropology' is inverted by Schmitt (and later by Agamben) to simply be a critique made by a dangerously 'unconscious' political theology.

In contradistinction, Kojève's Hegelianism presupposes the struggle for recognition culminating in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic State provides a more necessary and stabilising foundation upon which God once had formerly decreed (via the Sovereign or biblical revelation) a state of exception for the basis of political authority. The omnipotence of the modern State can only be secured once there is equal recognition between all citizens through the implementation of acts such as the Napoleonic Civil Code and general transparent constitutional rule.[16] Schmitt instead thinks what has happened after the French Revolution is those modern secular societies, whether they are based on liberal, communist, or social democratic principles, have usurped 'Gods' place'. Therefore, the challenge here is not that dissimilar to Solovyov's tale of the Antichrist—that appropriation (or *heretical* secularisation, let us say) of the formerly theocentric place of State sovereignty risks corrupting the singular ideal of the messianic truth of the end of the world that founded the political theology tradition.

Kojève's way out the Schmittean challenge of political theology and the need of 'theological concepts' proceeds via his critique of rationalism, and the early Enlightenment period in seventeenth century Europe. By considering the early Enlightenment as a secularized theology, or what we would call more simply, secular humanism, Kojève thinks he can distance the future ideal of the universal and homogenous State from the theological grasp. Hence, he takes seriously Schmitt's critique of secular modernity as lacking a real decisive foundation, but does not

[16] Napoleon established the Napoleonic Civil Code on March 21, 1804. The code forbade privileges based on birth, allowed freedom of religion, abolished slavery, established a secular public education system, and specified that government jobs go to the most qualified. Yet this code did not establish full-scale secularism in France as Napoleon had previously signed an agreement with Pope Pius VII (The Concordat of 1801) that assured Roman Catholic Church still had a national and civil status in France and would receive State funding. It was not until 1905 that the separation of State and Church became law in France.

believe a return to full-scale political theology would solve this problem. Kojève believes Enlightenment 'atheism' remained stuck in a theistic framework of understanding the world. Although it had freed thought from the control of the Church, it had not freed it from the transcendental realm of metaphysics and 'Truth' (Kojève 1968: 208). According to Kojève, the problem with the 'pre-[French] revolutionary' Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant for example is that they conform to an 'idealist dualism', and continue to separate the ideals of reason such as truth, beauty and the good from the 'real world' of worldly (secular) affairs. It is for these reasons that Kojève describes the Enlightenment up to Hegel as not overcoming superstition and myth as it claimed it had, but basically introducing a 'secularized Christianity', with its own set of mystifications. The Enlightenment figure of the 'Intellectual' shared with the Christian an 'existential solipsism', premised on individualistic 'satisfaction', and an isolation from the 'real' world of political economy—adding, '[t]he ideology of Truth, Beauty, and the Good is the religion of those who do not [have one]' (Kojève 1968: 108–110, see also 122, 131–32).[17] Simultaneous to his course on Hegel, Kojève also gave a course on the seventeenth-century French philosopher Pierre Bayle at the École pratique des hautes études over the 1936–37 Semester. This course, which is still little known, proves then to be significant turning point in Kojève's thought on how the modern State could overcome the influence and trappings of religion (see Kojève 2010).[18]

Kojève sees the origins of the early Enlightenment with Pierre Bayle—a thinker who conceived of the international 'Republic of Letters', which was like a public sphere for intellectuals to engage in debates of concern to the public as a whole that later evolved into the *salon* of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. Bayle called for the separation between faith and reason, and hence, matters of religion from matters of state. As Kojève tells it, Bayle claimed that there was no way of resolving religious debates between Catholicism and Protestantism as their propositions were indemonstrable, and the only way to avoid conflict was with the principle of 'tolerance'

[17] Kojève discusses the Enlightenment and the Intellectual throughout the 1936–1937 semester of the Hegel Course, another part of the *Introduction* which was not translated in the English edition (1968: 111–144). Later, when corresponding with Schmitt, Kojève said Hegel had underestimated 'the tragedy of the Intellectuals' (2001: 110)—i.e. the tragedy of inaction.

[18] The recently published manuscript, *Identité et réalité dans le 'Dictionnaire' de Pierre Bayle* is based on part of a planned book Kojève was working during the 1936–1937 course on Bayle for Georges Friedmann's 'Socialisme et Culture' series collection. The course itself was entitled 'La Critique de la religion au XVII siecle: Pierre Bayle' and involved 23 lectures given from November 12 1936 to May 24, 1937. The notes from the course are held at *Fonds Kojève*, Boîte XII, *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (*Département des Manuscrits Occidentaux*). In preparation for the course, Kojève wrote to Leo Strauss that he considered Bayle's 'problem of tolerance' between Catholicism and Protestantism relevant to understanding the crisis over resolving the conflict between Fascism and Communism in 1930s Europe (See Kojève 1991: 234). Geroulanos argues that Kojève's critique of the rationalism of the Enlightenment during this period and the attack on 'myth' in general are 'paramount', 'insofar as they contextualise the overcoming of theology by anthropology' and 'the homogenizing process of secularisation and the movement beyond absolute Reason as a step into a reality and society the individual is incapable of controlling' (Geroulanos 2010: 155).

that would ensure religious pluralism, cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism, and free and rational inquiry. Bayle represented for Kojève a kind of philosophical and political progress that moved thinking away from the chains of faith and the Church, yet he failed to solve the problem of the foundation and actuality of a purely post-religious modern State. Instead, his efforts only suspended the debate over universalism and truth itself for the sake of peace and neutrality. As Kojève recognised in the Hegel Course, this form of the Enlightenment would lead to further depoliticisation, relativism and social atomism. This Enlightenment which continues through to Romanticism remains *too* Christian for Kojève and, furthermore, conforms to bourgeois liberal ideology—wherein '[t]he Romantics *chatter* about the *public* good while businessmen *act* on the basis of their private interest' (Kojève 1968: 151). The second and more important stage of the Enlightenment period is the *post-Kantian* Enlightenment that begins with Hegel and is further realised by Marx and the Russian Revolution. This stage *actualises* the principles of the first stage on a universal and material basis and effectively destroys 'all Theology'. The French Revolution proves to be the decisive moment for the beginning of this full realisation of the Enlightenment's secular potential—with its 'attempt to *realize* on earth the Christian ideal', rather than only the intellectual ideal of free thinking (Kojève 1968: 141; cf. Hegel 1977: 355). This is why Kojève so grandiosely apotheosises Napoleon as the *last* 'God-Man' and 'world-soul' who wins the Battle of Jena against the Prussian Army in 1806 in the presence of Hegel himself, who simultaneously finishes writing the *Phenomenology*.

In 1946, Kojève annotated several footnotes to his lecture notes in preparation for the publication of the *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. One of these footnotes stood out in its speculative proposal that the establishment of the universal and homogenous State that began with Napoleon in 1806, would culminate in the twentieth century in the 'disappearance of Man', which he phrased even more starkly in the revised part of the footnote (written in 1962), as the 're-animalisation' of man. As a citizen of the universal and homogenous State or, at the least, a subject of global governance, the basic political and material needs of human beings are considered satisfied by Kojève, and all that is left is an 'eternal present', where 'everything that makes man happy' can be enjoyed (Kojève 1980: 158–59, fn. 6). Such an end to the historical process is the anti-climax theologians feared, one spiritually unsatisfying and heretical to their own eschatological visions of the last things. Kojève's rather polemical footnote provoked Leo Strauss to compare it to a world occupied by Nietzsche's 'last man' (Strauss 1991: 239).[19] However, even if Kojève's last step in announcing the very end of history within the historical process may seem necessary (although paradoxical) to him, it is the most problematic and controversial point in his whole philosophical output. For why exactly is the end of history standpoint really necessary to justify a post-religious modern secular State?

[19] Despite Kojève's general proclamation that the French Revolution overcame the limitations of a tolerant secular State, and brought into existence the UHS, he would still privately tell Strauss that Bayle's secular 'Republic' model remained 'alive' in modern democracies (see Kojève 1991: 302–03).

As Stefanos Geroulanos observes, Kojève's end-State 'lacks any idealist or paradisal basis', and in it man, 'without recourse to religion for guidance of how to live, is left only with the value of violent negation' (Geroulanos 2010: 155). Given this trajectory, Kojève critiques both the humanism of religion *and* the secular Enlightenment, because, as Geroulanos also observes, he is 'mistrustful of secular, egalitarian, and transformative commitments' that would for him, preserve theistic, dualistic, and transcendent presuppositions (Geroulanos 2010: 3). According to this logic, if God dies, so must its earthly substitute represented by the secular humanist ideal of the rational and autonomous 'Man' or 'Subject' who creates history and masters the natural world given that history is no longer. Yet despite such grave implications, Kojève makes this final step because he thinks modernity *philosophically* demands as much a firm basis and sense of final truth as theology had believed in. It can attain this finality only by understanding itself as the logical culmination of history and the attainment of philosophical wisdom, regardless of whether it was anti-climactic, or brings with it the 'disappearance of man'.

So if God is dead, what remains of the legacy of Christianity for secularism, in particular, the religious anthropology of the 'free and historical individual' Kojève originally intended to 'preserve'? This is an important question not only because Kojève's critique was premised on a dialectical synthesis of Paganism and Christianity in the form of 'anthropotheism', but because the ethical and social commitments to a modern secular end-State would be based on their fulfillment of earlier religious needs. The need of a messianic end of the world could not be recognised by Kojève as a real satiable need for a modern citizen to attain satisfaction. Key to Kojève's sidelining of such religious themes was his brief discussion of messianism and St. Paul at the end of the semester on Religion in the Hegel Course. Although Hegel does not directly refer to Paul, Kojève makes special mention of a Pauline theology premised on faith alone—faith that the Second Coming will be an event indifferent to earthly endeavours such as the creation of works and Churches, and an event that could happen spontaneously at any moment. But Kojève explains that the Pauline '[f]aith without work is nothing. What saves is Faith *realised*' and 'mediated by Works [*Oeuvres*] and History' (Kojève 1968: 263). Kojève argues that Paul's message of faith empties Christ's life of historical meaning—in fact, he literally does not speak of the life of Christ—and reduces the Christian message simply to the event of the Second Coming. Paul was not one of the twelve apostles, but a Jew who was converted directly by the intervention of God. According to Alain Badiou, concurring on these points, by knowing nothing of Christ's life and not being a part of the early Church, Paul is the archetype of modern faith itself, its 'Subject', for whom, '[e]verything is brought back to a single point: Jesus, son of God… the rest, all the rest is of no importance… (what Jesus said and did) *is not* what is real in conviction, but obstructs, even falsifies it' (Badiou 2003: 33; cf. Žižek 2003: 9; Agamben 2005: 15–16). Yet on this matter, Kojève sees Paul's revolution-by-faith inversely to how Badiou, Žižek, and Agamben read him later. For Kojève thinks in a way not too dissimilar from Nietzsche's critique of Paul, that by denying the 'work' of the Holy Spirit *qua* the historical community, Paul commits 'a second murder of Jesus'—and in a dialectical context, the murder or denial of the

particularity of human and historical existence, life itself (Kojève 1968: 263; cf. Nietzsche 1968: 154–55, 160–63). Without relation to time and historical events, Kojève thinks that not only is salvation not possible but, as a result, freedom and the overcoming of sin become meaningless terms. By this summary, Kojève considers that a religious consciousness premised on a messianic faith cannot accept any 'social Revolution' that would be historically-created, or any essential change of human societies as meaningful.[20] When Kojève reviewed the work of one of his students and religious critics, Father Gaston Fessard, he argued 'Christian' Hegelians 'deny all dialectic (i.e., the decisive, definitive, and irreducible value of historical action) as soon as they admit the *resurrection*' (Kojève 1991/1992: 193).[21]

This then poses a challenge to religion. Could a religion still be practiced in a secular context that has given up on an eschatological faith in the end of the world—one that for Kojève would be in essence an 'atheist religion'? Karl Löwith (1970: 58–59) considered the limitation of the Hegelian secularisation model was that it presupposed that Christian faith was 'realized' and 'yet [could] remain a faith in things unseen!' That is, the issue of whether the content of religion is separable from its forms remained unresolved. Kojève assumes he can make these dialectical adjustments, for he will not concede anything to the argument of exceptional 'divinity', and hence bypasses the whole premise of faith itself. But can he do so and still attribute a meaning to the historical process without divine sanction or spiritual foundation? In other words, how can Kojève really reduce or sublate the tension that obviously continues to exist over this *content* which theology and his philosophical anthropology share? Kojève's answers to such important questions tend to revert rather revealingly to a form of decisionism to overcome the split between these two fundamental attitudes, which brings him closer to the terms of Schmitt's secularisation thesis and echoes Kierkegaard's own famous 'either-or' choice. Explaining 'it is only through a sudden leap' that theology can become anthropology. Therefore,

[20] Kojève says, 'St. Paul formulates very well: that the [distinction between the] Knowledge [*Savoir*] of the Sage and the Religious person are to each other like madness and truth, and not—as for the Sage—the successive steps of revealing the attainment of the one and the same truth, namely the Knowledge of the Wise' (1968: 294, fn.1). The religious person, on the other hand, can attain their wisdom instantaneously (1980: 90–91). However, Kojève describes the 'post-historical' citizen in terms that betray the (secularized) influence of Paul messianic community, whose citizen is '[n]either Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). For example, in the Hegel Course, Kojève says the future citizen of the universal and homogenous State will relate 'directly to the Universal (State) without there being any screens formed by "specific differences" (*Besonderheiten*: families, classes, nations)' (1968: 145–46). Further, Kojève cites Paul directly (much more positively on this occasion) in his debate with Strauss as one of the first progenitors of the 'classless' UHS (1991: 171–73). On these points, Kojève differs to Hegel, who believed the relationship between Particular and Universal (citizen and the State) would have to be mediated by differences of social estate (*Stände*) (See Hegel 2008: 289–308). Agamben discusses Paul's '*ekklēssia*' [messianic community] in reference to Marx's classless society ('secularisation of the messianic') and Hegel's '*Stände*' (See 2005: 22, 28–33).

[21] Father Gaston Fessard was a Jesuit who was also one of two students who Kojève invited to offer a critical response to his lecture series in 1939, the other student being Raymond Aron (see Fessard 1990: 260–68). Fessard's interest in Hegel came at the same time as he read the letters of Saint Paul, and therefore, he does not separate the two on the issue of eschatology.

'there is no 'reason' for the decision other than the decision itself'. Such a statement reveals the ambiguity of Kojève's position, and once again, contradicts his other statements that for Hegel such a decision is 'necessary' in order for Spirit to become fully self-conscious (See Kojève 1968: 293, 297). At this point, Kojève effectively cuts the ground from under the feet of a secular and autonomous reason, that Hegelian Wisdom and its debate with theology can be decided in the end by 'extra-rational' reasons, i.e. actual historical events. Therefore, for Kojève, it would not be *reason alone à la* the Enlightenment ideal that would overcome theology, but revolutionary action motivated by a 'self-conscious myth' (Kojève 1991/1992: 191–92). But Kojève's dialectical interpretation of Christianity did not win over Marxist Tran-duc-Thao, who wrote to Kojève, that despite the advances his reading of Hegel delivered it did not reach the standpoint of atheist materialism. As a result, it did not escape the theological framework, and consequently, 'give[s] way to, without noticing it, a return of religious humanism' (Thao 1996: 66; cf. Fessard 1991/1992: 199).[22] Kojève was aware that his anthropo-theist philosophy would be interpreted as 'blasphemy' by theologians, and 'paradoxical' by strict atheists (1970: 40), but nevertheless, he was committed to the belief that this position represented the culmination of history and religion. Nevertheless, Kojève's issue with the critique of religion has remained, as Giorgio Agamben has shown with his own re-investigation of the debate between theology and secular anthropotheism. Agamben will argue that rather than closing it off, Kojève leaves open not only the relevance of religious humanism, but the thought of the messianic, revealed by his enigmatic descriptions of a uniquely 'passive' post-historical condition.

10.4 The End That Remains: The Resurrection of Paul in Our Secular Times

Throughout Agamben's work the themes of religion and secularism are interwoven, often in respect to sovereignty, the law, and the economy. Instead of contesting the secularisation thesis, Agamben renews the discussion. For this reason I believe he is unafraid to thread into his work references to the Hegelo-Kojèvian end of history as the 're-animalisation' of global society alongside Schmitt's 'state of exception', which are not opposed as such, but merge to form a modern paradigm of government as the 'administration of things'. Unlike the cavalcade of post-Kojèvian (and anti-Hegelian) critics who have attempted to escape or refute outright the end of history thesis, Agamben believes '[i]t is likely that the times in which we live have not

[22] Tran-duc-Thao echoes Marx's critique in the 1843 article 'On the Jewish Question' of Bruno Bauer's critique of theology. Marx argued Bauer's understanding of the secular state was 'still moving within the province of theology'. For Marx, even if a secular state 'politically' emancipates itself from religion, it can still be 'powerless' against the persistence of religion (See Marx 1975: 211–42). See also Lukács (1975: 9) who argues Hegel's critique of Christianity does not reach atheist materialism.

emerged from this aporia' (Agamben 2000: 109–110).[23] Agamben has endeavoured to pry open this 'aporia' directly to the point whereby a 'remnant' of divinity can suspend its perpetuation. The key to Agamben's method is the Schmittean concept of the state of exception, which for Agamben is a fact of existence that is not susceptible to disappearing or being dialectically sublated. Agamben then is neither Kojèvian to the extent that he calls for the overcoming of religion, nor simply a post-secular theorist calling for its return. Rather, he continues the messianic line of thought that Walter Benjamin himself had set out to fulfil; that is, to discover 'a conception of history that is in keeping' with the 'real state of exception'—wherein only the Messiah 'consummates all history', rather than any historical *telos* (see Benjamin 1977: Thesis VIII, 259, 1979: 155). In Agamben's rather post-Marxian twist, the same task should set itself against all secular and liberal institutions wherein the 'fictitious' state of exception continues to function unimpeded in its monopolization of the 'anomic' extralegal violence—by uncovering the 'real' state of exception which could not be institutionalised, and consequently the 'messianic' end rather than the teleological-dialectical end of history. Therefore, in Agamben's view, the current state of secular discourse that focuses on the importance of public spheres, tolerance, pluralism, human rights, democratic institutions, or even popular sovereignty is itself blind and prey to the 'cunning' and exceptional powers of economic and political theology. Part of the problem he diagnoses in this context is that 'secularism is not a *concept* but a *signature*', one that leaves its theological mark on all governable matters, including 'total management' of life itself, and even the separation of Church and State, which is for Agamben, an 'extreme outcome of the *providential paradigm*', rather than its neutralisation (Agamben 2011: 4, 135–36).

The references to Kojève in Agamben's work are always oblique, nearly sidenotes, yet there contains a serious purpose to their presence.[24] Interestingly enough, Jacques Derrida also made an oblique yet noteworthy reference to Kojève in *Specters of Marx* (1994), where he speculated that there was a sense of indeterminacy in Kojève's 1962 revised footnote regarding the 'Japanization' of man at the end of history that was 'messianic without the messianism' (Derrida 1994: 91–92; Kojève 1980: 161–62, fn.6 [revised]).[25] In this footnote, Kojève's revised his earlier and rather optimistic forecast of the post-historical condition, and issued quite

[23] Agamben refers to Kojève once in *Homo Sacer*, but it is also an important note, 'Alexandre Kojève's idea of the end of history and the subsequent institution of universal and homogenous state presents many analogies with the epochal situation we have described as law's being in force without significance' (1998: 60).

[24] According to Stefano Franchi, the issue of the quantity of references to Kojève is less important than Agamben's 'strategic' use of the references (2004: 40, fn. 5). See also Sergei Prosorov (2009), who says, 'Agamben has repeatedly engaged with the Hegelo-Kojevian problematic of the end of history (525).

[25] Derrida's brief point is that Kojève, far from advocating the 'triumphant end of history' that underlines Fukuyama's 'good news', is in fact proposing a formal way for post-historical man to retain '*historicity*'. Derrida argues that Kojève's suggestion that 'post-historical Man must [*doit*] continue to detach "form" from "content"', 'remains a prescriptive utterance' (See Derrida 1994: 88–93).

esoterically instead an ethical imperative to maintain one's humanity, whether through cultural traditions, or more brusquely through acts of snobbery or suicide, which he observed had been present in Japanese society. But this action per se would be groundless, and bear no relation to historical change or a faith in a Second Coming (yet he does 'resurrect' man if only in the formal sense) but done for the sake that it can, to borrow a phrase of Agamben's, be a pure 'means without end'. Such a revised footnote and about-face by Kojève is arguably ironic and once again polemical. Yet at the same time, it would help explain both the failure of the idealistic UHS-to-come fully materializing in a singular eschatological event after the War, and a even deeper element of pessimism in Kojève's thought that 'nothing new on earth' is no longer possible—that, in fact, we remain stuck in this indeterminate and indefinite *aporia*. It is for these latter reasons that I think Agamben sees in Kojève's footnote a theological turn, introducing, as he says, 'between history and its end—a fringe of ultrahistory that recalls the messianic reign of 1,000 years that, in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, will be established on earth between the last messianic event and eternal life' (Agamben 2001: 11–12; cf. Agamben 1998: 60–61). This is the time of tribulation which is dawned by the arrival of the Antichrist—Solovyov's false Messiah and Schmitt's feared 'lawless' universalism that would inevitably lead into a world 'civil war'.

For his contribution to the debates surrounding the issue of secularism, Agamben takes inspiration from a figure that Kojève had clearly attacked: Saint Paul. As also noted by Badiou, for Agamben, Paul is the paradigmatic model of faith in Christ and the *End* of Time. For Agamben, Paul's Letters to the Romans constitute the most 'fundamental Messianic text for the Western tradition', and despite efforts by the Church itself at neutralizing Paul's radical messianism, he believes this is a text that remains relevant to our own times (Agamben 2005: 1).[26] The question arises then how much Kojève's secularisation thesis surrenders too easily to the stasis of modernity, that is, the time of the end and tribulation, and writes off the messianic as a result. The key Agamben text on this relationship between secularism and the messianic is *The Time That Remains*. In many ways, Agamben follows the line of thinking that emerges out of Jacob Taubes's work on Pauline theology. Taubes, who communicated with both Kojève and Schmitt, considered Paul an unconventional Christian figure, *as* much Jewish as he was Christian. Taubes also forged impressionable connections between Paul and Walter Benjamin's antinomian messianism that intermixed Judaism and Marxism to produce a 'negative political theology' (Taubes 2004: 72; Agamben 2005: 1). Against the secularized modernity of Hegel-Kojève, Agamben summons Paul as a modern visionary thinker who foresees that 'works' or 'good deeds' or even the rule of law will not lead to redemption or universal justice, and that our best hope

[26] Agamben takes a different tact from Badiou's excursus on Paul that was published prior in 1997 (See Badiou 2003). In his one reference to Badiou, Agamben says rather than a transcendence towards modern universalism or the 'new', Paul opens up the possibility for a further 'operation that divides the divisions of law themselves', therefore, '[n]o universal Man' or emancipated humanity can be reached by such a procedure (Agamben 2005: 52).

lie in waiting for 'a politics and life that are yet to be entirely thought' (Agamben 2000: 111).

The key section of *The Time That Remains* for the connections to Kojève's end-State position is in the part called the 'Fifth Day'. In this section, Agamben unpacks what he sees as the 'hidden' content of the important Hegelian term '*Aufhebung*', that betrays a messianic eschatology (see Agamben 2005: 99–112).[27] Acknowledging that Hegel secularized Christianity, Agamben considers what is 'more significant is the fact that (with a certain degree of irony) Hegel used a weapon against theology furnished by theology itself and that this weapon is genuinely messianic' (Agamben 2005: 99, 2011: 163). Agamben traces something of a genealogical circle, which first claims that Hegel inherited the notoriously difficult-to-translate German word '*Aufhebung* [sublation]' from Martin Luther; secondly, Luther's use of *Aufhebung* is a translation of St. Paul's use of the Greek verb '*katergein* [to make inoperative]' in the Letters to the Corinthians (15:24).[28] And finally, to come full circle, Agamben reinforces the theological origins of the Hegel-Kojève philosophy of history by referring to the French word that Kojève used to describe the post-historical condition, '*désoeuvrement*', as 'a good translation of Pauline *katargein*' (Agamben 2005: 101).[29] On the last connection, Agamben cites from one of Kojève's rather ironically written literary reviews, 'Le Romans des Sagesse [The Novels of Wisdom]' (Kojève 1952). Kojève wrote this review about three novels by one of his former students, Raymond Queneau.[30] The term '*désoeuvrement*' is used in reference to Queneau's anti-heroes, who are more explicitly called by Kojève as '*voyous désoeuvrés*', which can be translated in many ways as unemployed rogues, lazy punks, or aimless

[27] In true theological style, Agamben structures his book on Paul, not in chapters but in 'Six Days', with the epilogue entitled, 'Threshold', which is not the all-important 'Seventh Day' (*Shabbat*), which remains appropriately absent from the text itself. See also Graham Ward (2010) who compares Hegel's philosophy to messianism, but in a different sense to Agamben.

[28] Agamben cites Paul's sentence in question: '[The Messiah] will render the rule, authority, and power inoperative [*katargese*]' (Corinthians 15:24). In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben links up Kojève's sense of inoperativity with its presence in the writings of Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy and Georges Bataille (1998: 61–62). *Aufhebung* is one of Hegel's key terms that is difficult to translate in other languages, often translated in English as 'sublation' to convey Hegel's intended dual meaning of cancellation and preservation. The ambiguity of Kojève's use of *Aufhebung* emerges in his translation of it as '*suppression-dialectique*', '*auto-suppression*' and also his repeated use of the word '*supprimer*', all of which contain a stronger sense of cancellation than preservation.

[29] However, this genealogy of terminology is not as 'tightly knit' as Agamben elliptically makes it out to be. For example, Kojève does not use the term *désoeuvrement* as a direct reference to *Aufhebung,* but simply in reference the state of post-historical life and wisdom (i.e., as historically inactive). Taking a different tact, Sergei Prosorov argues that Agamben's inoperative messianism follows more from Kojève's admissions that history could stop before ending dialectically through the 'suspension' of work (2009: 528–29, cf. Kojève 1980: 220).

[30] The three novels by Queneau are *Pierrot mon ami* (1942), *Loin de Rueil* (1944), *Le Dimanche de la vie* (1952). The justification and relevance of Queneau's novels for Kojève lies in the idea that they deal with the characterisation of post-historical wisdom (See Kojève 1952: 388).

hooligans.[31] Despite the ironic nature of Queneau's characterisation of these so-called post-historical prototypes, Kojève foresaw that the post-historical and secular condition was defined by a timelessness that potentially could lead to nihilistic apathy or his feared 're-animalisation'. In Agamben's hands, the post-historical condition has another potential, one directing us towards the thought of messianic time, to what Paul called, in Corinthians (7:29), the 'time that remains' or 'the only real time' (Agamben 2005: 5–6). This 'real time [*kairos*]' coincides with the culmination of chronological time (*chronos*). *Chronos* is the time that not only defines the Hegelian-Marxist end of history, but also its heirs in the social democratic movement and historicism, which Benjamin had critiqued as exemplifying 'clock time'. As Agamben sees it, Benjamin's 'now-time [*jezt-zeit*]' is inseparable from Paul's *kairos*, the 'end' in the real messianic sense as 'ful-fillment [*pleroma*]' and irreducible to the historical (Agamben 2005: 68, 143–45; Benjamin 1977: Thesis XIV, 263). Therefore, Agamben's secularisation thesis differs from Kojève's Hegelian end of history—noting that Kojève 'ends up flattening out the messianic onto the eschatological'. Kojève's post-history neutralises the messianic by conflating *kairos* and *chronos*, but it also leaves an unaccounted remainder ('ultrahistory') that Kojève sees as having no socio-political significance (Agamben 2005: 101). So Agamben's gesture of what to do with the issue of secularism is that we should at the least revaluate Paul's teaching of suspending the law (*nomos*) in order to fulfil its potential. And this can be done if we take Paul at his word (as Agamben reads him) that faith itself (*pistis*) as opposed to knowledge (*gnosis*) renders 'the *nomos* inoperative' (Agamben 2005: 98). Such faith can only be expressed through an extralegal and exceptional form of obedient love for Christ founded beyond the dictates of secular law and reason and even the sanctions of the socio-historical community and 'neighbourly' love. Here Agamben radicalises Paul to the point that he undoes Schmitt's juridical arguments that install the State as the figure of the '*Katechon*' for the purposes of restoring the law and preventing the messiah and lawlessness arriving. The cursed dualism of law and force captures both the Schmittean exception and Kojève's postwar model of juridical administration in the universal, homogenous post-historical State—where both theories only admit to the legitimate use of violence by the State. Agamben's Paul renders the law inoperative, but the difference is that this form of the exception fulfils the nature of law itself not by ensuring restoration, stability, universal consistency, or through destruction. This is why Agamben emphasises the foundation of law to be the 'promise' (*diatheki tes eppagelias*) given by God to Abraham (Genesis 15:18) that preceded the general form and use of the law as commandment (*nomos ton entolon*) given to Moses which founded the historical religious community. Inverting Kojève's previous distinction between faith and work as operating on two different levels, Agamben's Pauline point is that faith

[31] Stefano Franchi notes 'there is a lot of latitude' in this term, and that Agamben's engagement with it reflects his interest in the debates between Georges Bataille, Queneau and Kojève on the 'proper shape of the end of history' (2004: 33). Interestingly, Prosorov argues that Kojève's figure of 'Intellectual' discussed earlier, is more analogous to Agamben's 'inoperative subject' than the post-historical '*voyous desoeuvre*' (Prosorov 2009: 535–39).

itself is the primordial law (*nomos pisteos*) that grounds all the other forms of law be they normative or secularized versions.

Rather than reading Paul's messianism as a call for revolutionary action as Badiou and Žižek propose, Agamben is interested in uncovering a model for praxis qua 'messianic life' that would hasten the process of making the law inoperative (*katargein*). One element of this 'life' relates to the Pauline phrase '*hōs mē* [as not]' (Corinthians 7:29–32), which, Agamben adds, is 'essential to the Pauline vocabulary' (See Agamben 2005: 23–42). Agamben briefly explains this term with the example of one 'weeping *as not* weeping' and culminates in his description of the'non-non Jew' (Agamben 2005: 51–52). As Žižek puts it more clearly, the message here is to have 'an attitude of suspension', implying a 'purely formal gesture', which 'has no positive content' (Žižek 2003: 112). And furthermore, I would add, it is essentially no different to Kojève's 'formal [post-historical] act' mentioned earlier. The sense is that even this messianic turn admits that the way out of the problems of secularism may involve still being secular and respecting civil codes, but also, that one should not fully identify with or attempt to sacralise these categories of modern life. Therefore, Agamben resists buying into Schmitt's imperative of having to suppress 'lawlessness' as a theological service, nor Kojève's acquiescence to the end of history administered by international law and justice as the necessary culmination of secularisation. Paul then becomes an important *symbolic* figure, rather than a historical one, whose own form of resistance against the Roman Empire becomes a model for resistance against all Empires; that is, all 'positive' and institutional representations of universality or history, which, Agamben, Badiou and Žižek acknowledge is the model relevant for our current age of secular globalisation (Agamben 2005: 109; Badiou 2003: 37, 39; Žižek 2003: 96).[32] This 'Leftist' interest in Paul and political theology has the consequence of assuming there are no effective rational or discursive responses to the crises of secular reason. Even if evoking this brand of messianism may seem to be potentially emancipatory in a secular age that appears to be static and unable to neutralise religious fundamentalist movements, yet it is one that is inextricably theological at the same time in that it privileges the indeterminacy of messianic thought over a discursive rational framework.

Despite this revaluation of Pauline theology and its apparent relevance for our so-called secular end-times, it is not so clear how the messianic idea alluded to here divorces itself from the kind of formalistic problems that plagued Kojève's philosophy of history. Has not Agamben only substituted one version of the End-time (albeit one that is indefinite and non-dialectical) for another? Agamben's appropriation of theology remains entrapped by the same logic revealed by Blumenberg as afflicting the previous presupposition of other secularisation theorists. The logic by which the cure to problems of modernity, and by consequence, the failed state

[32] Badiou makes this analogy in reference to Pier Paolo Pasolini's script on the life of Saint Paul. Žižek himself believes Pauline Universalism was directed against the Roman Empire, and in ways we too are trapped within a globalised Empire of Capital. Žižek diagnoses the problem of our age as one which Strauss saw in Kojève 'post-historical condition', that concerning 'the last man'—the liberal hedonist who wants 'a revolution without a revolution' (Žižek 2003: 96).

of secularism, lies in unmasking the theological 'signatures', or as Blumenberg would say, a 'metaphorical theology' embedded in our modern concepts relating to sovereignty, the law, economics and politics (Blumenberg 1983: 101). As the old secularisation theorists had argued, Schmitt in particular, maintaining the origins of sovereignty through the mobilisation of theological metaphors and representations is somehow essential to the vitality and order of political society as a whole. And furthermore, the common strategy behind secularisation theory that, interestingly, both the atheistic or theological points of views share, is to 'recommend a therapy for acute [present] discontent' that always presuppose the existence of a historical disavowal of an 'undealt-with past' or 'distant event that is responsible for what is wrong in the present' (Blumenberg 1983: 117, 119). Therefore, it is difficult to think that we have really progressed from the initial secularisation debates that unfolded after World War II that claimed a modern secular philosophy of history represented by the USSR and Christian theodicy were part of the one slippery slope towards extremism. The general claim was that being 'religious' in appearance meant being religious in substance. Löwith for instance argued modern Christianity was susceptible to its appropriation by modern secular states, and for that reason, his critique of secularism ended leading into a position in which the only alternative was to return to the cyclical *weltanschaaung* of pre-Christian paganism, which Kojève claimed would be impossible. For his contribution, which I think is still relevant to the recent turn to messianism, Blumenberg argued the case that we had to make a distinction between secular eschatology and the idea of progress itself for 'there are differences that would have had to block any transposition of the one onto the other'. This is a distinction that all the secularisation theorists here covered, including Löwith, Schmitt, and arguably, Kojève neglect or underestimate. The 'modern age' (*Neuzeit*) for Blumenberg did not represent 'a watered-down form of judgment or revolution', but essentially a new idea—'the continuous self-justification of the present' through knowledge and self-empowerment (Blumenberg 1983: 30–32)

10.5 Conclusion

In this context, the crossroads that secular societies are venturing into today with the public return of religion poses a challenge that may actually strengthen its principles. But it all depends upon how we navigate this assumedly 'post-secular' moment and debate the issue of how to mediate between different religious communities and state secular institutions through the public sphere itself. Hent de Vries suggests a 'post-secular' discourse should not entail abandoning secularism or its historical constitutional arrangements, but instead lead to a change in the secularist's self-understanding and her attitude to the ongoing survival of religion (see de Vries 2006: 2–3). However, if we proceed to conduct this debate on the path of eschatology (messianic or not) and draw out of it the essence of how we should live our life, worldly and spiritually, we risk both excluding religions which do not share an eschatological view, and, furthermore, arguably exacerbate the interfaith

differences just by raising these *ultimate* questions. There is no real basis to think an eschatological debate can really work as a strategy to find a new socio-political unity. From Kojève to Agamben, theology has set the terms of such a debate so that any secular overcoming faces the continued challenge of answering to them. What is important if we are to have this debate is that we not lose the wood for the trees. For is the *real* issue here—the question of the ultimate end of the world (messianic time), the end of history (meaning *in* history), or is it in a more modest sense, the issue of what does being in a secular society mean and what kind of socio-ethical-political arrangements and norms should characterise it? The last suggestion may seem rather mundane and unadventurous, but it at least allows for debate, rather than assume the issue needs to be addressed in terms of faith and obedience to a higher Being, or inversely, resistance for the sake of it. If any society is called secular, it should at least mean that there must first exist a free and open discussion about its preconditions; hence, the tone of the discussion is as important as the content. Instead, secularism has in its historical discourse been associated with continuity with the past, and in particular, negative secularisation that appropriates and neutralises religious belief as if stealing its thunder.

Few thinkers in European thought today have adopted a tone that befits this 'mundane' challenge. One possible exception has been Jürgen Habermas, who as a well-known secular atheist thinker recently reconsidered the role of religion. Habermas concedes neither to the need of a secular theology thesis outlined in this chapter, nor defends the autonomy of secular reason in determining the whole of modern life. Instead, he poses that we need to begin discussion with the practical assumption of pluralism (rather than the theoretical universalism posed by Badiou and Žižek). He argues, if we 'understand the secularisation of society to be a complementary learning process, both sides can, for cognitive reasons, then take seriously each other's contributions to controversial themes in the public sphere' (Habermas 2006: 258). Religion has a role to play in modern secular societies, but for Habermas it still requires an epistemic shift on its part, while 'secularists' have to confess to their own incapacity to universalise their own norms. But if we remain entrapped in the alternative of either secularising the 'truth' of religion or reverting to the religious State, that is, to single absolutes, we may be jettisoning the possibility of a mutually-inclusive secularism altogether. The problem I have tried to reveal is that the continual argument on secular theology always ends up leading us back and reducing discourse of secularism into abstractions and temptations to envision the end—via the language and signifiers of 'significance' (e.g. 'event', 'state of exception', 'end of history', '*Katechon*', 'Antichrist'). Even with secular or atheist intentions, these discourses remain theologically loaded. Although such theorists have reminded us of the need of 'faith' in something beyond the here and now and that current secular life lacks a degree of conviction, this faith by itself will not solve the tensions that confront secular societies today. Rather, its wholesale adoption risks belittling the current state of affairs and failing to find practical ways of achieving a better world. Arguably, then, what is really needed is a *suspension* of the stark eschatological terms themselves.

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Part V

The Secular Age or Post-Secularism

Charles Taylor's Search for Transcendence: Mystery, Suffering, Violence

11

John Rundell

11.1 Introduction

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor provides a masterful interpretation of modernity. It is the culmination of an intellectual project that spans his reflections on hermeneutics, studies on Hegel and the genealogy of the modern self, a defence of *quebequois* multiculturalism in the context of reflections on the dynamics of modernity, and the problem of a transcendental dimension of the human condition. *A Secular Age* is an immense, and immensely troubling book, a more or less comprehensive attempt to reconstruct modernity's dynamics, which at the same time lays down a gauntlet to these dynamics. In presenting his own version of modernity, Taylor's task ultimately is to argue against it by constructing a fully fledged critique of modernity as a secular age. In the context of his critique he also builds into his analysis new forms of devotion, ritual, and religiosity, the aim of which is to give depth to the idea and practice of modern selfhood (Rundell 2010c; Taylor 1975, 1985, 1989; Taylor and Gutman 1992).

Notwithstanding the permanence of the topic of religion in the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology, Taylor's own gauntlet is not one of religiosity as such, but one of what he terms transcendence, that is, another dimension of experience that, for him, has been circumscribed by the very condition of modernity (Habermas 2002; Hefner 1998; Luckmann 1983; Berger 1999; Turner 1991). It is argued here that there are three main threads with which Taylor weaves his concern with transcendence—suffering, violence and mystery. Each thread contributes to the way in which his notion of transcendence is constructed, as well as to his critique of modernity. Suffering, violence and mystery are imbued in his critical analysis of the

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modern condition, as well as in his response to it in terms of his notion of the porosity of the transcendent condition. The modern condition is one in which suffering and violence are rife, and yet, except for its Romantic counter-current, mystery has been excommunicated from its possible range of imaginings and experiences. Suffering, violence and mystery also enable him to make a distinction between an older, pre-modern religious paradigm that problematically combines all three, and a modern one. The modern one, which Taylor advocates, combines mystery and the recognition of this-worldy suffering, but does not rely on an image of violence to open experience up to another extra-mundane world. In this sense, Taylor's hermeneutics of religion is one that also leans on the critique of violence deeply imbedded in the traditions of modern practical reasoning, even if in his argument, they are at a loss to address it.

Let's look at Taylor's analysis more closely: firstly his image of modernity, and secondly his accompanying human image of what he terms the modern, buffered self against which he will posit a porous one. The porous self is his own critical anthropology, which points beyond the specifically religious reference point of *A Secular Age* to the transcendent. In a third section I will, then, look at what Taylor wants in the context of his competing images of the buffered and porous self and his discussion of the Romantic counter-current, where mystery has been re-articulated in a secular age which has opened onto another possible relation to moments of transcendence.[1]

11.2 Taylor's Social Imaginaries

No doubt Taylor has the works of both Max Weber and Emile Durkheim in his sights when he discusses the secular age, which is Taylor's stand-in category for modernity. Taylor's 'list', although not as exhaustive as some other theories of modernity—no list could be—includes the economy, democracy, sovereignty, and the public sphere, secularity, the rise of science and instrumental reason, and multiculturalism, that is, the co-existence and survival of ethnic and cultural identities (Weber 1971; Durkheim 1964).

Taylor reconstructs his modernity and its dimensions according to three narratives or social imaginaries, a term he deploys in quite a different way to that developed by Cornelius Castoriadis. Taylor's version of a social imaginary makes it a background cultural hermeneutic. It is less a field of ontological imaginary creation (Castoriadis), and more an unspoken, inarticulate, un-theorised and ultimately un-theorizable background that gives an understanding to a whole situation within

[1] This chapter is a re-written and expanded version of my review essay on *A Secular Age* published in a 2010 issue of *Critical Horizons* (11(1):119–132). A draft of this re-written version was also presented at University of Antwerp, Corvinus University and University College Dublin under the auspices of The International Research Network on Religion and Democracy. I would to thank Peter Losonzci and Maeve Cooke for hosting me, as well as the participants of the seminars for their responses.

which the particular parts of it can make sense, and without which these parts can only ever be not so much incompletely, but more so incoherently explained (Taylor 2007: 173). Taylor also terms this un-theorised background understanding an 'implicit map' of social space or sociality that determines the style and forms of power inherent in social interactions.

The three 'implicit maps' or social imaginaries that Taylor posits as the core constituting ones that make up its moral social space and emotional life are the economy, the public sphere, and the practices and outlooks of democratic self-rule. According to Taylor, the latter two have devolved into the dynamics of sovereignty and governmentality. There is also a fourth one, that of Romanticism, which he presents as a counterpoint to modernity. Taylor's aim is not to give one of the imaginaries the capacity to determine the other ones in the manner of paleo-marxism, but to configure each in its own terms. In other words, he accepts that modernity is internally differentiating. It produces different spaces, and these spaces are understood as social imaginaries.

For Taylor, economic space is not defined simply according to economic or monetary exchange, the organization of labour, or the development of technologies or industries. Rather, it refers to the older version of civil society as '*politisse*', 'police', or 'civilisation'. Exchange is, thus, not simply a monetary form, it is a 'style of life' (Simmel) and a form of knowledge that individuates and, importantly for Taylor, one-dimensionalizes human experience around the idea of self-interest in which the older moral or virtue economy, which includes passion, greatness, as well as an ideal of the political good, is undermined, broken up, dismantled, or simply becomes vapid. The eighteenth century distinction between civilization and corruption dissolves and is replaced by this 'economy' of exchanges of self-interest. Economics becomes *the* science of society and given a privileged status by its practitioners, theoreticians and critics in the very act of its differentiation from other areas of social life. It produces sufferings not simply derived from the ever-likely possibility of economic impoverishment. Moreso, it engenders an impoverishment of the self caused by the combination of self-interest and the mendacity of others (Taylor 2007: 184–185).

The public sphere is a different social imaginary altogether from the economic one. In Taylor's formulation it is the creation of a new, unprecedented plurality of spaces of strangers whose only concern is discussion—another form of exchange—in which media in the form of letters, the press, radio, television, internet blogs, become the form of interconnection of mutual benefit and sociability. Similar to exchange constituted in the economic imaginary, being familiar is no longer a requirement (Taylor 2007: 187).

However, the public sphere constituted by 'the sociability of strangers' (Taylor) does not produce a sense of belonging to an 'imaginary community' (B Anderson) of discussants. Only the 'imaginary community' of the nation can achieve this, and subjects stand in a more involved or immediate way to them, thus gaining direct access to emotions otherwise denied or put on hold (Taylor 2007: 210, 574–580). For Taylor, though, the imaginary community of discussants is too 'in the moment' for this type of involvement. The modern public sphere replaces older cosmological

notions of circular time with a sense of time that is profane or this-worldly. Cosmological time or 'the cosmological imaginary' cohered around a sense of eternity, that is, a sense of time as an ascent away from the everyday, a gathering of time into a unity marked by particular rituals. As Taylor puts it, in modernity events exist only in one, profane dimension, and only in relations of causality with other events of the same kind. Otherwise they are disconnected from one another (Taylor 2007: 195, 324 ff).

This is ultimately what Taylor means by secularisation. Secularisation involves a radically purged, horizontally conceived time-consciousness in which we only relate to 'known' events on a lateral grid of experience, or 'unknown' ones in terms of what he terms a 'dark abyss'. In terms of the latter, time opens up and the question of the infinite is not so much destroyed, but something that must be filled by *theoria*, such as theories of evolution, and new mathematized theories of the universe that can give an account of not only time, but also of creation itself (Taylor 2007: 322–351). Here, mystery disappears. It is de-magified, as Max Weber would put it. And we suffer because time and experience are thinned out, so to speak, as well as disaggregated.

Yet there is an additional dimension to Taylor's notion of secularisation that stands at the heart of the formation of the modern public sphere, and is more troubling for him than the economic imaginary. Because modern time consciousness dispatches to oblivion a transcendent frame of reference located outside of itself, the public sphere becomes completely self-referential. The common action of the modern public sphere is the making of opinion, and the legitimacy of this opinion-making is given over to itself. There is no extra-social, legal or transcendent principle that anchors the nature and legitimacy of making opinion. During the eighteenth century onward a social imaginary of sociability was constructed by philosophers and intellectuals who devolved it into an emotionally detached, deontological yet mutually reasoning public. If Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment?' is taken as the paradigmatic text here, the public are expected to construct their own limits, to supervise themselves and be their own authority (Kant 1991).

Moreover, this self-referential illocutionary model of the public sphere has an explicit addressee government. The public sphere speaks and government is expected to listen. In this sense, the modern public sphere is political, yet it is essentially extra-political. This self-authorisation of the public, that is, public actors as authors of their own texts, inverts or differentiates an older political tradition according to Taylor's reconstruction. The modern public sphere is redolent with the differentiation between opinion and power. There is nothing, for Taylor, to link public discussion inherently to the idea of political society, and thus into something that transcends itself (Taylor 2007: 190).

What then, according to Taylor, becomes of the social imaginary of political power given this differentiation between it and the public sphere? What is the modernity of political power? If self-defined and self-constituted reason is the social imaginary of the modern public sphere, then the 'people' form the social imaginary of the political sphere, even in the context of its competing models. In this sense, there is no longer a covenant between God and the kingly or queenly sovereign, but

only a covenant between the people themselves. This republican moment, for Taylor, represents the revolutionary dimension of modernity and he finds its origins in the American Revolution which transformed an older idea of Natural Law grounded in the deified right of the sovereign into the natural law of the sovereignty of the people.

Originally grounded on the older idea of natural law, the new imaginary of the sovereignty of the people is, for Taylor, a re-interpretation that pushes the idea of power into a new centre. No longer ordained by an external force, it is ordained by an internal one, that is, the constitution of the people. For him, this is the secret of the new American federal arrangements. He is less concerned with its circulation of power in centrifugal terms, a concern that pre-occupies de Tocqueville, for example. The empirical people of the United States (excluding slaves) had to be synonymous with an imaginary universal 'people' of a federated centre that supplanted the role of each individual state or political entity in the new post-colonial reality. As he states, 'popular sovereignty could be embraced because it had a clear and uncontested institutional meaning', which gave the federated elected assemblies a legitimate basis for power (Taylor 2007: 199). The alternative is a 'collapse' into separate and separated 'denominations' in which the specificity of political legitimacy lay with particular political 'faiths'. Such segregation lays the ground for defensive closure and territorialisation in the form of permanent interpretative conflicts and culture wars (Taylor 2007: 450–455).

For Taylor, the contrast of the American with the French and Russian revolutions could not have been greater. In the French and Russian revolutions there was a constant search for a new imaginary centre after the ones of the old regimes had been dispatched. And for Taylor, it is not so much that there were neither constitutions nor institutions that could function as federated gradations of power notwithstanding their own difficulties. Rather, there was no agreement amongst the intellectuals and political actors about what these constitutions or institutions might be. Hence there was a double problem with the two later revolutions, both as realities and as paradigms. There were absences of the ideal of a legitimate centre and of mediating institutions through which power could circulate. And there were fierce and bloody disagreements about what these might be (Taylor 2007: 206; Lefort 1988; Furet 1981; Fehér 1987).

As Taylor points out, the case of the French revolution, especially during its climactic period of 1792–1794, brings together the unstable combination of harmony and virtue in an attempt to construct another new, modern political imaginary. This political imaginary would address the question of the centre and its mediations in a way different to both the American model, and the model of public opinion. Rousseau becomes the indirect spokesman here. Rousseau wishes to dissolve the two social imaginaries of economic civilisation, where self-interest is expressed at the expense of others, and the public one, where empathetic opinion about politics is expressed with others in impersonal and dispassionate discussion. He asserts that self-love or self-interest and empathy or sympathy can come together through the love of the common good. 'Self love is not distinct from love of others' (Taylor 2007: 202). Rousseau's modern goal is to create a new basis of identity beyond

egoism and thus to rescue freedom from economistic interpretations and place it under a broader umbrella of the 'common self' or the 'general will'.

It is here that virtue and harmony come together in a politicised union during the French Revolution. Love of self is fused with love of country (Taylor 2007: 203). The '*republique*' symbolises a fusion of self, politics and nation, which causes the spaces between each of them to disappear, even the space of the public sphere. The result, for Taylor, along with many other commentators, is a deeply problematic and inauthentic re-sacaralisation of a putatative principle of transcendence through the attempted reification of politics, which is also equated with a claim to transparency. The 'general will' is exactly that: both sacred and transparent, and as such it is this aspect that creates the legitimate centre. There are no hidden corners. From Rousseau's perspective, representative democracy is partial and opaque, and cannot represent the general will in its totality. Only participatory representation can be transparent, where the political citizen is both performer and spectator, taking his or her place in the public theatres and festivals of the political. Everybody represents themselves and everybody else, where everyone is on display to be judged in an orgy of what Foucault would later term in a slightly different context, perpetual surveillant self-governmentality (Taylor 2007; Foucault 1977). The possibility of the condition of a *modern* form of porosity is born.

Moreover, in order for these public spectacles and festivals to be coherent and give coherent meaning to subjects' experiences of the world, they must be clearly defined and clearly laid out. They must have a catechism of belief that also indicates those who are corrupt and not yet harmonised with the general will. The catechism, rather than constitution, is created by the most virtuous of all, the new politicised intellectuals who during the nineteenth century would be both its champions, for example in the form of Cherneshevsky and Tkachev (who would agree on nothing else), and its critics in the form of Marx and Dostoyevsky (who would also agree on nothing else) (Rundell 1990; Dostoyevsky 1971; Marx and Engels 1975).

It was a small step from this Rousseauean dream to the nightmare of the Leninist party, which replaces the general will as the imaginary centre. This heralds the invention of the social imaginary of totalitarianism on the back of the ideal of both the revolutionary vanguard and the protectors of the revolution itself. This is irrespective of whether this party is of the Left or the Right, the West or the East. Taylor's analysis of the Rousseauian fusion of harmony and virtue points in the direction of another political imaginary altogether, the development of the nation state and its potential to impose or deploy its own particular invention, the totalitarian option. Like the other social imaginaries, it is an invention of modernity, but one which Taylor fuses with the modern imaginary of sovereignty, more generally.

Yet, and as will be further explored below, Taylor's analysis points to the birth of a modern secular form of porosity. This modern, secular form of porosity de-differentiates the separation implied between the modern social imaginaries by placing the Party at the centre, and by so doing makes a myth of transparency equivalent to transcendence. As importantly, and as Taylor's analysis implies, this de-differentiation requires a catechism of belief that opens up, rather than buffers us

against suffering, violence and cruelty. These come together and radiate throughout society as a whole, and reach vertically, so to speak, into the soul and into the 'heaven' of the social: its collective representations, as Durkheim would put it.

11.3 Liberal Civilisation and the Buffered Self

Notwithstanding different dimensions and disagreements, each social imaginary, including the Rousseauian version of sovereignty, is informed by the same modern meta-norm, according to Taylor's reconstruction. This meta-norm is first articulated paradigmatically by Grotius' image of political society in which human beings are conceived 'as rational, sociable agents who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefit' (Taylor 2007: 159). This meta-norm becomes imbedded in debates throughout the seventeenth, and especially the eighteenth, century onwards concerning the nature and organisation of civil society, which as we have seen involves its own internal differentiation. The meta-norm's greatest champion, for Taylor, is Hegel, and its greatest critic is Marx.

In Taylor's view this meta-norm or idealisation of peaceful, rational and mutually beneficial sociability has four dimensions that form a coherent field of interpretation in which, as we have seen, different versions are created through each of the social imaginaries. These four dimensions begin first with the idea that the single individual is the basic social unit, and that society is created to benefit this single entity. This entails that, second, *mutual* benefit also begins from this individualistic premise, and spreads laterally throughout society through means of monetary exchange, security and prosperity (Taylor 2007: 170). Thirdly, security, exchange and prosperity are filtered through a language of individual right, the corollary of which is the individualistically conceived value of freedom, here viewed as a self-determining agency. Fourthly, rights of self-determining agency and mutual benefit are to be secured by all participants equally. Here interpretations of freedom and a formal notion of equality are dovetailed through the notion of right. The meta-norm becomes a point of orientation through which people are 'disembedded' from older and more traditional forms of sociability and mobilised (Taylor's term) in ways that make it individualistic, atomised and alienated. This meta-norm of peaceful, rational and mutually beneficial sociability becomes the self-legitimating reference point for what Taylor terms the 'closed world order' of liberal civilisation, with its codes of governmentality, the other side of so-called civility (Taylor 2007: 479, 556–580).

It is in this context of the articulation of these meta-narratives within the modern imaginaries that Taylor posits two contrasting images of selfhood to underpin his version of modernity and his critique of it. These images are of a non-modern and a modern self. The non-modern self is porous, and by this he means that it is 'vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces' (Taylor 2007: 38). Taylor's view of the pre- or non-modern self is one that is contextualized and constituted by a porosity between two worlds, the mundane and the enchanted. Crucially, for him, there is an emotional engagement in the enchanted through fear. This emotional involvement

through fear means that the enchanted realm cannot be kept at bay. Moreover, these two worlds are not interpreted simply supernaturally. They are interpreted on the basis of a principle of transcendence which is based on the supremacy and sovereignty of the enchanted world with its cosmology, vertical and eternal sense of time, theogeny and miracles. This enchanted imaginary is an exceptional world. The human world finds the enchanted ultimately indeterminate, mysterious and unknowable, even though it has a porous relation to us, and we to it (Taylor 2007: 73).

In contrast to the porous self, the result of the modern social imaginaries and meta-norm of rational and mutual sociability at the level of self-formation is the 'buffered self': the term Taylor now deploys for the objectivistic version of the self-defining subject. This is the central point of his long and complex reconstruction. The buffered self is, for him, contextualized and constituted by a knowledge and maintenance of boundary positions. This is its quaint meaning. It does not refer to the sense of being safeguarded or cushioned. Rather, the boundary functions as a facilitating defence or bulwark that keeps other social imaginaries or worlds at bay. It is facilitating in the sense that the buffer can, in his view, 'form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life. The absence of fear can be not just enjoyed, but seen as an opportunity for self-control or self-direction, or as he has characterised it in his book on Hegel, 'objectivistically construed self-definition' (Taylor 2007: 39, 1975). Hence, for Taylor, in this context of his critique of modern self-formation, secularisation or the secular age is really a stand-in category, a substitute for images that portray emotional singularisation, disengagement and detachment, compartmentalization and instrumental objectification.

As importantly, and in a final telescoping of his interpretation of modernity that goes against the grain of his image of its complexity, this buffered self, in which modalities of self-control and disciplinization are invented, refined and move centre-stage constitute what Taylor terms an 'immanent frame' (Taylor 2007: 542). By this he means *all* resources for the modern cacophony of meaning, value and morality, which give the buffered self its life and definition within any of the social imaginaries, are constituted immanently. In other words, these resources are viewed internal to the human condition and its social constituents irrespective of whether they are derived from exchange, reason, or political legitimacy. The modern, buffered self with its frame of immanence indicates, for Taylor, the over-emphasised ideal of objectivistically construed self-definition coupled with an anthropology of self-sufficiency that constitutes all of the imaginaries including the Rousseauian version of sovereignty, that is, the general will. We have need for neither gods, demons nor even nature. As he states, 'the life of the buffered individual, instrumentally effective in secular time, created the practical content within which the self-sufficiency of this immanent realm could become a matter of experience' (Taylor 2007: 543, 589). The modern buffered self and its world closes in upon itself, confident of its self-authoring self-sufficiency.

The modern human being begins to control interpretation. For example, the rise of post-Gallilean natural science constructed a 'physical' world 'naturalised' and 'governed by exceptionless laws, which may [or may not] reflect the wisdom or

benevolence of a creator, but don't require in order to be understood … any reference to a good aimed at, whether in the form of a Platonic Idea or of Ideas in the mind of God' (Taylor 2007: 542). This occurred not just in science but in all of the social imaginaries and for Taylor this is the second basic problem and predicament with the modern human condition and its social imaginaries. At both levels of the social imaginaries and modern self-formation, the desire for control, as well as the endless inchoate din that this desire produces, displace and remain deaf to a sense of the mysterious and an indetermination beyond human control. The result is flat and empty, instrumentalised soullessness. According to Taylor, this is where moderns suffer most. Soullessness is not so much an empty internal space that had been hollowed out. Because of the way it had been constructed immanently the modern self was always hollow to begin with.

For Taylor, this shallowness is the dark abyss of modern times, the modern condition in all of its social imaginaries. According to him, we are shallow, linear beings who suffer accordingly, and yet must push this suffering away into denial or neglect. This self-incurred suffering makes us inauthentic selves, not only buffered ones (Taylor 1991).

11.4 Poetics of Transcendence in Search of the Mysterious

We can, according to Taylor, only be saved by shifting our gaze elsewhere, to an enchanted imaginary that posits a condition of transcendence. For him there are two stakes. One of these belongs to the problem of modernity, the buffered self, and its shallowness of meaning and its inability to address issues of life, suffering and death with any substantial depth. The other issue is not to invoke or return to an older violent and punitive doctrine of religious belief within the Christian (for him, Catholic) tradition. The aim is only to invoke a new hermeneutics of the mysterious, in which new conversion practices and German Romantic poetry and its successor forms combine to become, for Taylor, the counter-paradigm to objectivistic liberal civilisation with its buffered self, leaving violence behind.

To be sure, there *is* a *modern secular* porosity that has combined suffering and violence and confused transparency with transcendence. As indicated above, it finds some expression in the Rousseaueian ideal of the 'general will' that is the forerunner to the totalitarian experiments of the twentieth century, and it is this that Taylor, to be sure, finds as disturbing as the modern buffering that is immanent to liberal cultures of governmentality.

However, Taylor has more than Rousseau and totalitarianism in mind when he invokes the spectre of modern porosity. It refers to violence, suffering, evil, fanaticism and terrorism: all of which, according to Taylor, call upon and creatively reinterpret an older religious paradigm of sacrifice. As Taylor points out, religious imaginaries (and here he has in mind most religions including non-Axial ones) often swing between two poles: one defined by the condition of absolute love, and another defined by absolute or demonic evil (to be sure as the outer limit) (Taylor 2007: 651–675, 715). As such they make impossible and unfulfillable demands

upon the soul under the language of sacrifice, especially ultimate sacrifice, with its invocations of salvation and redemption (Taylor 2007: 651–656). Older redemptive porosity can include an invocation to identify and merge with evil, violence and suffering, that is, with the demonic. Modern porosity draws on another feature of Axial porosity. According to Taylor, and in following the work of René Girard, the latter includes not only a hierarchical relation with the transcendent. It also establishes an internal link between violence and the sacred in terms of identifying those who are scapegoated and thus excluded, punished, excommunicated or put to death (Taylor 2007: 686, 611; Girard 1977; Kearney 2001). For Taylor, this principle of exclusion based on scapegoating establishes the continuities between pre-modern Axial and modern redemptive or sacrificial porosity.

However, there are also major differences and innovations between the two. Modern redemptive porosity, so Taylor argues, can initially draw on other sources—the roar and violence of the crowd, the thrill and thrall of violence itself. In addition a *secular* higher purpose replaces the Divine and Demonic and provides no limits, just a rationalizable series of techniques. In an argument that is similar to Zygmunt Bauman's in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Taylor argues that 'where much earlier warfare was ritualised, and hence limited, post-Axial sacred killing will become more and more rationalised and limitless' (Taylor 2007: 687; Bauman 1989). Yet unlike Bauman, it is not for Taylor the integrationist dilemma that is the background to the exterministic imagination of the concentration camps or the Gulag. Rather, as indicated above, for Taylor, its modern genealogy originates from the Jacobin phase of the French revolution, which becomes the modern paradigm where the justice of the guillotine reigns: 'The killing is seen to be more rational (directed against targets that really deserve it), clean, clinical and technological (the guillotine), and to bring about the real reign of good.' In addition, the buffered world of the secular age entails a differentiation between the higher purpose and the technical rationalisation of killing that obfuscates the connection between them. Taylor continues, 'this will be the reign of peace: Robespierre in his vote on the new constitution, sided with those who wanted to ban the death penalty. The disconnect between the final goals and the sacred killing which was meant to encompass it could not be more striking. And when we move into the twentieth century, we can see a revolutionary violence, boosted by rational technology, which dwarfs the horrors of all earlier ages' (Taylor 2007: 687, 709). In contrast to Arendt's analysis of Eichmann, for example, there is a deep unbridgeable rift of understanding between the grandeur of modern sacred plans and the banal barbarism of their implementation (Arendt 1994). For Taylor, this disconnect is constitutive of modern porosity. And it is self-defined.

Modern porosity unites violence, cruelty and suffering by placing a state sponsored catechism at its centre. Yet, paradoxically, for Taylor, this centre is buffered: not from the other modern imaginaries, but from another condition of modernity, a self-reflexivity concerning its own actions. Only the plan is self-reflexive, critique is not allowed into its vocabulary. Self-reflexivity as critique is denied and outlawed, to exist only in the interstices inhabited by dissident intellectuals, writers, artists and musicians.

For Taylor, the challenge of and for modernity or for the secular age is to provide protection from the machinations of modern porosity, or modern evil, which a modern bounded or buffered self, nor any of its constituent imaginaries, cannot provide. As Taylor says:

> …this is, as it were, a condition which arises even in a disenchanted world: we are unprotected; now not from demons and spirits, but from suffering and evil as we sense it in a raging world … It's almost like a nightmare. One wants to be protected, separated from this. But it can creep under your guard and assail you, even in a disenchanted world. (Taylor 2007: 681)

Taylor's response to this lack of protection of modernity by modernity, is to argue that the modern world does not have the resources internal to itself to respond to its own dilemmas, difficulties, and violences. Modernity cannot meet its own challenges from within its own meta-norm because it lacks the depth to do so. For Taylor, modernity's fate is to produce a wonderfully monstrous paradox: once the world was discovered to be round and its motion circular around the sun, it became flat, linear, buffered. The result of this is that, for him, meaning becomes fragile at best. At worst, it becomes empty, or we become indifferent to it. Taylor identifies and draws on the unquiet critics of modernity from Romanticism to existentialism who point to this spectre of meaninglessness in the face of, especially, human suffering. '[We] are left with a view of human life which is empty, cannot aspire commitment, offers nothing really worthwhile, cannot answer the craving for goals we can dedicate ourselves to' (Taylor 2007: 717–18).

However and more importantly, for Taylor this modern condition of meaninglessness and lack of depth entails an inability to comprehend and address the perennial issues that are internal to the human condition itself. For Taylor, these perennial issues are suffering, love and death. And because they are the condition of our finitude and mortality, they are the most pressing and prescient. Love and death throw the contingency of life into relief. When a love finishes or dies, so, it seems, does life. When someone dies, so does life, literally. This sense of finitude, of the mortality of love and life and the certainty of death, throws into relief the search for continuity, which, for Taylor, is synonymous with meaning, and presses us 'against the boundaries of the human domain'. Only meaning can provide continuity, which for him, always reached into the transcendent, until the advent of the secular age. According to Taylor, we are staring in the face of modernity's greatest paradox: a need for the affirmation of a transcendence beyond life, and a simultaneous denial of this need because it has no reference point. All we stare at is a void, a nothing. In the face of death, life should show its full and deep need for meaning, yet in modernity it cannot (Taylor 2007: 726).

However, as we indicated above, Taylor does not recommend returning to an older religious tradition that re-invokes the redemptive distinctions between Heaven and Hell in order to address these vital and perennial issues. For him:

> …there can be no question … of a simple return to the *status quo ante Deismo*. If I speak from out of this religious understanding, in which I place myself, then this modern turn has brought some positive benefits; in, say, detaching our view of the first mystery (original sin) from an obsessive sense of human depravity; and giving us a distance from the

> juridical-penal view of atonement … Our hyper-Augustinian ancestors were part of a religious culture in which it was normal to find divine meaning to suffering and destruction … The break of modernity means that this kind of reading no longer can be taken for granted. (Taylor 2007: 653)

Taylor, thus, asks for a different hermeneutics of and for the transcendent, but one that, as mentioned above does not fall into the trap of old religious languages and traditions, or new ones that marry the hermeneutics of faith with the politics of exclusion. As he provisionally asks, 'how can we become agents on whom misanthropy has no hold, in whom it awakens no connivance?' (Taylor 2007: 701).

It is precisely here that Taylor evokes and modernises the Christian Agapaic tradition in order to counter the traps of violence in modern porosity, with its background in the Axial religious traditions, and the incipient and never fully recognised misanthropy that lurks in the shadow of liberal civilisation. This liberal misanthropy takes the form of a new paternalistic attitude towards those who are less fortunate and in 'less-developed' parts of the world. The alleviation of suffering becomes the hallmark, no longer of missionaries, but of the new charities and non-governmental organisations whose task is not only to manage suffering, but manage it in ways that are geared only to the social imaginary of the economy and mass market.

For Taylor, there are two sources for a positive modernisation of the agapaic tradition and its connection with the transcendent—one stemming from the modern pre-occupation with everyday life, and another from the modern preoccupation with the mysterious through 'acts of conversion', which have affinities with Romanticism.

There are many critiques of everyday life within the traditions of critical theorising that attack it for its consumerism, for its mundane culture, and for its narrowness: its own forms of solipsism. Taylor does not share these prejudices. Rather, for him, and in counter to the Augustinian emphasis on sinfulness, disgust and the rejection of the body and sexuality, the recognition of the everyday is a recognition of the ordinary, foibled nature of human beings as they go about their imperfect, embodied and desiring lives. It is here that the condition and the recognition of human suffering can re-enter. Taylor recognises that this ordinary, foibled everyday life, in which we are sensual, embodied beings who, while aiming at the mark of good conduct, certainly sometimes miss it, cannot or should not be transcended. Whatever its sources—the Protestant Reformation re-evaluation of agape as ordinary, matrimonial friendship, the modern reading of the Eros tradition, or even Nietzsche's ambivalent recognition of our 'human-all-too-human' condition—one should, Taylor suggests, 'recognise the positive force and value of these homecomings of the ordinary' (Taylor 2007: 628). What is recovered in these moments of re-evaluation and re-interpretation 'is a sense of the value of the unspectacular, flawed everyday love, between lovers, or friends, or parents and children, with its routines and labours, partings and reunions, estrangements and returns' (Taylor 2007: 628).

According to Taylor, these moments are redolent with depth, because it is in them that we have glimpses of something transcendent. They open onto a new way of positing the porous self in the wake of modernity and its immanent frame. For Taylor, a sense of the transient is the basis for the beginning of human fullness.

Fullness, for him is a condition and an outcome of the recognition of, and gesture towards, transcendence (Taylor 2007: 768). Life-changing fullness, whilst it may recognise ordinariness, goes beyond it and beyond the self. It is also a fullness that embraces sacredness. Having faced our fragility, and in the wake of something grander than ourselves, *here is where a religious person will easily confess a sense of mystery*' (Taylor 2007: 367, italics added).

In other words, sacredness, for Taylor, does not refer to establishing a communion with God, or a new community of believers in the context of the established Christian Churches. All of the Churches, including the new dissenting ones, according to Taylor are implicated in the buffered world of liberal civilisation, the result of which is the bureaucratisation and instrumentalization of the traditions of *agape* and *caritas* (Taylor 2007: 737–744). Rather, for Taylor, sacredness is opening oneself to mystery, depth, and verticality that transcendent porosity offers.

In order to achieve this opening to mystery, a break-out from the immanent frame is required. Notwithstanding his references to ordinary, everyday life, this break-out, has historically occurred from two directions that have altered and transformed our understanding beyond the usual scope of the ordinary, either within or outside its embeddedness in liberal civilisation. As mentioned above, these two directions beyond the ordinary are Romanticism, and what he terms modern 'acts of conversion', or a new religious hermeneutics and practice.

In *Hegel*, Taylor termed the Romantic type of engaged and involved self a subjectivistically inclined self-defining one (Taylor 1975: 3–50). In *A Secular Age*, this subjectivist version of self-definition is replaced with the notion of transcendence and its accompanying image of porosity, but in a way that also enables a dialogue with modernity's counter-heritage of Romanticism to be established. According to Taylor, Romanticism's strength and gift to modernity is not only its sensibility to the dangers of the buffered self. Also and more importantly, it is a continued opening to, and theorisation of, our supposedly porous, transcendent relation with other worlds, especially those of enchanted Nature and the Divine (Taylor 2007: 299–351). From another perspective Romanticism's heritage has also opened onto the issue of the depth of the subject, that is, feelings, emotions and imaginings that cannot be encapsulated in objectivisitic or normative languages, or motivated only by awe and fear (Taylor 2007: 313–321; Frank 1999).

More specifically, the early German Romantic reflection on what poetry offered humankind in the wake of 'a secular age', becomes central for the modern, non-redemptive, paradigm of transcendent porosity. Taylor privileges the Romantic generation from the Schlegel brothers to Novalis and Hölderlin, for which poetry becomes the means and the 'text' of Spirit, not in the sense of Hegel's *Geist*, but in the sense that it strives to render something that transcends humanity. Poetry works at the edge of language and, for Taylor, this richness of poetry's symbolic universe is what attracts him to it. For Taylor, this emerges most forcefully through Augustus Schlegel's doctrine of the symbol in which:

> …the highest things, things to do with the infinite, with God, with our deepest feelings, can only be made objects of thought and consideration for us through expression in symbols … on this view, there is something performative about poetry; through creating

> symbols it establishes new meanings. Poetry is potentially world-making …' (Taylor 2007: 756)

As such, poetry also opens onto and works with the indeterminate, or, for Taylor, the grandeur and unknownness of God. It enters a space, often through an understated symbolic gesture, that we ourselves cannot enter. As such, Taylor's emphasis is beyond the usual subjectivistic interpretation of Romantic poetry. Poetry reaches into the 'invisible', which for Taylor is the transcendent, the mysterious, that which we cannot fully know yet can be opened once again to.

The other current that, for Taylor, informs his modern, non-redemptive paradigm of transcendent porosity is the idea of 'creative renewal', which is experienced as a conversion that opens onto the mystery and experience of the Divine. Drawing on the work of the French poet and worker's activist of the early twentieth century, Charles Péguy, Taylor's reconstruction and hermeneutics of 'creative renewal' or conversion involves the following four aspects. First, there is a notion of authentic action, which links ordinary, foibled, everyday life, present and past together, rather than disaggregates them, and brings them into alignment, for both Taylor and Péguy, with transcendent or cosmological time. It is also equivalent to a notion of transcendent freedom, which links to the second aspect a plurality of mystical experiences in which all of Judaism and Christianity contribute their own particular versions of mystery, and their access to it. Taylor implies that all of the Axial religions have their own forms of mystery, although Péguy's reference points were Jewish, Christian and what he terms in French '*mystique*'. Mystery, in this sense, is polytheistic, rather than 'multicultural' in a consumerist or liberal sense. It is also outside the managed and commercialised churches and 'new' religious experiments.

Thirdly, there is an emphasis on the image of harmonious cohesion and integration along the lines put forward not only by Péguy, but also by Durkheim and Mauss in their defence of modern corporatism, which Taylor, for one has defended in his discussion of the specificity of *Quebequois* culture. Fourthly, the polytheism of sacred practices and paths is matched by a universalistic attitude towards salvation. It is available to everyone, and there is no 'space' of Hell, no space of banishing the negative to the outside (Taylor 2007: 744–754).

Ultimately, Taylor's position comes to rest around these four aspects of creative renewal. We are outside the paradigm of the self-defining subject and have come to reside, not in Grand Hotel Abyss, but for Taylor, beyond ourselves, almost entirely. Taylor's position is not a religious subjectivism, it is not a *calling*. Rather, it is a hermeneutics that combines the poetics of Romanticism and religious experiences of conversion. It calls for the interpretative work of the counter-paradigm or counter-imaginary of transcendence with its own contours and innovations to continue to inform the work of critique, as well as the work of renewal, of renaissance, fullness and human flourishing in the context of the very problematic condition of modernity. Here there is mystery that addresses the permanent questions of suffering, love and death without the need to invoke either violence or redemption.

11.5 The Indeterminate, Wonder, and the Very Human Condition

The strength of Taylor's reinvigoration of the transcendent is that he wants to leave redemption and violence behind, and is particularly sensitive to the way in which they have been moored in modernity. Yet, Taylor's view of modernity is one that he shares with Adorno and Foucault, even if they would not share his disposition towards transcendence. It is constituted by a meta-principle of instrumental rationality that defines the internal life of each of the social imaginaries. But there is a twist here. The twist, for Taylor, is that because this rationality is conceived as being anthropologically self-defined or self-constructed, it is a self-definition that is ultimately solipsistic and denies the possibility of mystery and the indeterminate, and especially an indeterminate beyond itself, which he only supposes and posits in terms of transcendence. All of Taylor's imaginaries of modernity are stabilized around a 'great' divide between transcendence (rather than simply religious belief), which is viewed as being synonymous with meaning per se, and non-transcendent secular forms of thought and action that are in some viewed as profane or less than meaningful. It is here, too, that secularisation is also a stand-in category for modernity more generally, thus, forging a synonymous relation between them. This image of the 'great divide' includes Taylor's reconstruction where his idea of 'moral space', so thoroughly drawn in *Sources of the Self*, is shifted and orientated towards, if not religion, then the realm of transcendence.

Taylor's *A Secular Age* remains an argument against the long modern history of the formation of what might be termed, 'this-sided' philosophical anthropologies of human self-formation. Taylor argues that such philosophical anthropologies cannot adequately address the problem of indeterminate wonder and transcendence, even if they approaches this issue as a critique of modernity through its Romantic heritage alone.

Indetermination, mystery and wonder need not be equated with transcendence, poetry, or even a Heideggerean inspired negative theology (Kearney 2001). Taylor stands in its wake and shares the prejudice (in Gadamer's sense of the term) of the immediate identification of rationality with control, violence, instrumentality and modernity, contrasted by 'the invisible', nature, the sublime, and the poetic, which has fascinated critics since Romanticism.

However, a different possibility presents itself. This possibility of the indeterminate, of wonder, can also be approached from the vantage point of the integration of, and 'porous' relation between, emotion, dignity, the beautiful and the mysterious, with the recognition of our foibles and everyday suffering at its core (Heller 1999, 2010). In her *A Theory of History* Agnes Heller recounts a story told by the Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis in which his Greek peasant great-grandfather plants olive trees for his great-grandchildren. This was no self-denial or search for control, but a pleasure (Heller 1982: 35, 2010). Heller's commentary can be used metaphorically to suggest the creation of new spaces and the persistence of older ones in which contemplation, stillness, and even transcendence beyond everyday

suffering may occur, although not necessarily in the way that Taylor means. They are, nonetheless, this-sided spaces for the possibility of mystery and wonder. These new spaces may be constituted, for example, not only in the contemplation of the garden or nature (including non-human animals) with which one does not need to interfere, but also in the listening and creation of music, the absorption in and creation of artwork or a piece of writing for which poetry need not be the paradigm, the listening to and the creation of love (Rundell 2010a, b).

However, these different spaces are not really spaces, as such. They are different relationships, anchored as much in the work of the singularity of the radical imaginary (Castoriadis), as in the quite distinct social and inter-subjective imaginaries that co-constitute them of love, friendship, dignity and beauty, where 'a purposiveness without purpose' that integrates all of our senses and sensibilities may reign. It is a relationship, an inter-subjectivity of non-interference, of the specificity of the subject on both sides, as well as the specificity of the 'gap' between them which cannot or should not be filled immediately. We can simply wonder at it.

This type of relationality also has its own temporal horizon, its own sense of time. It is slow time, not the fast, technically instituted time of progress and control. This slow time is also a time for the openness of the gifts of love, friendship, of involvements as well as self-suspensions that are given beyond ourselves the time for different kinds of imaginings, mysteries, that cannot or need not be solved, deliberated, or even reflected on. They may simply open and deepen relationships with both human and non-human subjects. The secular need not mean a world without wonder and wonderment for its own sake and without interference.

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Towards Post-Secular Enlightenment

12

Wayne Hudson

12.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the theme of postsecular Enlightenment. I argue that we need to revise the anti-spiritual bias of the European Enlightenment and to apply reason both to the reform of human affairs and to human spiritual performances. Reason is needed to eliminate superstition and the tendency to confuse spiritual realities with facts, but rational perspectives on human spiritual performances are needed to do justice to the beings that we are. My strategy in the chapter is to emphasise the organizational issues involved in rethinking the role of the sacral in governance, understood as the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their affairs, including multinational corporations, the mass media, non-governmental organisations and citizens' movements, as well as the governments of nation-states (UNDP 1977).

This issue has contemporary pertinence. Much of the Western literature on governance is shaped by Enlightenment conceptions of 'religion' and 'the secular' and assumes that in the long run religion will decline, or at least play less and less of a role in public affairs (de Vries 2006). Today, however, European conceptions of 'religion' and 'the secular' are contested (see Asad 2003; Jensen 1997),[1] and there is empirical evidence that religion is not declining in many parts of the world. It is also not absenting itself from public affairs (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Moreover,

[1] There are also studies arguing that religions are mythic constructions which bring diverse phenomena within a European preconception of spiritual activity (see, for example, Jensen 1997).

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fundamentalist religion, both Islamic and Christian, is a major problem, both internationally and within some nation states.[2]

In what follows I defend the contemporary relevance of Enlightenment against both reactionary religionists and those who turn Enlightenment into code for a personal ideological programme based on atheism, materialism and libertarian sexuality. In Sect. 12.2 of the chapter I argue that the Enlightenment's critique of religion is flawed and leads to a misguided exclusion of spirituality from serious concerns. In Sect. 12.3 I evaluate and reject postreligion as a possible response to the inadequacies of both secularism and religion on the grounds that it lacks essential organizational specificity. In Sect. 12.4 I offer an initial draft of a postsecular approach to contemporary governance, consistent with what I have called elsewhere constructive as opposed to perfectionist utopianism (Hudson 2003a: Chap. 2; Unger 1999). In Sect. 12.5 I discuss applications of this approach to civil society and religious reform. Offering a draft of this kind is different from providing a coherent and realizable model for actual arrangements in one contextually specific nation state. It is also a different exercise from attempting to provide political theoretical principles and then justifying them by elaborated argument. It is an invitation to think and imagine differently. Considering such a draft heightens our awareness of organizational alternatives even though the balance of prudential constraints may lead us to reject such arrangements.

12.2 The Enlightenment Critique of Religion

I begin by offering a re-evaluation of the European Enlightenment critique of religion, understood as an ideal type or stand-in for a plurality of different critiques with a number of common structural characteristics. As everyone knows, the European Enlightenment sought to apply reason to the management of all areas of human life. This legacy is still largely valid, despite the qualifications of postmodern and post-colonial discourses. Today, however, the Enlightenment cannot be understood in monistic terms as a world view or single set of ideas. Contemporary studies show that there were *many Enlightenments*, including Radical Enlightenment, Protestant Enlightenment and mystical Enlightenments (Israel 2001, 2006; Hunter 2001; Hudson 2009a, b).[3] Nor was the Enlightenment only an eruption of transparent rationality. On the contrary, some forms of Enlightenment were *significantly clandestine* and owed much to *forms of enclavement*. Moreover, not all Enlightenment thinkers were anti-religious, especially not in Germany, Austria, Scandinavia or Russia. Similarly, Enlightenment passes

[2] For re-evaluations of the Enlightenment, see Kunneman and de Vries (1993) and Boeve et al. (2006). For a reassertion of Enlightenment perspectives, see Bronner (2004).

[3] Here account needs to be taken of recent developments in Enlightenment studies which draw attention to multiple enlightenments. See Hunter (2001) and my two monographs on the English deists (Hudson 2009a, b), a major reinterpretation of deism and the English deists and a study of these writers' contributions to reform.

through structural phases and an account needs therefore to be taken of its current shrunken form. Finally, prospective engagement with the Enlightenment needs to understand Enlightenment not only contextually, but in 'historical sociological' terms which emphasise emergent practical learning, institutional arrays and practices. When this is done the issue becomes how to carry Enlightenment forward, while taking account of its errors and the distorting effects of historical conditions.

In ideal type terms the Enlightenment critique of religion attempted to explain religion as intellectual falsehood, the result of bad reasoning and wrong premises and in terms of the credulity, ignorance and superstition of human beings. It took it for granted that *there were religions*, and it assumed that at the core of religion were *beliefs about the true which were false*. Recent scholarship largely discredits the notion that the spiritual activities of human beings can be understood in terms of false beliefs (see Asad 1993; cf. Scott and Hirchkind 2006).[4] Indeed, it is not clear that such human activities can be understood in terms either of a separate class of beliefs or as involving irrational forms of behaviour or that any generic conception of religion is viable, even though a generic approach persists among cognitive science and evolutionary approaches to these subject matters (Atran 2002). Today we understand these activities more in terms of *practices and regimes for ethical formation*—as arrangements which may be valid ways of developing human spirituality and ethical concern, even if the beliefs associated with them are not to be interpreted as literal propositions.

On the other hand, the Enlightenment critique of religion was not purely negative, a point which is often missed. Even the most severe Enlightenment critiques of religion often drew attention to positive potentials of human spiritual performances. To give only summary accounts, Hobbes accepted that there could be tensions between what individuals needed to promote their existential well-being and what was needed to maintain a strong state. He took the personal and social functions of religion for granted and never implied that it should be eliminated. Likewise, several of the writers known as the English deists, Herbert of Cherbury and Thomas Morgan for example, accepted that some spiritual orientations might be 'natural' in the sense of products of the operation of the facilities or reason. Even Kant, whose relationship to religion was always complex and shaped in part by his Protestant scholastic background, recognised that some religious doctrines could be reinterpreted as regulative. Hegel was even more positive and, in a brilliant anticipation of later historical scholarship, insisted that the self-knowing and self-relating of spirit embodied in forms of political, social and legal organization impacted profoundly on human ethical substance. Marx, hardly an obvious friend to religion, raised the possibility that human beings could only access unrealised aspects of their own nature if they first pass through alienated forms of projective consciousness (Hudson 2005b). Many Enlightenment critics of religion had a more complex view of the terrain than is often assumed and

[4] Although a generic approach persists among cognitive science and evolutionary approaches. See, for example, Atran (2002).

were far from inclined to assume that it was only a negative phenomenon. In short, when the main thrust of the Enlightenment critique of religion and its minor positive features are taken together the need for a contemporary evaluation is evident, especially since it is widely assumed that the Enlightenment critique of religion is broadly correct.

The European Enlightenment was arguably right to attack superstition, and to promote rationality, personal autonomy, and social reform. It was mistaken, however, to view religion per se as intellectual falsehood, as the result of bad reasoning and wrong premises and credulity, as the product of ignorance and superstition of human beings—although some religious phenomena had features which could be explained in these terms. Instead, human spiritual performances need to be explained in terms of biological and socio-historical processes, both of which render some aspects of such performances irreducible. In so far as the Enlightenment did not in general recognise this, it arguably promoted mistaken social and cultural strategies in some domains. Further, the Enlightenment was wrong to reject *doctrines*, *symbolisation*, *ritual* and *traditions* as outmoded and of little value for future social and cultural developments. It was also abrupt in its attempts to implement a utopia of transparency. On the contrary, counterfactual projection, cultural indirection, spiritual practices, cultural traditions and symbolization, social rituals and traditions may all contribute to human flourishing in the longer term, even if they need to be transposed in certain respects in advanced technological societies. If, however, such human spiritual performances are needed for future social flourishing, then this may have implications for political and social organization.

Furthermore, in so far as the Enlightenment's misunderstanding of religion was connected with its tendency to adopt objectivistic conceptions of nature, approaches are called for which do not set up nature as an external reality or proceed as if the present form of the natural world was an unhistorical fate, in effect a substitute for the mythical God of philosophical theism. A more embodied and socio-cultural conception of nature sets human sacrality in a different light, by showing that it is connected with the body knowledges which sustain it (Clement and Kristeva 2001; cf. Tatman 2007). This, however, suggests that getting past the Enlightenment critique of religion allows a recovery of body-based sacral perspectives in both personal and social life. To this extent, 'theology', which many forms of the Enlightenment tended to banish from serious contexts, may return as a practical science of body performances with implications for how to promote human flourishing, especially among the young and the old, in a variety of real world contexts. At the very least it is possible to envisage arrangements which allow degrees of sacrality in this sense. Obviously stronger accounts of 'theology' can be proposed, including ecclesial accounts, and I do not flinch from arguing that Enlightenment requires 'theology' in an appropriate sense. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is sufficient to argue that the Enlightenment's own concept of rationality requires some modification of its principles.

12.3 Postreligion: A Failed Attempt to Move Beyond Religion

I now offer an account of postreligion as a possible response to the inadequacies both secularism and religion and explain why what may seem attractive is seriously flawed.

The term 'postreligion' is now widely used for various 'religion after religion' trends which advocate moving out of religious belief, but not out of religion as an comportment towards the impossible. Postreligion is 'after' religion in the sense that it does not involve belief in spiritual beings or personal powers behind the world, forms of belief-based social control (especially social control involving belief in spiritual beings or personal powers behind the world), or institutions which order common social life according to doctrinal principles which are interpreted in realist terms.

Such 'religion after religion' theories were common place in late nineteenth and early twentieth century European thought. They included the socialist religions of Moses Hess and Wilhelm Weitling, Hermann Cohen's attempt to rethink Judaism as a quasi-Kantian religion of reason (although Cohen retained a strong positive commitment to the Torah), Comte's evolutionary scheme according to which humanity passed from theology to metaphysics to scientific thought, and the related 'religion of humanity' which he founded, a religion promoted by various positivist churches around the world, especially in South America. Emile Durkheim also envisaged a form of secular religion which would inculcate social morality. These ideas were taken much further in Russia by 'Godbuilders' such as Maxim Gorky and Lunarcharski. More recent versions of the same move are equally without a coherent organizational analysis (Berry 2004).[5]

Postreligion responds to the widespread ethical demand to move beyond 'religion' and is consistent with long term social evolution from residual animism to an inchoate, still to be determined, future form of spiritual life. After all, relatively few Western people are now concerned to discover exactly what sacrifices they should make to the gods in order to obtain either this wordly or other-worldly rewards, and every year less of them turn to religious institutions for reliable information about their lives after death. There is also a decline in the anthropomorphic tendency to perceive the non-human world in terms of humanlike models in all advanced countries. Although these claims are still controversial, there clearly is a movement out of 'religion' if we accept Tylor's classic 1871 formulation:

> One characteristic shared by all religions, great or small, ancient or modern, is the belief in spirits who think, act and feel like human persons. The essence of religion is the belief that there are living, personal powers behind all things. (Tylor 1871: 429)

The same movement out of 'religion' is present even in Maurice Gauchet's twentieth century claim that the idea that the social order comes from a source outside

[5] Among a vast literature works by Derrida, Vattimo, Richard Rorty and John Caputo are important.

human agency and is given as immutable prior to human freedom and activity is declining (Gauchet 1997).[6]

Contemporary postreligion repeats well-known nineteenth century mistakes, while ignoring the considerable advances made in historical sociology and religious studies over the last 20 years which shift the emphasis away from European conceptions of religion as hinging on strange beliefs. Many versions of postreligion accept the Enlightenment critique of religion; that is, they assume that traditional religion is problematic because it hinges on false or discredited beliefs. Postreligion also fails to address the historical functions of particular traditions in detail, and so does not clarify the crucial question of whether the functions of belief-based 'religion', and not merely its tokens, can be replaced.

Nevertheless, the movement beyond religion implied by postreligion has some merit in so far as it may now be necessary to recognise that many forms of religion have unsatisfactory features and that there is now a need to appropriate historical religion at a higher scientific and technological level. This is a difficult issue in a globalising world in which Islam is reviving and religion plays a considerable and by no means always positive role. Neither wholesale credulity about the merits of religion or deep seated anti-religion amount to adequate responses. Rather the challenge is to grasp the many-sidedness of phenomena labelled 'religious' and to respond to these issues in non-ideological ways.

12.4 A Post-Secular Approach to Contemporary Governance

I now offer an initial draft of a postsecular approach to governance which transcends the partiality of the Enlightenment critique of religion and the organizational amnesia of postreligion (cf. Barbato and Kratochwil 2009). This approach falls within the broad horizon of postsecular Enlightenment, where this is taken to involve:

- A revision of the anti-spiritual bias of the European Enlightenment,
- The application of reason both to the reform of human affairs and to human spiritual performances, and
- A recovery of body-based sacral perspectives in both personal and social life.

The postsecular approach to governance drafted here addresses contemporary challenges, without retreating from the advances made by the Enlightenment. It pursues a middle path between secularism and religious revivalism by proposing mediations which manage the continuing presence of religious and sacral concerns, while recognising that important advances are made possible by modern social differentiations. In terms of method it seeks to promote debate and discussion in light of the complexities of the emerging global order and pragmatics relevant to the management of complex societies, and not political philosophical principles

[6] Theologians, of course, have long been sensitive to the possibility of conceptions of religion which emphasise anti-mundane experience without positing mythical entities. They have been less quick to grasp the issue of organizational evolution.

articulated in Europe and America in the eighteenth century. Moreover, in a break with the universalist thrust of current Western doctrine, it envisages different models for negotiating the management of spiritual and religious affairs in states of different types. In contrast to types of postreligion which often accept the modern notion that all opinion formation should be mediated by discursive rationality, a postsecular approach to governance calls into question partitional approaches to the distinction between the sacred and the secular, as Islamic and Asian societies have always done to some extent (Fingarette 1972).[7]

The conception of the postsecular I introduce here differs significantly from some of those found in the existing literature (e.g. de Vries et al. 2008; Ferrara 2009; Morozov 2008). The term 'postsecular' is often appropriated by Romantics who hope for a return of enchantment. It is also used loosely by religionists, especially in the United States, to imply that secularism is outmoded or has nothing more to contribute to human development, although philosophical approaches are more sophisticated (Blond 1998). The postsecularism envisaged here, in contrast, assumes that higher levels of rationality are needed. Further, 'postsecular' on my account is not identical with nonsecular (see Connolly 1999). 'Postsecular' here implies that the advances in practical learning and organization associated with secularity in the West can be extended, while making allowance both for the nonmundane features of the reality that human beings experience and for the wealth of human spiritual traditions.

Nor in my usage is the term restricted to societies that *have first been secular*. Rather the descriptor designates the type of policy approach, not the situation before its introduction. Hence on this usage nonsecular Islamic societies could adopt postsecular arrangements without passing through the agnosticism and nihilism of Western secularism. Likewise, the postsecular, on the view advanced here, should not be reduced to Habermas' limited and residually secularist conception of it (Habermas 2008; see also Harrington 2007; Lafont 2007; Losonczi and Singh 2010). Nor should the term 'postsecular' be restricted to feminist accounts of the postsecular (Fraser 1992; Fraser and Honneth 2003; cf. Braidotti 2008) or to claims about social changes in Western or global society (Keenan 2002; McLennan 2007, 2010a, b)[8] or to affirmativist accounts for which the postsecular is automatically good. Finally, my use of 'postsecular' does not imply any historicist conception of history as falling into secular and postsecular ages (Taylor 2007), nor has it anything to do with speculations that religion is returning or that secularism has come to an end.[9]

[7] Apart from a vast empirical literature, see the useful discussion in H. Fingarette, *Confucius The Secular as Sacred* (1972).

[8] Sociologial studies of the postsecular are emerging. McLennan argues that the recent postsecular turn in social and cultural theory is mostly intra-secular. For postsecularism and international relations see Barbato and Kratochwil (2009).

[9] For a very different approach, see I. Stenhouse, and B Knowles eds. *Christianity in the Post-Secular West* (2007).

For related reasons my conception of the postsecular is not intrinsically tied to the Western European philosophical conception of 'modernity', which sometimes obscure the analysis and response to real world political and social problems. While 'modernity' as a normative category has its uses in a range of contexts, it can also be seen as tainted by Western imperialism and as tending to obfuscate clear analysis of unjust distributions of wealth and power. The postsecular as understood here does not accept that secularism is what 'modernity' requires because the dependencies alleged need to be shown between actual structures and methodological controls and cannot be based on quotations from historical figures or contemporary theorists (Huff 2010). It implies *a move beyond secularism*, understood minimally as the exclusion of religion from politics, and, maximally, as a hegemonic cultural practice which assumes that religions are irrational, matters of personal choice relevant only in the private sphere, and manifestations of a prescientific mentality, which it is appropriate to restrain and repress as soon as they threaten to become involved in the concerns of political, cultural, social and economic life. The postsecular approach proposed here explores the relevance of human spiritual performances to both private and public life, and envisages explicit reference to them as a feature of organizational forms in some domains. It is not based on a specific view of religion or a particular conception of the political, although I do not discount the importance of thick conceptions of the political, including Augustinian conceptions of politics and citizenship.

With these clarifications, I now set out some of the distinguishing features of a postsecular approach to governance of the type I defend. In contrast to French and Critical Islamic attacks on the Enlightenment (see Kunneman and de Vries 1993, esp. Chap. 12), this approach requires *more* Enlightenment, and not a retreat from Enlightenment. As more Enlightenment, it does not take Enlightenment imaginaries for granted. Rather it seeks to be informed by research which problematise these imaginaries. Nor does this framework take the normativity of human religious organizations and their forms of self-interpretation at face value, as some American religionist versions of postsecularism tend to do.[10] Instead, it puts Western political, social, and legal theory into discussion and proposes organizational alternatives in a spirit of democratic experimentalism and rational inquiry.

The postsecular approach to governance advocated here accepts the advances in practical learning and organization associated with secularity in the West, retaining the advances in practical learning associated with the Enlightenment while making corrections to its anti-spiritual bias. To do so, it rethinks the nature of the secular and secularization. A postsecular approach problematises the secularist construction of religion as irrational, premodern opinion and does not accept that spiritual performances intrinsically depend on irrational beliefs which must be confined to private life. It also contests partite distinctions between the sacred and the secular as well as the modern assumption that secular organizational designs are superior to designs with spiritual ecological features. Secularization, however, means many different

[10] Critics might argue that Dostert's rich discussion, *Beyond Political Liberalism: Toward a Postsecular Ethics of Public Life* (2006), tends in this direction at times.

things—from the decline or rationalization of religious belief to the separation of the legal foundations of the state from religion to the separation of science and knowledge from faith, to a general erosion of the sacral or at least the difference between the sacred and profane.

A postsecular approach to governance accepts the value of *secularity* as a form of functional differentiation in advanced techno-scientific societies, while maintaining that in some domains resort to the nonmundane is desirable as a way of enhancing human flourishing (cf. Ferrara 2009). It does not resile from a full acceptance of secularity, where in a particular context a case can be made for bracketing religious identities for certain purposes. Moreover, it is compatible with advocating further secularity in some domains, such as restrictions on the right of religious communities to use schools to indoctrinate children in unscientific beliefs. What is problematised is *secularism* in the sense of the assumption that human reality is mundane and that spiritually based performances should be excluded from all serious and non-private contexts. There is no reason to treat secularism as sacrosanct or as an unproblematic achievement of the Protestant West. Rather secularism may be a misguided way of arranging human affairs, one that seeks to impose closed world views on citizens while limiting the application of rationality to sacral matters by classifying them as 'private' or 'matters of faith'. In contrast the approach defended here maintains that reason should be applied to the formation of human beings, including spirituality performances. This, in turn, has implications for alternative approaches to education and for an economics based on love and gift, and not only self-interest (see Sen 2009).

A postsecular approach to governance may help to address some of the *lacunae* of liberalism; it does not depend on a particular political philosophy but on the contextual purchase of particular organizational forms (Dostert 2006).[11] In so far as a political philosophy based on the freedom of the individual to select his or her own goals fails to address fundamental social architectural concerns there is merit in evaluating alternative architectures in the light of historical outcomes rather than political philosophical principles. A more empirically-minded global approach tends to question the liberal public-private distinction and any normative separation of civil society from the state. It also challenges the myth of religious voluntarism in societies where it is counterfactual, and insists that spiritual actions should be regarded as social in key respects. So far from accepting a religion-free public square and an unrestricted utopia of social transparency, a postsecular approach to governance explores cases in which *enclavement* or the recognition of partially occluded social and cultural spaces can promote cultural development and social responsibility. It does not assume that all opinion formation should be mediated by discursive rationality. Instead, it recognises that not all domains can be reduced to discursive rationality and allows for value pluralism based on irreducible choices.

[11] Dostert (2006) advances a version of postsecularism which qualifies liberalism. However, in my view he does not allow sufficiently for the need for religions to pass through Enlightenment in terms of practical learning.

Nor does it posit a neutral secular state. Instead, it insists that value choice is integral to political and social arrangements and that more mediation of differences may be appropriate than notions of a neutral state permit. Instead of pretending that value conflicts can be avoided or easily overcome, it claims that arrangements need to be explored which accept differences and integrate them where possible in plastic organizational architectures. In this way it addresses the problem of moral diversity raised by John Rawls and theorized earlier in value incompatibilist terms by Isaiah Berlin (Crowder 2004) by moving from a secular republicanism to a political architecture more open to both communitarian, minority and indigenous concerns.

In the same way, a postsecular approach to governance relates the problem of normativity to human and environmental flourishing. It rejects the modern attempt to flee from nature to rationality or language or culture. Instead, it seeks to relate contemporary naturalism to political, economic and social design. Specifically, it investigates the merits and demerits of a *differential naturalism* which accepts a plurality of ontological models for different purposes as a perspective on organizational arrangements relating human beings to the natural world. On this view naturalism does not imply that outside nature there is nothing or that reality is a single spatio-temporal system governed by necessary and universal laws. The implication is that several thetics which conform to public rationality may be adopted towards nature and that heterogeneous social designs may reflect appropriate rather than a single totalised naturalism.

Finally, a postsecular approach to governance requires a revised understanding of publicity. Many political philosophers, influenced by Kant, suggest that the problem of reconciling authority and difference was solved in Europe in the eighteenth century by the emergence of specific notions of the public and publicity. A postsecular approach to governance, however, need not understand 'publicity' in the terms which emerged in Western Europe in the eighteenth century. Nor need it accept that 'the public' can be equated with civil society or an alleged public sphere. Today what properly belongs to the public realm is disputed, and activities that were once assigned to the private realm, especially reproductive behaviour, have become issues in the public domain. Certainly 'the public' can no longer be simply the public sphere that emerged in eighteenth century Europe.[12] Contemporary understandings of 'the public' do not preserve the wider utopian indications associated with the *res publica*. Nor does the emergence of the eighteenth century public sphere theorised by Habermas provide an adequate model for contemporary rationality, not only because of the problematic nature of attempts to construe public and private as separate domains (with obvious ramifications for the regulation of women and sexuality), but because the economic opportunities and the information available to citizens are now sometimes not under the control of national governments. To this extent, there is a need to reconceive the institution of 'the public', while at the same time recognising that 'the public' in the future may not be exclusively tied to the nation-state. Henceforth the public realm may need to be rethematised in terms of

[12] See Habermas (1989) and Calhoun (1992). It should be noted that English language discussions are partly shaped by mistranslations, especially of the crucial term *Öffentlichkeit*.

mutual recognition and civility and as a realm of global public consciousness in which others are regarded as consociate persons, and not taken to be merely a space in which free critical discussion is possible, let alone a Rawlsian public square based on overlapping understandings in which only public reasons should be given for positions advanced. Such a shift involves much more than talk of 'globalisation' and references to the Internet, mobile phones, iPod, iPad, and Twitter. It requires models of alternative institutions, organisational forms embedding cultures which integrate the emancipatory aspects of Enlightenment publicity, but not the bigotry associated with them, a position which even Habermas is now increasingly willing to accept (Habermas 2008).

Interpreting the postsecular in this way puts the emphasis firmly on the organizational and the contextual, and not on political philosophical principles or structures of belief. To this extent it has the potential to manage the conflicting interests that arise in concrete cases in more flexible and responsive ways. Consistent with this claim in the remainder of this chapter I briefly consider possible applications of a postsecular approach to governance to *civil society* and *religious reform* within the broad context of postsecular Enlightenment.

12.5 Applications

12.5.1 Civil Society

In so far as a postsecular approach to governance takes account of the limitations of the Enlightenment critique of religion and the fact that cultural symbolization, counterfactual projection, ritual and traditions are needed for future social flourishing, it can propose revisions to eighteenth century Enlightenment conceptions of civil society, especially in the context of non-Western societies. Civil society is not a single unified domain or driven by a single social logic. Rather it is often the by-product of governmental or inter-governmental action or inaction. It is not always separate from the state. Households, media, markets, churches, voluntary associations and social movements are already partially state-controlled in the most successful democracies, and by direct as well as indirect means. In reality most accounts of civil society are idealised and European models which cannot always be applied to Asian civil societies (see Schak and Hudson 2003: Chaps. 1 and 3), especially societies with no clear division between religion and politics. Some aspects of life in civil society will show sacral features even in societies in which confessional religion has become weak, as the cases of Sweden and the Netherlands suggest. Moreover, it is now widely conceded that attempts to separate religion and politics are hopeless in many Asian societies and that something more subtle and negotiable is needed to make secularity work in countries like India and Indonesia (see Bhargava 1998).

The notion of postsecular civil society implies that existing civil societies, whether secular, confessional or mixed, can be refigured to allow the sacral to have a greater role, both in the sense that religious institutions impact on how civil

society operates, and in the more controversial sense that sacral considerations may be relevant to decisions about governance and social form in a range of areas. This is not an attempt to bring back confessional religion, which any way in the Islamic world has not withdrawn in many countries. But it is an attempt to distinguish secularity from the repression of sacrality. Likewise, postsecular civil society on my account is paradoxically consistent with the view that the state should regulate manifestations of religion and impose public values, where need be, on forms of religious education and practice, provided it does so in ways that are constitutional, permitted by law, and consistent with human rights, including the right to practise one's religion.

Consistent with this pluralistic contextualism, in some countries a postsecular civil society may be compatible with the existence of religious parties, while in other countries constitutional doctrine might count heavily against them. Likewise, group rights may have a role in societies with major minorities or oppressed indigenous populations. All such arrangements, however, will be informed by Enlightenment values and will not be reversions to traditional life forms. At a global level, however, in the longer term it may not be enough to envisage a more sacral form of civil society within a nation state because the sacral is becoming caught up with globalisation (Casanova 1994). To this extent, it may be necessary to take account not only of confessional organisations of many kinds, but of the emergence of a form of civil religion which does not depend on world views or beliefs and has no authoritative metaphysics or cosmology (cf. Storrar 2011).

12.5.2 Religious Reform

A postsecular approach to governance also explores proposals for religious reform, some of which may contribute to multifaith dialogue and the management of fundamentalism (see Hudson 2005a). The importance of religious reform has been relatively neglected in Western explorations of political reform, partly because of an expectation that religion will eventually disappear. Both the spread of fundamentalisms and a spirituality vogue in first world countries suggest that religion may remain more important in political and commercial contexts than has been assumed. The persistence of religion, however, needs postsecular rather than merely secular responses. Religious organisations, for example, can be required by law to meet international as well as national governance standards in the management of their assets and staff. They can also be encouraged to practise multifaith toleration and cooperation in their activities and can be made to acknowledge that recognition of the freedom of others is a condition for their own exercise of freedom. Religious institutions can also be required to adopt democratic processes, to conform to natural justice in their bureaucratic dealings, and to provide transparent information and accounting so that their wealth and power become matters of public record, internationally as well as nationally.

A postsecular approach to governance also envisages positive extensions of religious human rights, specifically designs for religious citizenship (see Hudson

2003b). Religious citizenship is a neglected topic in Western political thought. It can be defined in several different ways. Firstly, there is a nation state definition, according to which religious citizenship is the citizenship that the nation state allows a citizen to exercise in religious matters, e.g. under your nation state's constitution. This account is obviously too narrow and without critical edge in decisive cases such as atheist Albania or Afghanistan under the Taliban. Secondly, there is a civil society-based definition according to which religious citizenship is the citizenship which citizens exercise as religious persons in the civic sphere. Civil society models of citizenships make it possible to show that nation-state citizens develop and exercise different religious citizenships in different domains, where some citizenships are not under the direct control of the nation state. This opens up useful terrain, but it remains difficult to determine how many civil societies exist in one nation state and where either domestic or global civil society begins or ends. Thirdly, there is an approach that theorises religious citizenship in terms of the rights of persons. On this account religious citizenship can be characterised as one of the citizenships persons may exercise in a specific community, within a nation state, nationally, internationally, or globally because they are persons with dignities and capacities. It involves rights which individuals allegedly have and obligations which they accordingly acquire—to other persons, to their neighbours, to other groups, to other citizens of their nation state, to humanity in general.

Fourthly, there is an approach that starts from positive legal documents, for example, the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 25 November 1981*, or by reference to specific legislation and case law at a national, international or religion-specific levels. Fifthly, there is also a reflexive account of religious citizenship according to which persons can acquire such citizenship by adopting specific discursive positions. This account captures cases in which a subjective disposition may be crucial. None of these approaches is satisfactory by itself but an account which combines them may provide a basis for debating what religious citizenship should look like. In the long run the recognition of human spiritual performance and the rights associated with them is likely to prevail over attempts to pretend that human beings can flourish without a degree of sacrality and rational forms of governance are likely to take some account of this.

12.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the theme of postsecular Enlightenment, a theme which needs further articulation elsewhere. It has done so by arguing that we need to reverse the anti-spiritual bias of the European Enlightenment and to apply reason to both the reform of human affairs and to human spiritual performances. Specifically, I have argued in Sect. 12.2 that the Enlightenment's critique of religion is flawed and leads to a misguided exclusion of spirituality from serious concerns. In Sect. 12.3, I have evaluated and rejected postreligion as a possible response to the inadequacies of both secularism and religion on the grounds that it lacks the relevant

organizational specificity. In Sect. 12.4, I have offered an initial draft of a postsecular approach to contemporary governance. In Sect. 12.5, I have applied this approach to the issues of civil society and religious reform. Entertaining a version of a postsecular approach to governance in indicative terms does not involve taking a strong view of the forms that religion may take in the future. At most it involves recognising the need for *moderations*, including a greater awareness that changes away from belief-based social reforms may be tendential in advanced techno-scientific civilisations, but that social differentiation may be able to be achieved in postsecular as well as secular forms. Whether secularisation is inevitable or turns out to be a transient Western cultural figuration remains to be seen. However, if religion survives and is more public, then postsecular approaches to governance will need to be discussed. Even if religion becomes less central in the longer term, greater account may need to be taken of human spiritual performances in both social organizational and personal ecological contexts. To this extent, postsecular Enlightenment, especially if it is compatible with a commitment to rationality and the progress of the sciences, is likely to emerge as an horizon for contemporary debates.

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