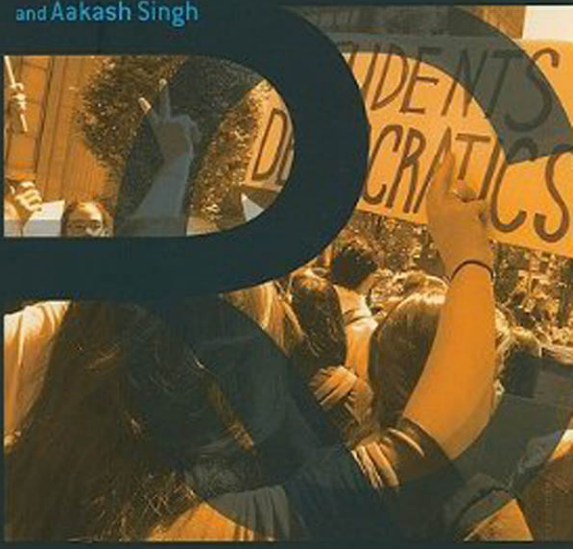
CONTINUUM RESOURCES IN RELIGION AND POLITICAL CULTURE

# From Political Theory to Political Theology

## RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES AND THE PROSPECTS OF DEMOCRACY

Edited by Péter Losonczi
and Aakash Singh



# From Political Theory to Political Theology

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# Contents

Acknowledgements vii
Contributors ix
Foreword by Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl xiii
Editors' Introduction xv

**POLITICAL THEORY**

**Part One: Liberal Accommodations to the Religious Challenge**

1 Religion and Liberalism: Public Reason, Public Sphere and Cultural Pluralism 5
*Sebastiano Maffettone*

2 Accommodating Pluralism through Public Justification: Moral vs. Practical Considerations 22
*Eszter Kollár*

3 Public Reason and Models of Judgement 31
*Daniele Santoro*

4 Hannah Arendt and the Problem of Public Religion 47
*Gábor Gángó*

**Part Two: Challenging the Liberal Secular Paradigm from Within**

5 Cultural Identity, Religion, Moral Pluralism and the Law 61
*Herman De Dijn*

6 Can Freedom of Religion Replace the Virtue of Tolerance? 73
*Peter Jonkers*

7 Democracy and Moral Relativism in a Post-secular World: Reclaiming Obligation 85
*András Lánczi*

FROM POLITICAL THEORY TO POLITICAL THEOLOGY

**Part Three: Radicalizing the Challenges: Recuperating Religion**

8 Religion, Democracy and the Empty Shrine of Pluralism – Some Reminders 101
*Walter Van Herck*

9 Religion after Auschwitz: Jonas, Metz, and the Place of Religion in our World Today 111
*Balázs M. Mezei*

10 Politics without Dénouement, Faith without Guarantee: A Critical Appraisal of the Politics of Religion of the Left and the Right 122
*Theo de Wit*

**Part Four: Political Theology *as* Political Theory – Prospects**

11 Reinhold Niebuhr and the Crisis of Liberalism: Augustinian Realism and Democratic Politics in the Post-Enlightenment 139
*Alexander Rosenthal*

12 Genuine or Elitist Democracy? Christianity and Democracy in the Thought of István Bibó and Dietrich Bonhoeffer 152
*András Csepregi*

13 The New Political Theology as Political Theory: Johann Baptist Metz on Public Suffering 162
*Péter Losonczi*

Notes 175

Bibliography 183

Index 197

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# Foreword

The idea of this series, *Continuum Studies in Religion and Political Culture*, emerged from an international research project on the *New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture* funded by the British Academy. In a series of workshops and conferences, a consortium of European scholars from various disciplines discussed the new awareness of religion and its visual, discursive and media manifestations. Very soon it became obvious that the new visibility of religious phenomena is, on the one hand, not necessarily a proof of any actual increase of religious faith today, and, on the other, not something that can be discussed without taking into account the political culture in which this new visibility can be observed. From these explorations into the nature and shape of religion as it is visible today, it became evident that neither 'religion' nor 'political culture' are discrete concepts, or, to borrow a phrase from Wittgenstein, it became evident that both concepts are without 'sharp boundaries'. Nevertheless they retain strict and distinct meanings. We have an understanding of what religion means and we do understand what political culture means, even if we cannot give a clear definition of these concepts. Nor is it possible to say exactly how they interact, overlap or are in competition with each other. Dichotomies like the spiritual–secular, private–public, transcendent–immanent or the categorial division between *auctoritas* and *potestas* no longer pertain. Today, they have lost their explanatory power. In fact, from their origins religion has infused political cultures while political cultures have shaped religions. Modernity may have wished to have established a separation; a distillation of religion from political life. But, since at least the late 1980s, this separation has been eroded as the visibility of religion has become more pronounced.

The series *Continuum Studies in Religion and Political Culture* seeks to exemplify and clarify the complex relationship that has arisen by concentrating on a topical and analytical approach rather than a merely territorial and descriptive one. What are the pressing problems in the field of religion and

political culture today? What is the appropriate conceptual framework to make these practical problems accessible to academic discourse? These are the questions we seek to answer and we are delighted that, with the present volume, political theology (a concept gaining increased critical attention) is interrogated by an excellent cohort of scholars in the field of political theory and theology. As indicated by the title of the book, the suggested development from political theory broadly understood in terms of secular liberalism to (Protestant and Catholic) theology touches on a recent issue that will not go uncontested. After the long history of the separation of religion from politics, do we have to rethink their relationship? And does theology really have the last word in this debate? To court controversy is a dangerous academic exercise, but to do so with scholarly acumen (as this volume shows) invites the possibility of new insights and potential changes in the historical landscape within which these two phenomena coexist.

Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward
University of Manchester

Editors' Introduction:

# Reasons, Beliefs, and Paradoxes: Religion and Democracy

Since the 1980s and early 1990s when sociologists began publishing their crucial work on the issues of 'public religion' (Casanova 1994, 2006, 2007) and the 'desecularization' of the political arena (Weigel and Berger 1999), it has become increasingly apparent that the post-Enlightenment secular paradigm which dominated the discourse of the social sciences during the twentieth century has met with fundamental challenges. The complex movements that accompanied the evolution of globalization have also demonstrated that it is indispensable to understand and analyse how religion plays a role within the social and the political reality of contemporary societies. The 'clash of civilizations' thesis of Samuel Huntington (1998) provoked intensive debates and positioned religion as the central factor of the modern and postmodern political context. In effect, consequent upon these developments, what in Habermas scholarship is referred to as a 'post-secular turn' seems to be occurring within the social and political sciences, as well as in the study of international relations.

Furthermore, these developments shed new light on the works of philosophers who had dealt with religious issues during the second part of the last century, and – in contrast with the secular and atheistic tendencies of modern philosophy – has rendered the question of religion a crucial topic for philosophy. Negligence of the problems concerning religion, including taking for granted the universal applicability of the secular paradigm in the social sciences and political theory, had in earlier decades led to researchers who were concerned with 'the religious' and its influence on the political being placed in an embarrassing position – well summarized through the imagery evoked in Rorty's expression 'conversation stopper' (1994). Finally, however, the more or less marginalized or isolated debates of theologians and other experts on the question of inter-religious dialogue and other theological issues – such as political theology – are gaining an ever-widening general interest.

The landscape is extremely varied. Some celebrate the return of religion from its 'Westphalian exile' in international relations (Hatzopoulos and

Petito 2003) while others argue for the thesis of an uneven, though persistent, secularizing process (Norris and Inglehart 2004a). Habermas' 'post-secular turn' (2008) generated an especially intensive reaction by a community of post-Enlightenment scholars who almost seemed to be betrayed by their leader. Charles Taylor (2007), for his part, speaks of the possibility of (re)conversion within a critically self-reflective modernity. Hans-Joachim Höhn (2007) elaborates a theory of religious dispersion in modern culture and speaks about the ambivalence of secularization. The Indian sociologist T. N. Madan (1997, 2006) denies that secularism ever could have been the only alternative for building societies in the contemporary global context and defends the idea of a 'participatory pluralism' (Madan 2006, 133). Another well-known Indian theorist, Ashis Nandy (2003), vividly and categorically expressed his scepticism about the secular and the modern agendas, having written his anti-secular manifesto much earlier than Western scholarship would begin to embrace the idea of a 'new religious pluralism' or 'radical pluralism'. Tariq Ramadan (2004) seeks the principles and ways of the formation of 'a European and American Islamic culture' (Ramadan 2004, 216), while others, alternatively, attempt to represent Islam as the 'other' of modern Western secular culture, the uniqueness and dignity of which would consist in its 'a-secular' character (Majid 2004). In the United States, both in scholarship and in democratic political life, the 'religious factor' continues to retain its vital role. Europe seems to be the 'only exception', if it is at bottom an exception at all. According to Lieven Boeve (2007, 26), even in the European context we can detect that 'a dynamic multi-religious society, full of complexity and ambiguity, has taken over'. Even in China there are serious attempts to regenerate specific religio-cultural roots and (re)present them as being in harmony with communism in its specific Chinese version (Yuet Chau 2008). But many countries of the post-communist scenario, Russia included, also turn to religion as a new factor of political and social cohesion, generating a new wave of what Mark Juergensmeyer (1993) calls 'religious nationalism'.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that this religious resurgence continues to take on a *violent* form expressed in contemporary communalism, fundamentalism and terrorism. The shocking scenes of New York, Madrid, London or Mumbai receive enormous attention and easily become the negative symbols of the new post-secular political scenario. The acts of Desmond Tutu and the capacity for religion to help fuel the reconciliation process in South Africa, for instance, easily remain in the shadow when the gaze of the global audience is captivated by violence, death and destruction. Thus we heed the oft-expressed concern that the political inclusion of religious driving forces, '[t]he impulse to pursue the Ultimate Good, particularly in an authoritative

institutional context and with the support of others sharing the same religious outlook, can lead to a tendency, conscious or unconscious, to dominate others' (Audi 2000, 3–4). It is not a hard endeavour to create radically pro-secular arguments in the light of all these considerations; let us not forget, then, as Miroslav Volf points out, that '[m]ost violence perpetuated in the twentieth century – the most violent century in humanity's history – was done in the name of secularism' (Volf 2007, 278). It is also important to note that many matters that belong to the post-secular discourse – e.g., 'embryo-politics' – are not treated according to the fault lines of the secular–religious division; as Banchoff evinces, these considerations suggest 'the emergence of a more fluid and plural political landscape that defies any simple religious–secular opposition' (Banchoff 2007, 302). It is really paradoxical that – as Herman De Dijn writes in his contribution to this volume – 'religion, which is a major source of … tragedies [in human history, even if not the only one] is at the same time one of the few ways to cope with them'.[1]

We can, then, quite clearly see that the *political* influence and adaptation of traditional and new forms of religious consciousness is a widespread phenomenon. However, this general religious impact on the political is to be differentiated from the question of how the insights derivable from different religious outlooks can be – or, alternatively, why they perhaps cannot be – introduced into the public life of *democracies*. If we understand democracy as 'a system of conflict regulation that allows open competition over the values and goals that citizens want to advance' (Stepan 2005, 5), the question is how the different religious traditions and communities can adapt themselves to such conditions, how they can contribute to the operation of such systems, and conversely, how this environment can receive the contribution of these communities. It is also a question how the limits and forms of this traffic should be defined in order to produce the best possible conditions for such a multiform cooperation. In short, it is essential to reflect both on the challenges and the prospects that the now globally resurgent religious influence carries for democratic politics.

Our volume tries to present a large panorama of the questions belonging to the specific problems that may arise in connection with the political adaptation of religious contributions in a democratic society. This topic in itself is an extremely difficult issue with several ways of approaching it and numerous possible questions to discuss. We decided to attempt to convey the thematic richness and complexity of the essays we have included by structuring the book in a dialectical manner. It is evident, however, that the structure we have imposed is not necessarily exclusive and that the problems and methods themselves are and even must be overlapping.

We begin solidly in the domain of *political theory*, specifically liberal political theory, with an essay by Sebastiano Maffettone that beautifully typifies the nature and scope of liberalist accommodations of religion (Chapter 1). Maffettone begins by drawing a distinction between classical liberalism, which he characterizes as suspicious of religion, and contemporary – primarily Rawlsian – liberalism, which he presents as deeply accommodative to religion. According to Maffettone, religion is not singled out as peculiarly dangerous to democracy; on the contrary, religious worldviews, just like any other worldviews – including utilitarianism or other secular philosophies – constitute 'comprehensive doctrines' that by their nature have a tendency to stake exclusive claims to truth, any of which may thereby be potentially destabilizing to democracies committed to pluralism. The political is not about what is true, but what is right and just. Consequently, reasoning about political essentials should be consensus-based and doctrine-free, and religious notions – or Kantian or Buddhist or utilitarian ones – should not govern considerations whose rightful place falls within public reason.

There are numerous objections levelled against Rawlsian liberalism, and Maffettone rehearses, analyses and attempts to answer them in the Rawlsian spirit. He also pays a great deal of attention to Jürgen Habermas' critique of Rawlsian public reason and lays out the Habermasian alternative, the public sphere, with great clarity and penetration.

Eszter Kollár picks up on a single thematic current of the Rawlsian position canvassed by Maffettone, and penetrates deeply into this topic in Chapter 2. Her chapter focuses exclusively on a paradox which Rawlsian political liberalism seems to incorporate. On the one hand, it requires citizens to subscribe to the shared point of view (i.e. conception of justice) and refrain from using religious or other doctrinal reasons in the political arena, given that those reasons are not available to others. On the other hand, it requires citizens to affirm the principles of justice from within their own moral point of view, and find religious or comprehensive liberal reasons for endorsing the conception of justice itself. Kollár's intention is to achieve greater clarity on this apparent paradox; her aim is to respond to those critics who interpret Rawls' move towards a public political foundation as a practical project and as giving up on the relevant normative question. But she goes further: challenging those conclusions, Kollár tries to show that for political liberalism to be a consistent theoretical project and a practicable political enterprise, its justificatory premises must be endorsed by liberal and by religious members of the public on moral grounds – moral grounds that are to be found within their own comprehensive doctrines. While political justification as a normative requirement weakens the historical possibility of an overlapping consensus,

it is a requirement that a consistent theory and its practical possibility cannot do without.

The essay by Daniele Santoro (Chapter 3), like the preceding one, penetrates deeply into a core set of ideas at the heart of the logic of Rawls' thought. Rawls attempted to establish a stable *overlapping consensus* between reasonable doctrines over a basic freestanding conception of justice. Santoro shows that, far from being stable, Rawls' proposal is unfeasible under a strict liberal account, since it implies a stark dualism between the demands of impartial reasonableness and the comprehensive identities of citizens. The essay explores the epistemological presuppositions of the Rawlsian framework and shows how such dualism is embedded in a conception of judgement based on principles, a model that Rawls borrows from Kant's practical philosophy. According to Santoro, Rawls conceives of principles as formal constraints on the will and the content of judgements, i.e. as constraints on the universalizability of the will and on the justifiability on matters of basic justice. This way, the dualism is internalized within the point of view of the agents, but at the cost of revealing an idiosyncratic nature of the subjects when *hard cases* of disagreement are at stake.

Although the strict liberal solution to the problem of disagreement turns out to be unfeasible, the Ralwsian paradigm leaves room for a different line of thought closer to a republican ideal of citizenship. Santoro shows how civic virtues can account for a faculty of deliberation based on salient features of the practice, rather than on principles. The epistemological roots of this idea can be traced back to the Kantian idea of 'reflective judgement' rather than to his practical philosophy. Santoro concludes by arguing that a practice-based conception of judgement allows opponents in the domain of public reason to be sensitive not primarily to the formal fairness of ultimate principles, but to the level of generality at which principles can be adjusted and conflict reconciled.

Rawlsian political theory has been well (re)presented. Although it is not uncontroversial to characterize Hannah Arendt's thought as liberal political theory, it is also arguably not at all unfair to do so. We sought to add richness to the variety of liberal approaches of accommodating religion, which in the first three chapters featured primarily the work of Rawls and Habermas, through including a paper on Arendt's approach to public religion – paradoxically however, as Gábor Gángó reveals brilliantly and comprehensively in Chapter 4, since publicness and religion are incompatible, there is no account of public religion in Arendt's work. Consequently, Gángó treats of the non-existent crossing point of Hannah Arendt's critique of religion and theory of public, a crossing point where Arendt's concept of public religion *might have*

*been* situated. Clarifying the multiple philosophical formations of Arendt's refutation of the idea of public religion, Gángó argues that an underlying factor in this negative attitude is Arendt's anthropological position, which is accompanied by a specific existential analysis and its role in the understanding of sociality. Furthermore, according to Arendt, Christian otherworldliness results in human alienation from the world and in this way its political involvement carries essential dangers. At the same time, as Gángó explains, Arendt's concept of religion is a 'thick' conception and she does not take into account the possibility of a 'thin' notion of religion. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, Gángó attempts to show that Arendt remains an important point of reference in the contemporary debates on democracy and religion.

Part Two continues the discourse of political theory. The authors included in this part may be characterized as 'conservatives', but the term would have to be immediately qualified in so many ways that one would be left wondering whether there was any reason to have employed it in the first place. It seems more fruitful, then, to see these chapters as united by their lack of sympathy for the secularist – and indeed relativist – tendencies of liberalist thought.

In Chapter 5, *Herman De Dijn* – whose essay we already quoted with regard to the paradoxical role of religion *vis-à-vis* politics – gives a combined analysis of a complex of problems at the intersection of philosophical anthropology and political philosophy, stresses the importance of *recognition*, and explains the contemporary difficulties faced when trying to actualize this principle. Developing upon this inquiry, he proceeds towards a dilemma in the relationship between law and morality and the possible sources of the determination of this relationship. In this context he turns specifically to the problem of religion and argues that '[t]here is no reason why all sorts of groups with the exception of religious ones should be allowed to voice opinions and try to influence political decision-making'.[2] He argues that even 'secular' political action is conjoined with symbolic functions and that a kind of conservative political attitude with a complementary civil religion could offer an essential and valuable contribution to the political community.

Opening up and readdressing another line of inquiry that runs through liberal (and, if you will, conservative) political theory, in Chapter 6 Peter Jonkers queries whether the virtue of tolerance can be substituted by a totalized concept of freedom of religion. For Jonkers, the latter entails a sense of neutrality and passive openness, a stance which automatically implies that we must stop affirming anything as *intolerable*. According to Jonkers, this sort of neutrality is impossible; and paradoxically, attempts at its implementation have resulted rather in the evaporation of tolerance. Jonkers shows that since, in fact, we are always involved in a certain position and are unable to remain

there with regard to our convictions – so the intolerable always remains with us. Consequently, there will always be disturbing, strange – that is, intolerable – persons, communities, opinions and phenomena in our closer or wider environment. Being incapable of tolerating something is an elemental anthropological feature that cannot be done away with. Jonkers shows that '[t]olerance is not only the virtue of enduring what is intolerable for me, but also the virtue to refrain from inflicting spiritual or cultural harm on other people, [an] asceticism of conviction and power [that] is not only meant to protect the slanderers from the (violent) reactions of others, but also requires from the slanderers the virtue of not deliberately harming other people'.[3] From these considerations Jonkers concludes that the sustenance of the idea 'intolerable' is necessary even at the juridical level since – paradoxically – the intolerable is not merely a threat to tolerance but is also a way of safeguarding it.

Unlike all the aforementioned chapters, the essay by András Lánczi (Chapter 7) lays out a stark critique of the Enlightenment tradition and its political heritage. In his view, inspired by the political thought of Leo Strauss, the liberal tradition has adopted such an institutionalized relativism that it jeopardizes the functioning of the democratic regimes themselves. The source of what he calls the 'unsolved antinomies' of the Enlightenment is the split of reason that has resulted in a relativism that, drawing on Bernard Williams, Lánczi characterizes as a genuine impossibility from the perspective of reasonability. His proposition is that the reintroduction of the concept of *obligation* may be salutary in this regard. Moreover, Lánczi locates the place of religious traditions precisely within the alleged void brought about by the split of Enlightened reason, asserting that public reason 'cannot exist without vantage points that transcend the actual processes of deliberation'.[4]

In Part Three, building upon the immanent critiques available in the previous part, we begin to make a move from political theory to political theology. The essays in this part basically radicalize the challenges that surfaced in preceding chapters, and take tentative steps beyond the secularist paradigm towards recuperating religion in the public realm.

In Chapter 8, Walter Van Herck discusses problems of religion, democracy and, as he calls it, the 'empty shrine of pluralism' with a concentration on the problem of religious belief. He shows not merely that the very meaning of this concept was and is conditioned historically, but also that the changes of this meaning have borne grave consequences for the understanding of the political applicability of a religious stance. According to Van Herck, the contemporary context interprets *belief* as 'having a worldview', and attributes to the gesture of choosing this worldview a specific individualistic

character made in a radically autonomous way. However, attributing this radical autonomy to the choice implies a self-contradiction, since every sort of decision regarding value or relevance presupposes the use of a criterion; thus, 'in a way it doesn't make sense to say that one has chosen one's highest values'.[5] For Van Herck, it follows from these considerations that the liberal vision of individualist, opinion-based religion is an illusion. He also argues, reminiscent of Wittgenstein, that every form of language use is an essentially public endeavour that evinces that absolute neutrality is impossible. From this it follows that the very moment of sociability creates its own form of religiosity: 'The shrine of pluralism may be empty, but it is still a shrine.'[6]

In Chapter 9, Balázs M. Mezei combines philosophical, theological and historical viewpoints in his diagnosis concerning a possible but elemental way of being religious in secularity and in our religio-historical situation after Auschwitz – which he dubs as *open religion*. First drawing on Charles Taylor, Mezei explains what he has in mind by the term *secularity*. Mezei attempts to invert the normal conception of a 'secular age', arguing that it can be understood as a manifestation of a general tendency *towards* religion. Mezei detects a certain historical directedness in the evolution of secularity to become pluralized and unified simultaneously. However, the possible options for the future history of religion are varying; thus it is not unimportant what sort of theological tendencies will shape the future of religion. Relying on Hans Jonas and J. B. Metz, Mezei develops the concept of open religion, one that follows the logic of the paradigm changes occurring in the recent history of ideas, a tendency which he sees as progressively leading from closedness to openness.

Chapter 10, by Theo de Wit, palpably inspired by Carl Schmitt, serves as an effective transition from political theory to political theology. Containing a trenchant critique of both the politics of the left and the right, from both theoretical and – taking up the case in the Netherlands – practical angles, it forces open a window of opportunity for alternative approaches, which the authors of the final part of the volume will readily explore.

De Wit argues that the foundations of the post-Enlightenment leftist doctrine about the full rationalization of politics – that, at the same time, would result in the end of politics – seem to be losing support. He gives a detailed analysis of the 'politics of resolution' and attempts to establish that it functions as a quasi-religious phenomenon with potential radicalization in the form of fundamentalism. He makes an interesting parallel between the leftist forms of politics of resolution and their reformulation as radical contemporary multi-culturalism on the one hand, and on the other hand, the political arguments of the populist movements of the right, whose flourishing

we experience today. For de Wit, a politics without dénouement would be 'a politics that accepts that human beings continue to have longings and desires […] is in essence always also a longing for recognition, one for which people may even be prepared to put their own lives at stake'.[7]

De Wit reminds us of the tendency, so abundantly visible in the last decade, of the theological to puncture into the political, indeed at times thereby to morph itself somehow into the political. If we have witnessed in the twentieth century many currents of movement from political theory (Rawls, Habermas, Arendt, Strauss) towards a resurgent interest in political theology (Schmitt, Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer, Metz), might we not predict for the twenty-first century various and abundant crosscurrents to arise? What are we to make of the religious challenges for democracy when political theology takes shape *as* political theory?

In Chapter 11, where Alexander Rosenthal explores Reinhold Niebuhr's claim that 'democracy requires a more realistic justification than that which is given by the liberalism with which it has been associated in modern history', we find one of the many possible ways of approaching our queries. Rosenthal's work combines the philosophy of religion and anthropology, but points towards (political) theology. In his chapter, Rosenthal argues that Niebuhr had convincingly established that the Augustinian understanding of human nature and history addresses the truth of the human condition more adequately than the philosophical anthropology of the Enlightenment with which the democratic ideal has long been intertwined. This Enlightenment anthropology, rooted in a complex synthesis of Greek intellectualism and a progressive view of history nourished an innocent view of man – a view discredited by the twentieth-century world crisis in which the problem of evil brutally intruded upon the optimistic hopes of the modern age. While many see Christian discourse as irrelevant to modern politics in an ostensibly secular era, Rosenthal argues that Niebuhr's Augustinian insights into human nature and political life continue to provide a resource of prudential wisdom for democratic politics in navigating the peculiar challenges facing us in the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 12, András Csepregi analyses the dilemmas concerning the process of democratization in post-communist Hungary from a political theological perspective. In an eloquent style combining self-reflection with political and sociological insight, Csepregi juxtaposes Dietrich Bonhoeffer's political theology and the life and work of the renowned and religious Hungarian political thinker István Bibó, always in terms of his own differentiation between immature and mature democracy. Csepregi anchors his reflections in Bibó's definition of the democrat – a determination which

became a household saying in Hungarian political discourse – according to which 'to be a democrat means first of all not to be *afraid*'.[8] The category of *fear* generates an interpretation of democracy that puts democratization and the formation of the ethos of citizenship and the system of liberties in line with a therapeutic agenda. The democratic ethos of Bibó and Bonhoeffer's notion of sacrifice provides this analysis with a theological perspective: 'we never forget that "being there for the other", even giving one's life for the other is not identical to promoting democracy [but it requires that we do not fear] leaving the other to be what the other can and wishes to be'.[9] This conclusion, at the same time, resolves the dilemma that lies behind the argument of the chapter; namely, whether the idea of elitist or of genuine democracy is to be embraced.

Finally, in the concluding chapter (Chapter 13), one of the editors of this volume, Péter Losonczi, gives an interpretative analysis of Johann Baptist Metz's new political theology, taking early steps to recast it as political theory. In so doing, Losonczi attempts to import the concept of *public suffering*, a term he borrows from Talal Asad, into the Metzean framework. Losonczi argues that the course of development of Metz's thought, from his earlier notion of the *memoria passionis* to the later notion of *compassion*, renders this synthesis possible. Losonczi does not aim merely to reconstruct the most important theological and political aspects of Metz's programme, but to develop a set of novel interpretative strategies, within which the nucleus of Metz's thought – that is, the memory of suffering in its manifold reformulations in Metz's oeuvre – restates suffering as a public question. This fact, at the same time, bears the political theoretical relevance of the Metzean new political theology, since by this gesture Metz radically steps beyond the limits of the models involved by the modern political theories concerning the processes that happen in the public sphere.

It seems that it ought to be our task in the Introduction to dispel some of the perplexity that will inevitably follow from the conflicting currents and counter currents flowing forth from the following essays. Evidently, the usual encomium of reasoning and dialogue could be our model, which it must be admitted often lead to certain insights that in conclusion could serve to dispel perplexity. Within this paradigm, the *strength of understanding* dissolves perplexities. But we prefer to suggest to preserve and linger with, to retain in mind and not bracket out, the numerous paradoxes that ineluctably arise when deeply engaging with these questions. For this may serve to carry us over into the realization that, irrespective of our orientation and position, religious or secular, modernist or postmodern, analytic or continental – whatever – we cannot continue to pretend that there is a single totally

authentic stance that per se counts as *innocent*. There is no such position any more.

We think that giving due consideration to this basic condition, not despite of but because of the competing theses posited in these chapters, reflecting upon them individually and dialectically will prove fruitful – though we readily admit that they will not provide adequate solutions for the many questions regarding matters of religion and democracy that they elicit.

Perhaps in realizing the painful lack of our own innocence, the possible corruption of all ostensibly theoretical stances we take, the scholarly work done by the authors of this volume can stand as more than just a scientific endeavour. Perhaps it can stand as an exemplary case of that *democratic culture* which is not dependent on ideologies, traditions, or worldviews, but that develops out of a human attitude called *tolerance*.

# POLITICAL THEORY

# Part One

# Liberal Accommodations to the Religious Challenge

# 1. Religion and Liberalism: Public ReasoChaptern, Public Sphere and Cultural Pluralism

*Sebastiano Maffettone*

## 1. Prologue

Within contemporary liberalism, inspired by John Rawls' political approach (Rawls 1999a [1971], 1993, 1996), the relation between politics and religion is different from the traditional liberal one. Traditional liberals see the relation between politics and religion in terms of potential conflict. For historical reasons, they feel that religion threatens stability and think that liberalism is the appropriate antidote to this risk. From this hermeneutics of suspicion arises the idea to put restraints on religion. Thus religion, for a traditional liberal, is and must be kept private. Such an ethics of restraint is essentially different from a liberal ethics of reciprocal respect, as is Rawls'. For the contemporary liberal ethics of respect, the problem is not simply that *religion* threatens stability, but rather that we need a cement of society based on a universal – that is, valid for both religious and non-religious persons – consensus in a *pluralist* society. The liberal ethics of respect, to be universal and to preserve pluralism, must be based on shared institutional premises. Rawls' notion of public reason embodies in such a way the institutional morality of an ideal meta-community. It is, in his words, the most significant 'part of society's political capital' (Rawls 1993: 157).

My use of 'religious' in the title of this chapter may be in some way improper. To speak of religion and politics, in general, is quite ambitious, presupposing some interpretation of the relation between a theory of political justice and several theologies of justice. My aim here is more modest, because in the following I have more in mind *pluralism*; that is, a pluralism of all comprehensive doctrines, rather than a pluralism of religions. By 'comprehensive doctrines' I mean a complete and profound world vision believed to be inspired by basic truths, which includes religious outlooks but is not exhausted by them. To speak of comprehensive doctrines is intrinsically significant insofar as it puts secular and religious views on the same level. Both secular and religious views, in such

a way, are not characterized merely by their *content*, but rather by their attitude towards toleration. Finally, it must be mentioned that a liberal-democratic regime is presupposed in the background of my account of pluralism.

In the following, I will critically discuss a version of pluralism within contemporary liberalism, namely John Rawls'. I will also analyse some criticisms of Rawls' account, and in particular that of Jürgen Habermas. Rawls' version is based on the notion of 'public reason' whereas Habermas' is on the notion of the 'public sphere'. These are not identical, but they share the general intention to be open and sympathetic towards religion, at the same time inheriting from traditional liberalism a prudent attitude about the public role of religion.

In sections 2 and 3, I present Rawls' idea of overlapping consensus (2) and public reason (3). In section 4, I present some significant religious criticisms against Rawls. In section 5, I look at the notion of the public sphere of Habermas. This leads us to the penultimate section (6), which discusses in some depth Habermas' critique of Rawls as appeared in the Habermas–Rawls exchange. We close with a brief conclusion recapitulating salient ideas of the chapter (7).

## 2. Overlapping Consensus

The key problem posed in John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (Rawls 1993, henceforth cited as PL) is the simultaneous presence in contemporary liberal-democratic society of different comprehensive doctrines. This pluralism generates difficulties from the perspective of stability. In the second part of PL Rawls tries to solve this problem that he had posed in the first. The key tool for achieving this result consists precisely in the creation of what he calls 'overlapping consensus'.

Rawls' overlapping consensus regards a situation in which citizens that adhere to different comprehensive doctrines tend to accept the same liberal political outlook in a well-ordered society. This process does not assert itself from the outside, but takes place for each citizen 'from within their own comprehensive view', taking advantage of 'the religious, philosophical and moral grounds it provides' (ibid.: 147). Each citizen, regardless of whether his/her basic comprehensive doctrine is Muslim or Catholic, secular or Buddhist, utilitarian or Kantian, sceptical or pluralist, should reach an agreement on the principles of liberal and egalitarian political justice, finding some of the reasons to do so within his/her own comprehensive doctrine. The resulting consensus, according to Rawls, is not a superficial or prudential consensus,

but is rather of a moral nature. We are not dealing with compromise, with what Rawls calls a mere *modus vivendi*.

The basic intention consists in breaking down the morality of individuals into two parts. On the one hand, there is the morality of people viewed as a whole, which rests on deep ethical or religious foundations; on the other hand, there is a more limited institutional morality, which concerns citizens rather than individuals and is not rooted in the ethical or religious depths of each person, but rather in the loyalty of each to the political and constitutional system in which they live their public lives. The political conception based on the institutional morality makes it possible to govern the pluralism of the conceptions of the good. This occurs precisely through the formation of an *overlapping consensus* among citizens, who – although they remain rooted in their ultimate convictions and, indeed, nurture themselves with them – are nevertheless capable of placing them aside in the public sphere (better, in certain aspects of the public sphere) and accepting a common and predominant institutional morality.

The core idea coincides here with the creation of this institutional morality: it reasserts Rawls' 'priority of the right'. In a well-ordered society pluralism reigns supreme. Different aesthetic, ethical and religious views meet and confront each other. But pluralism cannot concern the entire institutional order and the fundamental structures of politics. Here, on the contrary, we all need a certain degree of unity. This unity, however, cannot be founded on a single ethical and political theory. In this case, therefore, we need a consensus that is less deep but broader, whose primary object is precisely a political conception of justice capable of allowing a basic structure that can ensure pluralism to a certain extent.

Also for Rawls, the model for such a consensus is inspired by the birth of classical liberalism. It depends on the laborious conquest of religious tolerance. After the many clashes of the previous centuries, European civilization discovered, in Rawls' words 'a new social possibility: the possibility of a reasonable harmonious and stable pluralist society' (ibid.: xxv). Only before that time was it possible to believe that 'social unity and concord require agreement on a general and comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine' (ibid.: xxv). After that time the Europeans convinced themselves that 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to believe in the damnation of those with whom we have, with trust and confidence, long and fruitfully cooperated in maintaining a just society' (ibid.: xxv).

According to this traditional point of view, we cannot separate liberalism from tolerance, and tolerance, in turn, from the loss of the certainty that there is only one truth. If the liberalism belonging to the European tradition, which

is the one Rawls is thinking of, appeared as the result of a loss of orthodoxy, then the liberal political theory should still be characterized today by a certain loss of faith. It is not unusual to believe that this separation between liberalism and certainty (not to say truth) has been traumatic and has required a lengthy process, with various intermediate stages, before achieving the maturity that Rawls considers within his own position. Therefore, it was somehow natural that the first type of liberalism grounded all its certainty precisely on the loss of faith and, like Voltaire's, was basically sceptical in nature. Or that a second type of liberalism operated with the ultimate conviction of searching for alternative, albeit equally deep, foundations to religious faiths – as in the case of Kant and Mill, for example. On the contrary, Rawls' political liberalism rejects these two paths and takes an intermediate route, which is that of overlapping consensus.

## 3. Rawlsian Public Reason

In the 1993 edition of PL, in Lecture VI – taken from his 1990 Melden Lectures – entitled 'The idea of public reason', Rawls proposes a topic never treated in previous writings, including his great earlier work *A Theory of Justice* (henceforth, TJ). He later takes up this topic again in the second edition of PL (1996) and once again in his last article, entitled 'The idea of public reason revisited' (1997).

Rawls' public reason does not concern a determinate object, but rather the limits of the public debate when fundamental subjects are at stake. From this point of view, public reason is the reason of the citizens, being public in three ways: (i) as reason of the citizens, it is also the reason of the public; (ii) its subject is the good of the public when constitutional essentials and matters of fundamental justice are concerned; (iii) its nature and content are public insofar as they are provided by the political conception (Rawls 1993: 213).

Rawls discusses public reason within the limits of a liberal-democratic political conception. From this standpoint, the first constraint imposed on public reason is an institutional one: to speak properly of public reason, we need to be confronted with *constitutional essentials and fundamental matters of justice*. There are, in other words, many political topics which are not included in this domain. Public reason does not apply, for instance, to all the debates that, albeit politically significant, take place outside these institutional constraints, such as those that take place in churches, families, universities and other associations. All these non-public debates are part of what Rawls calls 'background culture'. The criteria of public reason do apply, on the

contrary, when we have political deliberations in 'public forums' and, more controversially, when citizens discuss voting (ibid.: 215).

To grasp this distinction between 'background culture' and 'public culture' is certainly not immediate, especially if we take into consideration the role played by state coercion in the definition of the limits of public reason. Here, Rawls appears often obscure: it is not altogether clear whether public-reason constraints do apply simply when constitutional essentials and matters of fundamental justice are at stake (content), or rather when state coercion is also implied. Constraints required by content appear anyway more important than constraints depending on the use of state coercion.

A difficulty, in a way implicit in the notion of public reason, consists in the fact that this concept imposes a sort of double standard. In the most relevant political debates, one should avoid appeal to the whole truth and more generally to comprehensive doctrines, yet one should also instead take seriously just the part of them coherent with public-reason constraints (Rawls 1993: Lect. VI, sect. 3).

The fundamental requirement on which the idea of public reason is based is the requirement of 'political legitimacy', according to which:

> our exercise of political power is proper and hence justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be expected to accept in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to them as reasonable and rational. (Ibid.: 217)

From this principle descends a moral obligation called the 'duty of civility'. The basis of this duty of civility consists in the duty all citizens have to reciprocally justify the political principles they adopt in the light of public reason. Liberal democracy itself imposes a special link, based on reciprocal respect, among citizens. To respect each other, the citizens have to adopt a common language.

Liberal legitimacy, in PL, exceeds justice in two opposite ways. On the one hand, it is not sufficient for an act to be just to be also legitimated. On the other hand, there are legitimated laws and regulations that we cannot think of as just. Citizens, however, are obliged to respect these legitimated norms, even if unjust: 'Democratic decision and laws are legitimate, not because they are just but because they are legitimately enacted with an accepted legitimate democratic procedure' (ibid.: 428).

From this perspective, even Rawls' principles of justice – even assuming their rightness – cannot claim to be legitimated. Liberal legitimacy depends on consensus, and it is difficult to imagine all citizens believing in the same comprehensive doctrine (including Rawls').

One can better understand the nature of public reason by confronting it with non-public reasons (ibid.: Lect. VI, par. 3)? Non-public reasons are part of the background culture, and their rightness standards and justificatory criteria derive from the subject they treat and from the kind of associations in which they are embedded. By contrast, the content of public reason depends on the political conception and presupposes the authority of the state. As mentioned, one should not confound public reason with the public sphere. The public sphere – but not public reason – *includes* the background culture. And public-reason constraints cannot be applied within the domain of the background culture.

A liberal-democratic political conception provides 'guidelines of inquiry' which specify the acceptable ways of reasoning and the type of relevant information (ibid.: 233). These guidelines do not depend directly on any comprehensive doctrine. As a consequence, public reason, when we discuss in public forums about constitutional essentials and matters of fundamental justice, does not permit any direct appeal to philosophical or religious (comprehensive) doctrines. It is possible, instead, to rely on the most relevant scientific theories, when they are generally approved by the community of scholars.

In the realm of TJ, these guidelines of inquiry derive their basis from the substantive principles of justice. Within the domain of PL, on the contrary, they are relatively independent: different liberal-democratic conceptions do not necessarily share their substantive principles of justice (ibid.: 226). To accept the principle of liberal legitimacy and the idea of public reason does not mean to share the same political comprehensive doctrine: 'It is crucial that public reason is not specified by any one political conception of justice, certainly not by justice as fairness alone. Rather, its content – the principles, ideals, and standards that may be appealed to – are those of a family of reasonable political conceptions …' (ibid.: 451).

This family reunites a set of liberal-democratic positions. This idea has delicate implications: every political hypothesis we select must be compatible with a liberal-democratic view.

## 4. Religious Objections to Overlapping Consensus and Public Reason

Many scholars – including several in this volume – are perplexed with respect to the solution of an overlapping consensus as proposed by Rawls. The reason for such distrust in Rawls' solution lies in the double standard with which Rawls views disagreements concerning the conception of the good and disagreements

concerning the conception of justice. It is precisely this strong distinction that poses the most obvious problem. The reason lies in the fact that by doing so Rawls seems to immunize the notion of justice from conflict. The praise of pluralism, even his insistence on the burden of judgements, which we find in PL, seems limited to the disagreements on the good. But then the 'shared convictions', the 'fundamental ideas', the 'political conception' and, more so, the 'overlapping consensus', seem to confirm the impression that, faced with deep disagreements on the good, there is a certain unity of view on at least several general characteristics of justice. Hence the reaction of the critics: is it possible to conceive a world, such as the one we live in, without thinking of it in the light of robust conflicts of a political and moral nature on justice?

Rawls' negative answer to this question prompts two principal critical options: either the immunization of politics occurs through a *de facto* compromise, a *modus vivendi*, or Rawls reintroduces in PL the conception of stability taken from his earlier work TJ, which he had started by criticizing in PL, and, in other words, basically formulates what is tantamount to a liberal 'comprehensive doctrine'.

I believe that to respond to these objections it shall be necessary to begin by assuming that Rawls uses two different interpretations of liberalism simultaneously. In the first, liberalism is viewed as a comprehensive doctrine, and we could positively identify it with (an interpretation of) the theory of justice as fairness, but also with a Kantian conception based on autonomy. This interpretation of liberalism, however, concerns only the level of 'justification', which is grounded on the comprehensive doctrine of each person. This level is exposed to the attacks from the 'existence of pluralism', typical of contemporary societies. If we were to move only on this level, it would be impossible to find convergence upon justice. From this awareness, there arises the idea of using the second meaning of liberalism, based on the principle of 'legitimation'. In short, this second idea of liberalism suggests that there are liberal-democratic institutions and practices that no 'reasonable' person would want to do without. These are few and fundamental and concern the essential elements of a liberal constitution and some questions of basic justice. *My thesis is that the overlapping consensus can exist only insofar as it unites these two views of liberalism, the one based on justification and the other based on legitimation.*

Legitimation takes into account the fact that Rawls always tries to include in his theory elements of historical experience capable, so to speak, of qualifying consensus with the support of external factors someway independent of the favoured theoretical approach. According to this perspective, the way out from the above-mentioned dilemma can only be inspired by actual experience,

which, in the public domain, is constituted by the way in which the *basic structure* functions in the ambit of a liberal-democratic system. And this, in close examination, is the vantage point from which Rawls looks at religion within a theory of tolerance, compared to his modern forerunners, such as Locke and Bayle, who, after all and unlike him, could not rely on an exemplary practice for reference.

In addition to the critiques of overlapping consensus, there are several ritual questions concerning public reason, include the following: how does public reason constrain our arguments? Is it acceptable that similar constraints do exist, and, consequently, that some kinds of arguments are to be avoided in political debates? In particular, is the way in which Rawls formulates these constraints the right one? These questions can concern the relation between public-reason (possible) constraints and race, ethnicity or gender.

To put the discussion on the right track, we need a premise: it is fair to begin by disentangling the idea of public reason from the notion of secular reason (Audi 1993: 677).

Secular reason aims to exclude religious arguments from political debate, whereas public reason does not. According to the standards of public reason, the appeal to religious values is admitted, even if it must be presented in a specific form under some constraints, the goal of which is respecting other citizens. Moreover, if secular reason is usually supposed to be self-sufficient to express people's motivations in political debates, Rawls' public reason requires a sort of complementarity between the religious background and the political discourse. Substantially, public reason requires perhaps a sacrifice of religious sentiments and values, but surely much less than the one required by secular reason. The Rawlsian believer is not seen as a fundamentalist. On the contrary, it is possible that his/her religious background can help to solve political dilemmas. Rawls' concern is that a religious citizen cannot be certain that other citizens will immediately understand his/her motivations based on faith. But this does not imply any negation of these motivations. Rather, in some specific and limited cases, the religious citizen is obliged to make his/her creed compatible, at least from a communicational point of view, with the political opinions of the other citizens. To accuse Rawls of 'secular fundamentalism' is simply misleading (Campos 1994).

Rawls himself was certainly a religious person, even if his relation with religion became more troublesome over the years.[1] Probably one of the deepest motivations behind PL consists precisely in conceding to religious people the maximal space compatible with a liberal-democratic polity. Thus, in PL, the nexus between public reason and comprehensive religious doctrines is never denied and is generally considered with appreciation.

Nevertheless, there have been numerous religious objections to Rawls' idea of public reason.[2] One can group them in several classes: (i) Rawls' public reason can have some advantages, but the costs are too high (Weithman 1997); (ii) liberals put on religion an excessive epistemological and ethical burden, a burden which liberalism itself is not able to support (Garcia 1997); (iii) religious arguments alone can adequately support public claims.

According to some religious critics, the supposed exclusion of religious arguments from politics via public reason is a consequence of an 'oversimplification'. This oversimplification would depend on a reductionist view of politics. Politics, in this reductionist view, would be identified with political decisions having coercion as an outcome. Politics however – these religious critics maintain – is much more than this, having a social dimension we cannot bypass. Within this social dimension, the role of religion would be significant and un-eliminable.

There is no need to deny this role, however, if we keep in mind the importance given by Rawls to the background culture, which is independent from public reason. Public reason is just a tiny subset of the public sphere. And of course we do politics also within the public sphere, where political arguments based on religion have, even for Rawls, all the room they deserve. Rawls does not seem in substantial contrast with his critics on this point.

Within this debate,[3] one can also maintain – as Paul J. Weithman[4] did – that the supposed exclusion of religious arguments via public reason implies a tremendous loss for the community, in terms of civic and political energy. This thesis, however, does not seem in conflict with Rawls' thought. Rawls' thesis, in particular his inclusive view, in fact does not exclude religious arguments from politics. On the contrary, religious arguments, such as Abraham Lincoln's and Martin Luther King's, are held in great consideration.

Looking closer, this criticism can be split in two parts.

First, Rawls intends to limit their public usage, in a very restricted domain, via a 'proviso': one can rely on religious arguments in politics *provided* that one has the possibility of reformulating them coherently with public reason. Religious critics can object to this proviso (Eberle 2002). They can maintain that it creates an unfair asymmetry between lay and religious people (Habermas 2008a and b). The former need not return to it, whereas the latter should. This thesis, however, is not fully defensible, if we read Rawls carefully. The proviso in fact does not apply only to religious doctrines, but to all comprehensive doctrines. In other words, the problem is not only a religious one (Larmore 1990). It is applicable also to lay people, such as Kantians, utilitarians, and – why not? – even to Rawlsians. Public reason, so

interpreted, does not imply any unfair asymmetry between lay and religious people. Rawls' public reason is against all forms of sectarian interpretation of the political life of liberal democracy. The sectarian interpretations rely on comprehensive doctrines, secular or religious.

Second, there is another way to conceive a possible asymmetry of the burden of the proof against religious people. One could recognize the necessity of an honest justificatory effort of the sort Rawls has in mind in PL, at the same time negating the opportunity to locate religious arguments within the range of the arguments unable to perform this justificatory task.[5] To impute unreasonableness to everyone who opts for a solution different from a broadly speaking contractualist one would be in some way to beg the question in favour of a liberal thesis. Moreover, it would be offensive to oblige religious people to be morally restrained from discussion starting from premises that come directly from their faith. In such a way, Rawls would underestimate a person's religious 'collateral commitments' (Stout 2004: 70) in the name of the liberal-democratic community's right to protect itself. This Rawlsian proposal – according to Stout – would imply too much 'group thinking', given that single individuals could be ready to critically discuss policy arguments based on religious premises (ibid.: 71–2).

This second criticism can be tackled in two ways. First, it is controversial to claim that Rawls simply wants to put restraints on people relying on comprehensive doctrines. Perhaps he is offering them, rather than a dramatic choice, an extra opportunity: to believe in their own faith while they bet on a kind of institutional morality when discussing some topics in the public domain. Second, if one follows my own interpretation mentioned above, it is possible to recognize the justificatory effort of religious people while at the same time accepting an ideal of public reason according to which some uniformity is necessary in terms of legitimation.

The third set of criticisms maintains that a religious rationale alone is often sufficient to support basic public claims, also because in the long run the religious argumentative strategy is not so different from the liberal one.

Starting from the second part of the argument, liberals are not able, according to some religious critics, to keep the pretentious standards of public reason. Liberalism, thus, would not be able to create its own support. In a true regime of pluralism, liberals could not suppose that there are 'shared' views, creating allegiance to public authority, independently from particular virtues, like the ones religious people cultivate (Dombrowski 2001: 41). Civic virtues come from traditions, and traditions include religions. The ideal institutional meta-community the liberals have in mind simply does not exist if founded on a voluntaristic basis (like contractualism). To put it more

radically, liberalism, in these terms, seems to be another form of 'political theology' (de Vries and Sullivan 2006).

## 5. Habermas' 'Public Sphere'

The notion of public sphere in Habermas' work arises particularly from his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962–89). Also, it derives from modern Western political theory and has been often accused of not having taken religions and other traditions into due consideration. In the last few years, Habermas has made a terrific effort to show how his own version is compatible with religion, basing it on the idea of mutual learning between lay and religious worldviews. He has also explored the 'multiple modernities' debate (Eisenstadt and others) to mediate between his own version and this alternative framework.

Habermas' public sphere is based on the value and significance of open dialogue and transparent collective understanding. This version of the public sphere can be conceived also as a discursive counterpart of a working civil society. In civil society, the public sphere plays the role of the political culture of the public sector, as structurally different from the economic culture of the private sector.

Over the years, Habermas has managed to qualify the public sphere in the light of his general theory: (i) as an instantiation of communicative action; (ii) then to make of it the ideal space where a discourse ethics of reciprocity can take place; (iii) finally, in creating a derivation from it of the standard production of norms within an idealized liberal-democratic regime.

Although the public sphere shares the same Kantian origins of Rawlsian public reason, it differs from public reason in the following ways:

(a) the notion of public sphere is much broader than Rawls' public reason;
(b) the realization of a normatively significant public sphere is strictly connected with democratic practice;
(c) the idea of a public sphere *à la* Habermas can be conceived as the conceptual consequence of a comprehensive doctrine and as such is somewhat at odds with liberalism.

Assuming the plausibility of these points, one could say that the public sphere is both more open and more closed towards religion.

## 6. The Habermas–Rawls Exchange

This paradox becomes clearer by consideration of the Habermas–Rawls exchange (HRE), first published by the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1995. In HRE, Rawls publicly discusses Habermas' work for the first and last time. In contrast, Habermas had already discussed Rawls at length at least twice in his 'Remarks on discourse ethics' (1994: 25–8), and '"Reasonable" versus "true", or the morality of worldviews' (1998), and later continues his critical engagement in chapters 2 and 3 of *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) and in 'Religion in the public sphere' (2008a). These other writings considerably help to clarify Habermas' intentions as an interpreter of Rawls. Habermas agrees with Rawls in adopting a pluralist but normative social philosophy (Habermas 1998: 79) and in opting for Kant against Hobbes from a foundational point of view (Habermas 1995). In particular, Habermas favours Rawls' intention to merge a Kantian scheme into the 'social world' (ibid.: 26). At the same time, he condemns Rawls' contractualism for its voluntaristic background.

After the exchange, Habermas became more interested in the politics–religion debate. In this regard, he attacks Rawls' public reason for transforming the state–religion necessary separation into an excessive mental and psychological burden for religious people. The core of Habermas' critical argument rests on the critique of Rawls' conception of 'freestanding' neutrality.

In '"Reasonable" versus "true", or the morality of worldviews', Habermas focuses on the nature of the 'political' in Rawls as opposed to the 'metaphysical'. Habermas thinks Rawls' use of the metaphysical–political distinction corresponds: first, to a peculiar view of neutrality, as separate from any profound doctrine; second, to a special epistemic status that would permit the coexistence of different comprehensive doctrines. Habermas maintains here that Rawls insulates political theory from ethics, religion and metaphysics in an improper (read: arbitrary) way.

Habermas' basic criticism consists in saying that Rawls confuses the descriptive and the normative level of his own analysis. This confused overlapping would make philosophical argument within Rawlsian liberalism a kind of ideology. From this point of view, Habermas is convinced that his own idea of democratic legitimation works much better than Rawls' vision of liberal justice.

The core of Habermas' arguments against Rawls is already substantially present in the 1995 exchange. In HRE, Habermas presents a threefold criticism of Rawls: (i) the original position is unable to guarantee the level of impartiality it aims at (JP 111–19); (ii) Rawls cannot properly distinguish – especially when he discusses the overlapping consensus – between abstract acceptability,

that is justification, and concrete acceptability, losing a substantial part of the cognitive and normative value of his argument (JP 119–26); (iii) Rawls is not in a condition to neatly separate the liberty of the ancients from the liberty of the moderns because his vision of liberalism obscures democracy (JP 126ff.). These criticisms, if joined, permit Habermas to state that Rawls' liberal vision should be modest from a normative point of view, but not modest 'in the wrong way' (JP 110–11).

We are not particularly interested in criticism (i) here. Criticism (ii) concerns overlapping consensus, and criticism (iii) public reason.

Criticism (ii) is based on what Habermas sees as the confusion between normative and descriptive, between ideal acceptability and *de facto* acceptance. This criticism applies to Rawls' arguments in PL in general and to his treatment of the overlapping consensus in particular (see PL chapter 4). Habermas thinks that Rawls responds too timidly to the challenge of the communitarian arguments and in so doing hides some basic normative arguments in his own theory of justice as fairness.

Habermas is convinced, and so am I, that the overlapping consensus plays a central role in Rawls' theory in PL. He is worried though, because without opportunely distinguishing the normative from the positive, the whole Rawlsian model could lose its cognitive and normative value. The risk here would be for Rawls to confuse overlapping consensus as a normative device able to support moral stability and overlapping consensus as an empirical fact able to support just social stability.

Habermas' problem is clear: either the overlapping consensus has an independent normative force or it cannot solve the problem of stability. On the second option, the overlapping consensus would not be a way for the acceptability of the theory but rather an instrument to control its already realized acceptance. Of course, Habermas believes that Rawls is much nearer to this second version of the overlapping consensus.

In other words, if Habermas is right, there could not be any new normative contribution coming from the overlapping consensus. But, is he right? In fact, Rawls' construction of the overlapping consensus in PL aims to get an inter-subjective consensus of different individual and group positions, positions that reflect themselves in the comprehensive doctrines of the citizens. In this regard, it is somewhat true that to achieve an overlapping consensus would be a fortuitous outcome. There are no *a priori* guarantees that it will arrive; 'It just happens', as Habermas correctly observes.

This conclusion does not convince Habermas. He would prefer— recognizing an ineliminable pluralism within a post-metaphysical milieu – that the real discourses of democratic citizens could converge at a further impartial level.

Of course, the problem with this view is that it concedes too little to pluralism, because the equilibrium it is supposed to reach is simply another and higher form of Kantian impartialism. Rawls' thesis, instead, even if we can just hope to reach the lucky outcome which 'just happens', opts for another view of pluralism. In this view we can get a possible, and surely not guaranteed, convergence among citizens believing in different comprehensive doctrines but assuming consensus on some fundamental institutional matters. These matters do correspond for example to some prerogatives of the American constitutional regime. From this point of view, Rawls' claim that Habermas' theory of communicative action is a comprehensive view makes sense. For, Habermas pretends – differently from Rawls – that there is an independent and superior level of truth with respect to the single religious, metaphysical and moral doctrines (Rawls 1993: 378–9).

For Rawls, when it comes to overlapping consensus, acceptability and acceptance cannot be neatly separated. There exists no fixed point from which we can look at them from a distance. Comprehensive doctrines survive within a generally shared political conception, in a permanent dialectic between two ethical stances, one of them being more profound and less shareable and the other less superficial but more shareable.

Habermas maintains that Rawls appears dangerously in equilibrium between normative claims and empirical claims. This difficult coexistence is revealed by Rawls' failure to present the 'true' in tandem with the reasonable, where the true would, according to Habermas, correspond to cognitive validity and the reasonable to ethical-political validity. For Habermas, this parallel is impossible within Rawls' framework, *because the logical space of truth is occupied by the comprehensive doctrines*. As a consequence, Rawls' idea of the reasonable cannot support epistemically significant claims in ethics and politics. Rawls' political theory, in other words, cannot pretend to ground itself on a true doctrine. It rather takes its significance by a successful compromise among different comprehensive doctrines, each one of them having its own truth-claims. Substantially, this objection is not different from the previous and more general one: in a pluralistic regime Rawlsian equilibrium – for Habermas – cannot advance normative claims which present themselves as stronger than the ones advanced by the different comprehensive doctrines. Habermas, on the contrary, opts for his discourse ethics in which one is supposed to reach a superior impartial point of view with all its truth-claims. Habermas explicitly maintains: 'The question is whether the citizens can grasp something as reasonable if it is not open to them *to adopt a third standpoint* besides that of an observer and the participant' ('"Reasonable" …' 87, emphasis added).

The third Habermasian criticism can be directed against Rawls' use of public reason. It appeals to the relation between the liberty of the ancients and of the moderns. The liberty of the moderns covers classical civic liberties, whereas the liberty of the ancients concerns participation and communication. In the background, there is the distinction between public and private autonomy. Explicitly Habermas says: 'Rawls could satisfy more elegantly the burden of the proof he incurs with his strong and presumptively neutral concept of the moral person if he developed his substantive concepts and assumptions out of the procedure of the public use of the reason' (JP 127).

For Habermas, the way in which the principles of justice are derived from the original position makes the citizens in 'flesh and blood' subjects to norms which have been already anticipated from a theoretical point of view (JP 128). In such a way: 'they cannot reignite the radical democratic embers of the original position in the civic life of their society, for from their perspective all of the *essential* discourses of legitimation have already taken place' (JP 128).

In this regard, they can contribute to (what Rawls calls) political stability, but at the cost of being deprived of their political autonomy. In the Rawlsian framework, a boundary separating the private from the public would rise, in such a way ignoring Habermas' postulate according to which human rights and popular sovereignty are supposed to be co-generated. Only by assuming their co-originality, instead, could one make private and public autonomy correspond. Habermas' idea is that in Rawlsian political liberalism individual rights would trump over democratic practice. Rawls' theory of justice would expropriate citizens of their own democratic powers. The Habermasian alternative consists in taking seriously the democratic law-formation process. In this way, the discursive procedural approach would be confirmed. For Habermas, the meaning and the force of the law cannot depend on philosophical reasoning. They rather presuppose the actual commitment of public reason in discursive democratic practices.

Habermas' point of view is here curiously both more modest and more ambitious than Rawls'. It is more modest insofar as within its ambit the public use of reason is exclusively procedural: philosophers are not entitled to decide on substantive matters of justice, these being left to the dialogue among citizens. It is more ambitious insofar as Habermas does not accept a method of avoidance, which would permit us, and permits Rawls, to bypass fundamental controversies within the public use of reason.

In reply to Habermas' critique, Rawls takes up his four-stage sequence argument developed many years earlier in TJ. According to Rawls, Habermas would not go beyond the first stage, the one of the original position, and just for this he can imagine that the principles of justice are decided there

'once and for all' (Rawls 1993: 399). For Rawls, instead, it is opportune to consider the passage from the first stage (original position) to the second (constitutional convention), to go then to the third in which there are 'legislators enacting laws', to end up with the fourth stage (application of the norms) (Rawls 1993: 397). A different level of information is available to each of these stages, in which citizens progressively confront each other and themselves with the main institutions. These do not derive their authority from the head of a philosopher but rather from the 'work of past generations' (Rawls 1993: 399).

In such a way, the political autonomy of the citizens is guaranteed within political liberalism. Liberty and equality are not regulated by an instantaneous decision but rather by a continuous inter-generational process. In any case, the 'non public values', as Rawls prefers to call them, cannot be derived by the ontological contents determined by a comprehensive doctrine. They are derived instead from the 'will of the people' (Rawls 1993: 405).

In this perspective, Rawls does not accept Habermas' main thesis in *Between Facts and Norms*. If one embraces that thesis, liberalism *à la* Rawls cannot show how 'public and private autonomy are co-original and of equal weight' (ibid.: 412). For Rawls, instead, the relation between the original position and the other three stages of the sequence ensures an opportune equilibrium between public and private autonomy. In this regard, Rawls is keen to deny that his liberalism 'leaves political and private autonomy in unresolved competition' (ibid.: 416). For Rawls, political liberalism faces a structural and inevitable dilemma of democracy: moral laws cannot be imposed onto the people's sovereignty and the people's sovereignty should not violate some basic rights. Substantially, says Rawls, within political liberalism there is not 'unresolved competition' between public and private autonomy.

The difference at stake here is clear. For Habermas, the limits of the political cannot be *a priori* decided either constitutionally or philosophically. They must be instead decided via an actual debate among real individuals. These individuals move on one side and the generalization coming from a non-distorted public discussion on the other. Rawls' thesis, on the other hand, is more philosophically and constitutionally oriented.

## Conclusion

Rawls' general position on pluralism still seems today very promising from the point of view of the religion–democracy relationship. As we have seen, Rawls presents a new version of liberalism in which religion is not supposed

to be confined within the private sphere. On the contrary, for Rawls, religion is a potential background for the most relevant political ideals. This version of liberalism is defended in PL through the use of two basic concepts, 'overlapping consensus' and 'public reason'. As discussed, Rawls founds his political liberalism on a notion of reciprocal respect, according to which each citizen, when appealing to her comprehensive doctrines, must take into consideration what other citizens can reasonably understand. This ethics of reciprocal respect does not sacrifice the interests and aspirations of religious people. For this very reason, common religious criticisms of Rawls are misdirected. Reciprocal respect does not imply a special burden for religious people, but a burden for all citizens *qua* citizens. I also hope to have shown that Habermas' criticism of Rawls concerning these two concepts does not undermine their epistemic and ethical force. This conclusion does not mean to suggest that Rawls is a ready-made solution for such a complex problem like that posed by the religion–democracy relationship. However, I do hope to have established that Rawls provides a general and quite promising argument from which scholars could start a discussion of this relationship. It is up to contemporary scholars to use these foundations in the proper way, filling in the gaps, but aiming all the while to keep alive the spirit of reciprocal respect.

# 2. Accommodating Pluralism through Public Justification: Moral vs. Practical Considerations*

*Eszter Kollár*

## 1. Political Liberalism and its Alleged Paradox

The possibility of a just social order, which provides a common ground among conflicting worldviews, but which, nevertheless, leaves room for dissent and fosters the flourishing of ideas, has been the prime concern of liberal political theory since the rise of religious toleration. Human interaction has developed competing ideas concerning the values of human life, the goals worthy of pursuing and the desired forms of association. Over the centuries we have come to recognize that disagreement over truth and value is likely to persist. While appealing in many respects, this modern condition poses an inherent difficulty when questions of justice arise. The basic norms of our living together are questions to be settled in every society, insofar as they constitute the background framework that has to accommodate these competing ideas and to yield a fair solution between them. The relevant norms to be settled concern basic rights and entitlements, responsibilities, the system of property, the distribution of social goods, and the political procedures that lead to binding decisions.

Liberal political theory has produced various normative solutions to the problem of social justice; the solutions, however, have always relied on ideas that can be attributed to particular traditions in political philosophy (Waldron 2004: 90). Autonomy, consent, self-determination, utility and equality, are some of the basic notions grounding the different liberal conceptions of justice. Justifying the basic terms of political association from within a particular philosophical doctrine, however, seems to run afoul of the dilemma these liberal theories are set out to solve. If the task is to establish a standard of justice, a shared normative point of view that people can endorse despite their diverging

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moral views, then singling out any of these philosophical premises as reasons for others to affirm the principles of justice is problematic, at least, in two ways. First, those who do not find the premises appealing are likely to reject the principles they ground, thereby undermining its potential acceptability and political stability (let us call this *practical* consideration). Second, justifying shared institutions on grounds that are not available to others can be conceived as involving a form of disrespect towards their moral commitments (let us call this *moral* consideration). It seems, then, that there are both practical and moral considerations that move us to seek alternative starting points. If substantive philosophical starting points are ruled out, however, are there any other sources available for justifying standards of justice?

In *Political Liberalism* (1993) John Rawls makes a claim to resolving the centuries-old dilemma of liberal political theory. He puts forward the idea of *public justification*, a normative proposal concerning the appropriate way to justify the basic norms of our society, and argues that it is the key to accommodating moral and religious pluralism in a democratic institutional setting. Public justification is built on the idea that norms of justice (which regulate social institutions and thereby determine the distribution of social positions in a society) cannot rest on particular moral or religious views, i.e. cannot be grounded in doctrinal reasons if they are to be action-guiding in a pluralist society. Given that people are deeply divided in their moral commitments, a theory of justice cannot select any particular conception of the good as privileged. Rather, the moral ideals that justificatory reasoning must take as starting points must be *public ideals* latent in the political culture. Given that those public ideals are assumed to be implicitly shared by all, the political conception of justice, Rawls argues, has the potential to accommodate the moral and religious differences that challenge the social unity in a democratic society.

Despite its promising solution, political liberalism seems to incorporate a paradox. On the one hand, it requires citizens to subscribe to an allegedly shared normative point of view (political conception of justice) and refrain from using religious or other doctrinal reasons in the political arena, given that those reasons are not available to others. On the other hand, it requires citizens to affirm the principles of justice from within their own moral point of view, and find religious or liberal reasons for endorsing the conception of justice itself. An evident question arises, then. How is it possible for citizens to *refrain from* invoking doctrinal reasons in the political arena, and at the same time *appeal to* doctrinal reasons for endorsing a political conception of justice? Can this double requirement of refraining from and appealing to comprehensive views be made consistent?

In the following sections I try to show that the seeming paradox can be dissolved in two steps. Firstly, one must insist on the two separate stages of the Rawlsian theoretical structure. That is, the reasons for endorsing public justification as the appropriate method (doctrinal reasons), and the reasons invoked when publicly justifying the laws of the polity (public reasons) have a different role in the two different stages of the theory. This first step aims at clarifying these distinct elements of the Rawlsian theory. In the second step towards dissolving the seeming paradox one needs to show that in the two stages of *Political Liberalism* public reason presupposes comprehensive views that are capable of supporting the *political* foundations of public reason itself. In other words, bracketing one's doctrinal reasons in the public arena requires an overriding commitment to public justification itself. The difficult question is whether subordinating one's doctrinal reason to public reason is, in fact, a human possibility; 'not a mere logical possibility, but one that connects with the deep tendencies and inclinations of the social world' (Rawls 1999a: 128). For public justification to be more than a mere logical possibility, democratic citizens must have an overriding moral commitment to the public and to its members as free and equal. Public justification entails a *normative requirement* about justification under conditions of pluralism, and, as such, it requires *moral* support from within each comprehensive view.[1]

Besides hoping to achieve greater clarity on the problem of the alleged paradox, a further aim is to respond to those critics who understand Rawls' political turn as a mere *practical* project that conflates the normative project of justice with political stability (Habermas 1995; Cohen 2003). To challenge their conclusion, I try to show that for political liberalism to be both a consistent theoretical project and a feasible political enterprise, its justificatory premises must be endorsed by liberal and by religious members of the public on *moral* grounds; moral grounds that are to be found within their own comprehensive doctrines. While political justification as a normative requirement weakens the historical possibility of an overlapping consensus, it is a requirement that a consistent theory of justice and its political possibility cannot do without.

## 2. The Two-stage Theory: Political Justification and Pluralist Convergence

What justice is, in its most abstract sense, is a question that has inspired philosophers over millennia in search of universal moral principles that hold for all possible worlds. Rawls, however, maintains that the relevant question about justice is not whether we could conceive of the best conception of justice for the

best possible world, starting from scratch. This would make 'moral philosophy the study of the ethics of creation' (Rawls 1999a: 137). The important question, in his view, is whether we can work out from where we stand, from the here and now, a criterion for evaluating the justice of our society. As Rawls stresses, the relevant normative point of view is not a view from nowhere, 'from a certain place beyond the world', but a 'view from somewhere'; 'it is a certain form of thought and feeling that rational persons can adopt within the world' (1999a: 514; 1993: 44). A conception of justice, in this sense, is a social point of view rooted in our self-understanding and the tendencies of our world, which is employed in evaluating our historically evolved social institutions, and serves as a public criterion for continued political dialogue. The question is how to account for the requirements of justice, if the concept of justice is so conceived. If the role of justice is to provide a social point of view that people can endorse and share despite their moral disagreement, then, as Rawls concludes, justice is best accounted for by reasoning on the basis of shared public ideals embedded in the political culture.[2]

The argument for social justice on *public* grounds proceeds in two consecutive stages. In the first stage, Rawls argues that when questions of social justice are at stake, we ought to bracket our philosophical disagreements about moral truth, and work out the basic norms of our society on the basis of shared public ideals. Second, he examines whether such a political conception of justice can be affirmed (or not) from within the different moral and religious doctrines; in his terminology, whether a conception of justice can be the object of an overlapping consensus among reasonable comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1993: 140–1). The principles are justified, in the political sense, only if both requirements are met. That is, if the principles can be worked out on public grounds, without reference to a particular philosophical doctrine, and if they can gain support by people holding a variety of moral views. These assumptions are, then, built into the political conception of justice, which together support the possibility of public reason in the political arena. Let me examine these two stages in more detail.

In the *first stage* of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls draws on public ideals in justifying a political conception of justice; a conception is political insofar as it makes no reference to any specific moral or religious tradition (freestanding), and it draws on fundamental ideas implicit in the public culture (Freeman 2007: 332). The public ideals he takes to be implicit in the political culture (i.e. in democratic institutions) is a morally laden characterization of the nature and purpose of a democratic society ('idea of society') and the self-conception of its members as citizens ('political conception of the person'): 'society as a fair system of social cooperation between free and equal persons viewed as fully

cooperating members of a society over a complete life' (ibid.: 9). How must we understand this ideal notion of a society? An appealing way to grasp it is as Rawls' best attempt at capturing the general rationale underlying a democratic polity, by making explicit what is implicit in its political institutions.

Once the principles of justice are worked out on public grounds, in the *second stage* of the theory, Rawls examines whether the political conception of justice can be the object of an overlapping consensus among the plurality of moral and religious views. The challenge is whether principles that claim to make no reference to particular moral ideals, but to allegedly shared public ideals, have any potential in gaining support and allegiance from citizens.

Does liberal theory aim at accommodating all kinds of pluralism we find around ourselves? Rawls introduces an important threshold, beyond which his theory cannot make any further claim to potential accommodation. As he writes, the kind of pluralism that is a relevant constraint on a liberal theory of justice is '*reasonable pluralism*', that is the 'normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of free institutions' (ibid.: xviii). Reasonable pluralism contains a double assumption: (1) a factual assumption concerning the exercise of human reason under free conditions; and (2) a moral assumption about willing cooperation (Waldron 2004: 95). The first assumption is that competent reasoners living under free institutions will tend to arrive at different conclusions about a life worthy of living, and the goals worthy of pursuing; i.e. they will come to hold different reasonable comprehensive doctrines. The second assumption is that reasonable citizens are willing to cooperate with others on fair terms (acceptable to each from their own standpoint), have the capacity to recognize the nature of their disagreement as reasonable, and are ready to bring their ideas to the political arena as equals. The qualified question in the second stage is, then, whether the principles of justice can be affirmed by citizens so characterized: citizens who might disagree about the valuable goals to pursue in life, but still want to cooperate with others as equals and work out regulative principles that could be accepted from the standpoint of others.

Two further points call for clarification. The first point concerns the sense in which public ideals and the principles derived can be shared; in what sense do they constitute the object of a *consensus*. As Rawls (1993: 39) says, 'the idea of consensus is easily misunderstood given the idea of consensus used in everyday politics'. The relevant distinction is the one between a consensus conception and convergence conception of public justification; a distinction famously made by Fred d'Agostino (1996). In his use of the term, a consensus conception requires that we all have the same reason to endorse a principle or law. In this sense the overlapping consensus is not a real consensus. Rather, for Rawls, it is enough

if citizens converge on the political conception and find its justification from within their own comprehensive views (d'Agostino 1996: 30).

The second point concerns the *depth* of the consensus. Rawls emphasizes that the object of the overlapping consensus are not only the principles of justice, but also the public ideals from which the principles are constructed:

> The consensus goes down to the fundamental ideas within which justice as fairness is worked out. It supposes agreement deep enough to reach such ideas as those of society as a fair system of cooperation and of citizens as reasonable and rational and free and equal. (Rawls 1993: 149)

That is, it is not enough that liberal and religious views converge on the *principles* regulating a society; they must also converge on the *justificatory premises*: (i) on the normative ideals of society and its members, as he lays them out; and (ii) on the idea that under conditions of reasonable pluralism public justification is a normative requirement; i.e. public ideals constitute a good starting point for reasoning about justice. In short, reasonable citizens must converge on the *idea* and the *source* of public justification. If most of us (reasonable citizens) can agree that the appropriate form of justification for questions of justice must rest on public grounds, only then can a freestanding political justification of the principles receive general support and serve as a public point of view under conditions of pluralism. Once a general commitment to public justification is obtained from within the different liberal and religious views, only then can we fully observe the requirement of refraining from doctrinal reasons in political discussion, which allows us to appropriately exercise public reason in the political arena.

## 3. Public Justification: Moral vs. Practical Considerations

Why opt for a political foundation for justice? Many have taken Rawls to say that his political conception of justice draws on allegedly shared public ideals as mere facts about liberal democracies. This challenge has, at least, two versions. G. A. Cohen (2003) has argued that the Rawlsian justificatory strategy fails, insofar as facts alone cannot ground normative principles. Cohen's thesis is that, 'it is always a further principle that confers on a fact its principle grounding power' (ibid.: 215). That is, there must always be a further normative consideration that makes those facts relevant in justification. Cohen, then, concludes that the Rawlsian ideal of 'persons regarding themselves as

free and equal' cannot be a sheer fact about democratic societies but it 'either embodies or presupposes a fact-insensitive normative principle' (ibid.: 222).

Jürgen Habermas (1995) has challenged the Rawlsian political turn in a similar way. He maintained that Rawls' basic concepts (public ideals) contain moral intuitions, intuitions that are 'actually *found* in the practices and institutions of a democratic society' (ibid.: 120). In his reading of the overlapping consensus, he takes Rawls to be confusing the 'actual acceptance' of a conception of justice with its 'justified acceptability' (ibid.: 122). He, then, concludes that *de facto* agreement on public values is a historically contingent fact, and, as such, it lacks moral content and cannot serve as a basis for a theory of justice.

On my view, the above critics miss their target, insofar as they fail to appreciate that Rawls' political justification neither amounts to grounding principles in facts alone, nor is it a strategic move motivated by practical considerations of wider appeal or political stability. Rawls can rebut the above challenges, if one can show that a political conception of justice does not rest on facts alone, and that the move towards political justification can be supported on *moral* grounds, and not merely on *practical* grounds. This can be shown in the following way. Rawls' critics focus on a fact-like element in his theory; namely the fact that certain moral assumptions are embedded in political culture, and this *fact of embeddedness* seemingly provides the foundation for the justificatory enterprise. Rather than concentrating on public ideals, the political culture and whether their relation is factual or normative, I argue, we must take a closer look at the *reason why* public ideals serve as starting points in justification, in the first place. The point that deserves more careful consideration, then, is the reason why public justification is our preferred view of justification. Following this line, in what follows I would like to show that Rawls has not given up on the normative project, but has shifted the normative project to the meta-ethical level, i.e. to the reasons for affirming a specific view about justification.

As we have seen, the practical interpretation rests justice on rather shaky foundations and leaves room for a number of charges claiming that facts, and facts alone, provide inappropriate grounds for principles of justice. One way to save the Rawlsian political project is by showing that the practical interpretation is not the only interpretation available, and to offer an alternative one.

Scanlon (2003) provides us with very helpful insights in this direction. On his view, democratic public culture and the moral ideals it contains neither constitute the relevant starting point for a political conception because it happens to be the one we find ourselves in, nor should we prefer public justification for political stability alone. Scanlon argues that when questions

of basic justice are at stake we ought to offer each other political justifications 'by appeal to political values that everyone in the society, regardless of their comprehensive views, has reason to care about'. Doctrinal justification will 'therefore not only be destabilizing but also fail to show proper respect for these citizens, who are owed reasons that they could reasonably accept' (ibid.: 160). Public justification, on this account, is a normative requirement; that of respect towards our fellow citizens as our equals in justifying and settling the basic norms of our shared society.

Following Scanlon, the *moral* consideration for endorsing public justification runs as follows. Public justification requires us to make reference only to publicly available reasons, assuming that they are the ones every citizen has reason to care about. It asks us to bracket our particular comprehensive views about life, on the basis of an overriding commitment to fellow citizens as having equal standing in justification. In other words, justifying the basic norms of our social arrangement on public grounds is motivated by an overriding moral concern with citizens as equally valid sources of claims upon the way a society and its institutions are organized.

So, the underlying moral commitment that public justification cannot do without is to *treat others as equally valid sources of claims in justification*. This is, I believe, the sense in which the public ideal of the free and equal citizen can be best understood in the Rawlsian theory: citizens as having equal moral and political status and being legitimate sources of claims over how the basic structure of a society can affect their life expectations. The conception of the person, which represents the moral standing of citizens in a democratic polity, is the moral ground that selects public justification as the preferred method, and this is the very same idea that is publicly justifiable given its embeddedness in our political culture (Rawls 1993: 191). Our liberal commitments draw us towards an idea of public justification, which in a dominantly liberal political context identifies as its starting point the very same ideal. Treating others as free and equal in their political status requires us to rest our arguments on political grounds, and because it so happens that the idea of free and equal citizen is the one embedded in the public culture of a society, the Rawlsian argument can proceed without essential modifications towards the same requirements of justice. The core conceptions that Rawls takes to be the theoretical essentials of his theory, then, have a double role: they are comprehensive ideals of liberal origin that select the appropriate method of justification, and they are public ideals that ground the political conception of justice (Mulhall and Swift 1992: 190).

If such an argument holds, then the reason for endorsing political justification as the appropriate method is essentially a moral one and not

merely a practical one. First, we must assume that citizens are free as valid sources of claims upon the political authority that is exercised over them. Second, we must assume that citizens have an equal standing *vis-à-vis* each other as citizens and, therefore, must be committed to justifying the norms of the polity to each other from an equal standing. Based on these assumptions we can come to recognize that the only form of justification that meets these assumptions under conditions of pluralism is one that rests on shared public grounds.

## 4. Conclusion

I have shown that the double requirement of refraining from and appealing to doctrinal reasons can be made coherent within the Rawlsian theoretical framework, by careful attention to his two-stage justificatory strategy. I have also argued that political liberalism is a workable solution to accommodating pluralism only on the condition that a core commitment to public justification as a normative requirement is attainable; that is, only if citizens are willing to cooperate with each other on terms that are justifiable to others from their own standpoint. The remaining question, then, for the possibility of moral pluralism within social unity is whether the norm of public justification among fellow citizens is reconcilable with the different doctrinal conceptions of the good; whether the idea of treating others as our equals in justifying the basic norms of our polity is an idea that can find wide support in a morally divided society; whether subordinating doctrinal reasons to public reason is within the limits of human possibility.

Liberals, who ascribe a special moral standing to persons as equally valid sources of moral claims, have essentially moral reasons, not mere practical ones, to justify their conception of justice to others on public grounds. The more difficult task, however, is to find similar sources in religious doctrines; to understand what reasons, if any, religious believers have for public justification given their *own* systems of belief. The success of the Rawlsian enterprise seems to stand or fall on whether such a moral support for public justification itself can be found within non-liberal views. Rawls anticipates the success, from a philosophical point of view, by putting his hopes into the effectiveness of civic education and the moral sensibilities we are likely to develop through political socialization under democratic institutions.

# 3. Public Reason and Models of Judgement[1*]

*Daniele Santoro*

## 1. Premise

John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* represents the most systematic attempt to defend an inclusive conception of liberalism within a Kantian conception of reason. Rawls characterizes the idea of political liberalism as a freestanding conception of justice, which specifies the fair terms of cooperation between free and equal citizens within a pluralistic society. According to Rawls, the stability of social cooperation depends on the availability of an *overlapping consensus* between different and yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In particular, an overlapping consensus holds when the principles of justice that govern the basic institutions of a society are *endorsed* by those comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral views rooted in the background culture of a well-ordered society (Rawls 1993: 134). The overlapping consensus delimits the space of Public Reason, which constitutes the domain of practical reasoning governed by a fundamental 'criterion of reciprocity': acceptable reasons and arguments are those that each subject would reasonably believe others could accept.

My purpose in this chapter is to analyse the epistemological presuppositions of this framework and highlight the dualism between the abstract model of reasonableness implied by the theory and the role of comprehensive doctrines. My claim is that this dualism arises within the classical model of judgement, and leads to fundamental disagreements when hard cases involving essentially contested concepts are at stake. The diagnosis of the problem will lead us to recognize that the source of the dualism lies in the Kantian conception of judgement based on formal principles. As a solution, I will consider a different account – the so-called model of reflective judgement – which still originates in Kant, though not as a part of his practical philosophy. I will defend an

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alternative understanding of the concept of public reason as an argumentative practice whose standards of correctness do not lie in the appeal to formal constraints on universalizable principles of conduct, but in dispositional capacities to deliberate on the basis of salient features of the circumstances of judgement. I will call them practice-based judgements. Whereas deliberative judgements are usually taken as conclusions of deductive inferences for which a principle is already given (this is Kant's notion of determinant judgement), the model of practice-based judgements relies upon standards of congruence implicit in the practice of normative discussion. Kant's concept of reflective judgement offers a model for such an alternative epistemology, and discloses important connections with the republican legacy of civic virtues.

## 2. The Two-stage Account of Political Liberalism and its Idiosyncrasies

In recent years,[2] issues concerning religion and democracy have come to the foreground in discussions on the availability of an overlapping consensus. An overlapping consensus – in Rawls' formulation – is more than a *modus vivendi* governed by mere interest and compromise. An overlapping consensus is a stable and durable agreement among different comprehensive and reasonable doctrines, which provide support to a set of constitutional principles for a well-ordered society. The ultimate justification of the constitutional essentials does not rely on any particular doctrine, but it is based on the availability of what he labels a 'political conception of justice'.

Rawls' exposition of the model of political justice comes in two stages. The first stage is a justification of social cooperation based on the classical argument from the reciprocity of advantages. The model here is still represented by the device of the *original position*, whose outcome, the two principles of justice, is the nucleus of *justice as fairness* (Rawls 1993: 140–1). Justice as fairness in the first stage should be understood as a freestanding view: it is a *political* conception in that it functions as a 'module, an essential constituent part, which in different ways fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it', but still does not rely upon any specific religious, metaphysical, or epistemological doctrine (Rawls 1993: 144–5).

In the second stage, the comprehensive doctrines provide a basis of acceptance of the set of fundamental constitutional principles – the so-called 'constitutional essentials' – which represent a historical, though approximate, expression of the freestanding conception. A freestanding view must ensure

unity and stability for a well-ordered society, which can only be given by an overlapping consensus among reasonable doctrines. Two features characterize the idea of overlapping consensus. First, in such a consensus the different comprehensive doctrines are able to endorse the same political conception, which – in turn – will be justified according to reasons already affirmed within each comprehensive view (Rawls 1993: 133–4; Freeman 2003: 36). Second, the introduction of the 'overlapping consensus' marks an important shift from *A Theory of Justice*. While in the earlier work Rawls undertook the project of showing why members of a well-ordered society would converge on the two principles of justice on the basis of the same (Kantian) comprehensive view, in *Political Liberalism* 'Rawls undertakes to show that people would have reason to affirm a sense of justice based on his two principles no matter what reasonable comprehensive view they come to hold' (Scanlon 2003: 160).

The two levels of the theory obviously interact: the outcome of an impartial, though hypothetical situation, gains support from the point of view of substantive moral, religious, and philosophical doctrines. But, however elegant it can be in its articulation, this picture remains ambiguous under a normative profile. I wish to discuss three aspects of the theory.

**2.1. Comprehensive views and the thick veil of ignorance**

The two-stage model does not explain the normative role of the comprehensive views: although these doctrines are part of a general scheme of justification (the overlapping consensus provides stability, and furthermore, those doctrines must also be *reasonable*), on the other hand they fall beyond the veil of ignorance of the original position:

> [I]n the original position, the parties are not allowed to know the social position of those they represent, or the particular comprehensive doctrine of the person each represents. The same idea is extended to information about people's race and ethnic group, sex and gender, and their various native endowments such as strength and intelligence. (Rawls 1993: 24–5)

This is what Rawls calls the *thick* veil of ignorance. As I said, Rawls' idea is that a free endorsement of a political conception of justice will gain the support of citizens who hold reasonable comprehensive doctrines: an overlapping consensus will be realized when such support is wide enough. However, he adds, this 'suggests that we leave aside how people's comprehensive doctrines connect with the content of the political conception of justice and regard that content as arising from various fundamental ideas drawn from the public political culture of a democratic society'. The best way to model this support

is by putting people's comprehensive doctrines behind the veil, because this will 'enable us to find a political conception of justice that … serves as a public basis of justification in a society marked by the fact of reasonable pluralism' (Rawls 1993: 25f.). But the argument does not follow straightforwardly. First, it is unclear how a political conception emended by the accidental aspects of one's own comprehensive membership can express principles of justice that would gain support from substantive doctrines. If a political conception models the ideal of impartiality and reciprocity of social cooperation, than the support from overlapping consensus seems unnecessary, since it is not *qua* members of a comprehensive doctrine, but as *reasonable* persons that they would accept the terms of that agreement. Viceversa, if we deem such support as sufficient for the stability of a political conception of justice, then it will be the idea of a freestanding conception to appear redundant. As an example, consider the case in support of toleration: if it is assumed to be an implicit value shared by all reasonable doctrines, nothing more is required to be added to its justification, whereas if toleration is taken as a principle of reason, its justification will rely on rational capacities, its justification will rely primarily on rational capacities, not on implicit values.

**2.2. Political vs. comprehensive identity**

Rawls calls 'political' the idea of the person required by political liberalism. The main feature of a political conception of the person is that it does not presuppose any particular metaphysical or comprehensive view. Moreover, persons are capable of forming a political identity beyond their given comprehensive membership when they view themselves and the others as free and equal citizens, not 'tied to the pursuit of the particular conception of the good that they affirm at any given time' (Rawls 1993: 30). That such identity is not attached to any particular comprehensive view is proved by the fact that

> when citizens convert from one religion to another, or no longer affirm an established religious faith, they do not cease to be, for questions of political justice, the same persons they were before. There is no loss of what we may call their public, or institutional, identity … (Ibid.)

Moreover, an identity specific of the public domain exists, which cannot be achieved from the point of view of a comprehensive membership:

> We can imagine a society in which basic rights and recognized claims depend on religious affiliation and social class. Such a society has a different

> political conception of the person. It lacks a conception of equal citizenship, for this conception goes with that of a democratic society of free and equal citizens. (Ibid.)

This last statement sounds at odds with the previous claim that a political conception of justice will be endorsed by each citizen as member of a comprehensive doctrine: either the democratic identity is specific of a political conception of justice, or it is not. If it is, the first stage in the exposition of the theory cannot be a merely descriptive or expressive device: it would not just serve the function of modelling ideals already implicit in reasonable doctrines, but something more would be implied, a grasp of the ideal of equal freedom that adds to, or even prescinds from, the content of those doctrines. This additional and specific democratic identity would require achieving a conception of ourselves that cannot be grasped from the perspective of a contingent comprehensive doctrine. On the contrary, if our political identity were not specific of a higher-level conception of justice, it would just be one among the many comprehensive identities we could have happened to have, that is just another way of conceiving of citizens that we received from the liberal constitutional tradition. Rawls is aware of such a difficulty, when he recognizes that our sense of identity is certainly tied up with deep aims and commitments that shape the entire sphere of both political and non-political life, but he insists that a commitment of a distinctive sort is attached to a political identity. For Rawls, the source of those commitments is the citizens' view of themselves as 'self-authenticating sources of valid claims' and as 'capable of taking responsibility for their ends'. He also adds that the idea of responsibility for ends is 'implicit in the public political culture and discernible in practices. A political conception of the person articulates this idea and fits it into the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation' (Rawls 1993: 32–4). But, the argument does not seem to bring support to the idea of a higher-order political conception of the person enduring over time. Quite the contrary indeed, any argument to the effect that commitments and responsibility are essential components of one's endorsement of a theory or system of beliefs faces a general problem: if the commitments associated with one's political identity overrides our comprehensive loyalties, why do we need an overlapping consensus at all? Why, in other words, should we reconcile our political and non-political commitments?

### 2.3. Religious commitments and impartiality

There is a third case in which the tension comes to the foreground. This is the case of public reason. Public reason specifies at the deepest level 'the basic

moral and political values that are to determine a constitutional democratic government's relation to its citizens and their relation to one another' (Rawls 1993: 212–54). Within the domain of public reason, citizens exercise their deliberative capacities on the most important issues concerning public life, on matters of constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice:[3]

> Public Reason is characteristic of democratic people: it is the reason of its citizens, of those sharing the status of equal citizenship. The subject of their reason is the good of the public: what the political conception of justice requires of society's basic structure of institutions, and of the purposes and ends they are to serve. (Rawls 1993: 213)

Rawls specifies that the content of public reason is given by (a) the political conception of justice that articulates the two principles of justice for the basic structure of society; and (b) the 'guidelines of inquiry that specify ways of reasoning and criteria for the kinds of information relevant for political questions'. The procedures of reasoning are essential within the domain of public reason because 'without [them] substantive principles cannot be applied and this leaves the political conception incomplete and fragmentary' (Rawls 1993: 222–3). Two kinds of political values are attached to the twofold content: values of political justice, and values specific of the public reason, which includes 'political virtues as reasonableness and readiness to honor the (moral) duty of civility' (ibid.), that is 'the duty of citizens of explaining to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be understood by the political values of public reason' (Rawls 1993: 217).

The appeal to such virtues is a fundamental move in Rawls' strategy to explain how the appeal to public reason is compatible with the support of overlapping consensus: 'How can it be either reasonable or rational – Rawls asks – when basic matters are at stake, for citizens to appeal only to the public conception of justice and not to the whole truth as they see it?' (ibid.). The answer is given by reference to the 'principle of liberal legitimacy', which states that political power is justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with those constitutional essentials which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of those principles that they would accept as reasonable persons:

> When the political conception is supported by an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, the *paradox* of public reason disappears. The union of the duty of civility with the great values of the

> political yields the idea of citizens governing themselves in ways that each thinks the others might reasonably be expected to accept; and this ideal in turn is supported by the comprehensive doctrines reasonable persons affirm. (Rawls 1993: 218; emphasis added)

But the appeal to the duty of civility, which expresses in the form of a virtue the principle of reciprocity embedded in a political conception of justice, can solve the paradox only at the cost of circularity. An overlapping consensus will support the political conception of justice as the common basis of justification for citizens within the sphere of public reason only to the extent that those doctrines are already *reasonable*. And what determines their reasonableness is their recognition of the principle of reciprocity. Stated in these terms, the disagreement between reasonable doctrines does not seem to be a serious challenge for political liberalism: there could never be a genuine disagreement between different comprehensive doctrines, not only because they could not disagree on matters of basic justice, but – and more importantly – because the ideal of reasonableness imposes a hierarchy between public and non-public reasons: public reason and its principle of legitimacy is honoured by citizens when, among other things, they give 'overriding weight to the ideal it prescribes'. Citizens who affirm comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines and who think that non-political and transcendent values are the true ground of political values, are not unreasonable, since nothing precludes them from justifying within their own view the political values of public reason in terms of some revealed truth (Rawls 1993: 241). There is a symmetry between the political conception of the person and the description of public reason: political identity can receive support from one's own comprehensive identity, but the former is more stable and enduring over time; likewise, a political conception can be defended in the light of 'transcendent' justifications, but only those reasons that are open to universal acceptance will count as public.

I believe that here lies a misconception of the sorts of commitments involved in the public domain. Religious beliefs are paradigmatic cases of conviction that have a deep impact not only on the political identity of citizens, but also in that they express a distinctive endorsement of a comprehensive doctrine. A distinctive aspect of religion lies in this dual dimension: as with any practice, one needs to be acquainted and engage in religious practices in order to grasp the meaningfulness of a transcendent view. The materials for that apprenticeship are given in history, in culture, and in anthropological roots. One cannot understand the value of symbols without being exposed to them as signs in the first place, which acquire meaning by means of education.

But, as a system of beliefs, one needs to endorse those values, connect the symbols to an expression of a fundamental truth, and accept that truth as stemming from a transcendent point of view. For instance, within the sphere of Christian religion, the source of this achievement is the gift of faith. But, within this dual dimension, citizens of faith appear as idiosyncratic subjects for any theory of justice that constructs mutual agreement as the reference point of impartiality.

To sum up, throughout the theory we find a stark dualism between a freestanding and a comprehensive point of view: both in the design of the political conception of justice and of the subjects of justice (the first stage), and in the articulation of the concept of public reason (the second stage). With these elements at stake, we are now in the position to formulate a crucial objection to the feasibility of political liberalism: while according to the freestanding point of view, deliberation must be issued for the 'right reasons' – that is, for the reasons that persons conceived in their political identity would reasonably be expected to accept and will expect that the others would do as well – according to the comprehensive point of view, those reasons must be connected with the full identity of citizens. Can the poles of the dualism be reconciled, or is it rather an inconsistency inherent to the theory?

## 3. Models of Judgement and the Problem of Disagreement

A way to oppose the objection is to claim that the dualism is only apparent: once the premises of a political conception of justice, along with the principles of justice, are shared by different yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines, we have all we need for an overlapping consensus, so the dualism disappears. But this argument does not seem convincing: it confines the overlapping consensus to the mere function of confirming that a political conception is already in place, against Rawls' intent to argue for the distinctive normative role of comprehensive doctrines.

I want to argue that the dualism is inherent to Rawls' political liberalism, and that it cannot be reconciled within the limits of the theory. In order to defend this claim, I will adopt a diagnostic attitude, and look at the epistemological presuppositions of the theory. More precisely, I propose to focus on the paradigm of judgement implicit in the model of public reason. This paradigm consists in the idea that reasonableness is a capacity exerted by appeal to principles, where principles are conceived as *formal constraints* on justifiable judgements. The formal constraints on judgements determine the kind or reasons that reasonable citizens would accept in the practice of

public reasoning. More specifically, these constraints define the justifiability of one's judgements in terms of the capacity of eliciting the appropriate reasons and motivations for social cooperation. Such constraints on judgements play a pivotal, although hidden, role in Rawls' constructivist apparatus: once combined, they provide an epistemological foundation for the overlapping consensus. A key point of this 'principled model of judgement' is that such constraints do not apply to procedures, but to the agents' capacity of choice. They are part of what we may call the *faculty of deliberation*, a capacity of drawing conclusions and actions from premises on the basis of justifiable arguments. According to this reading, agents conceived as moral persons suitably motivated to cooperate on a durable basis over basic principles of justice are reasonable if they possess the faculty of deliberating within the domain of public reasons from a point of view acceptable to all.

Let me analyse a bit more in detail the philosophical sources of this approach. We can grasp an understanding of this idea by looking at its philosophical paternity, Kant's conception of judgement in the second Critique. Kant's idea of rule-bound reasoning is expressed is his derivation of the principle of practical reason. In the opening definition of the first book of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he states that:

> Practical principles are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or maxims, when the condition is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will; but they are objective, or practical laws, when the condition is cognized as objective, that is, as holding for the will of every rational being. (Kant 1997: 17)

This claim serves to establish the following theorem in the deduction of the fundamental law of morality: 'If a rational being is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form' (Kant 1997: 24). The passage makes clear that the principles of practical laws are principles in virtue of their form, but that the form of those principles should not be understood as the shape of a content, but rather as a constraint of the will, independently from the content of the maxim.

In the same section, Kant clarifies that the connection between principles and form is given by the specification of what that form is: maxims – Kant says – are practical principles only insofar as they can be thought as principles given in the form that make them fit to express a universal law, which is the only ground to determine the will as purely moral.

The Rawlsian constraints on the reasons for cooperation have the Kantian form of formal principles governing the will to cooperation. They figure in crucial parts of both stages of the theory. In the first stage, they are expressed by the idea that a political conception of justice (and its two principles of justice) can be accepted only if it is justifiable to all. Moreover, they appear in the political conception of the person as a moral power, that is as a 'capacity to understand, to apply, and to act from the public conception of justice which characterizes the fair terms of social cooperation' (Rawls 1999a: 398).

They also have a role within the second stage – the domain of public reason that governs overlapping consensus – where they take the form of the principle of reciprocity that governs practical reasoning and deliberative judgements. However, that the Rawlsian individuals can be thought as persons potentially sensible to Kantian reasons does not yet provide a solution to the problem of disagreement. The Kant-Rawls conception of justifiability assumes that the point of view of the persons can be extended from the subjective perspective of the Kantian moral imperative to cover the inter-subjective scope of the principle of reciprocity. But, such a principle (along with its substantive cognate, 'respect'), remains undetermined in its pure Kantian formality: a person can consistently universalize a set of maxims in which she believes without the outcome of this procedure being compatible with the universal maxims of her fellow-beings. What we face here is the same dualism that we have faced earlier, couched in a different vocabulary: the comprehensive (moral, religious, philosophical) commitments attached to one's identity as citizen are hardly translatable as particular expressions of the formality of a principle, because those commitments cannot always, nor necessarily, be detached from the content of a comprehensive claim. In shifting from the subjective point of view (of a particular comprehensive association), to the inter-subjective dimension of public reason, individuals may well lose their identity as citizens without retaining any higher-order conception of themselves as political members.

In relation to this last point, we face the problem of reasonable disagreement. According to Rawls, the capacity of having a conception of the good is part of the description of the rational endowments of the parties in the original position, a capacity which turns out to be essential to describe the particular conceptions of the good of democratic citizens. Notice, however, that not all conceptions license justifiable judgements: often abortion, euthanasia, same-sex relationships and other issues of public interest express views justifiable only to one's own comprehensive loyalty. As a matter of public reason, such disagreements show also that the endorsement of the same constitutional frame is not sufficient for a stable convergence between comprehensive doctrines,

since disagreements of this sort are not local, but involve a more profound disaccord over fundamental conceptions. Rawls does recognize the potential threat of this criticism, but his answer relies on the resources of abstraction of the same Kantian model of principled judgement which is at the root of fundamental disagreement:

> The work of abstraction … is not gratuitous: not abstraction for abstraction's sake. Rather, it is a way of continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser generality have broken down. We should be prepared to find that the deeper the conflict, the higher the level of abstraction to which we must ascend to get a clear and uncluttered view of its roots. (Rawls 1993: 45–6)

Is this a viable solution to yield an overlapping consensus? Cass Sunstein has argued that abstract conceptions, rather than representing idealized expressions of fundamental ideals implicit in the public political culture of a society, are *incompletely theorized agreements*. According to Sunstein:

> the distinctly legal solution to the problem of pluralism is to produce agreement on particulars, with the thought that often people who are puzzled by general principles, or who disagree on them, can agree on individual cases. When we disagree on the relatively abstract, we can often find agreement by moving to lower levels of generality. Rawls is more interested in the opposite possibility – that people who disagree on much else can agree on political abstractions and use that agreement for political purposes. (Sunstein 1996: 47)

Although Sunstein refers to legal decisions, his view that higher levels of abstraction do not make overlapping consensus more likely than middle- or lower-level principles is a telling objection against the Kant-Rawls model of judgement. According to Sunstein, incompletely theorized agreements depend on the supposition that

> [rules] that operate as mid- and low-level generalizations can settle all cases in advance.
>
> First: Rules cannot do what they are supposed to do, since substantive disagreements may break out at the moment of application. Rules are not quite what they appear to be. They do not settle all cases in advance. The inevitability of interpretation undermines the aspiration to rule-bound justice.

> Second: The generality of rules, and their blindness to particulars, is not always a virtue but is often a political vice, because a just system allows equity or adaptation to the particulars of individual cases. Rules are obtuse; ideal justice is flexible and based on the situation at hand. (Sunstein 1996: 121)

As a complement to the rule-based approach, Sunstein proposes to focus on aspects of law that require attention to the particulars. But, one does not need to follow him on the doctrine of casuistry to recognize that within the domain of public reason, disagreements are more likely to persist if conflicts among judgements are shifted to the level of the normative *principles* governing the axiology of comprehensive doctrines.

## 4. The Practice-based Model of Judgement: Normativity without Principles

Although the problematic Rawlsian model of principled judgement has a Kantian paternity, Kant himself offers us an alternative in his *Critique of the Capacity of Judgement* where he draws the distinction between *determinant* and *reflective* judgement. The determinant judgement consists in thinking 'the particular as contained under the universal' (Kant 2007: §4). But, this can be done only if one is able to identify a principle or rule, under which the concrete case can be subsumed as an instance. A determinant judgement states that if such subsumption is the case, the judgement will be correct. Differently, reflective judgement is the type of judgement in which 'only the particular is given, for which the universal has to be found' (Kant 2007: §4). While the ascending path from the particular to the universal is what we take when we look for a *general* principle (both practical or theoretical) under which to subsume our judgements, the same is not possible for the reflective judgement.

In the last decade, many authors have sought to extend the model of reflective judgement to include within its scope the sphere of practical deliberation. In particular, Alessandro Ferrara has recently presented a view of reflective judgement as the model of choice for thinking of validity when no clear-cut, generally accepted or otherwise established 'universal' can be invoked for answering it or testing available answers within the domain of public reason (Ferrara 2008: 20). According to the *judgement-paradigm* defended by Ferrara, a critique of the formalism of principles should not undermine the availability of a universal point of view. Rather, a non-

formalistic understanding of normativity opens up the domain of practical reason to explain cases in which the validity of judgements cannot be thought under the universal claims of a principled reason. Such a move puts forward a conception of judgement that reconciles 'normativity and universalism … in the form of an anticipation of the general consensus of those who possess the necessary expertise for assessing the matter, no matter where they are situated' (Ferrara 2008: 22). The idea here is to replace the 'normativity of a *law* or *principle* with the normativity of the *example*' when we recognize that the historical and cultural context exerts a cogency outside its original domain by showing the internal congruence of the exemplary case, a subjective stance which becomes a model in virtue of its being expressive of the authenticity of the subjects (2008: 20–1).

Against the model of reflective judgement it can be argued that its universalistic force cannot but ultimately rest on the formalism of practical reason. In fact, the objection goes, although the grasp of the universal significance of examples can be also attained by focusing on the historical and reconstructive dimension of practical reason, still the significance of a retrospective understanding does not account yet for the bindingness of the judgement, especially for what concerns general principles, which are supposed to be valid not only *hic et nunc* but also in a forward-looking perspective. So, there is no normativity without principles in the practical domain.

In order to reply to this objection, we need to supplement the model of reflective judgement with an account of what capacities are required to agents to yield such judgements, and show that these capacities are not constrained by the formal requirements of principles. I will outline here the main line of thought, and connect it with a political interpretation of the model of reflective judgement.

The exercise of reason can reconcile exemplarity and universalism only if the judgement is thought of as an exercise of deliberative capacities in the form of a judgement based on *practices*, within which the peculiar *congruence* of concrete cases provides salience to the examples. Exemplary judgements function as a paradigm neither for their irreproducible uniqueness, nor in virtue of a general guiding-principle, but in virtue of its capacity to reveal a concrete model of behaviour, which brings with itself an *emulative* power: rather than conceiving the particular under the universal, the particular embeds features potentially relevant to other particular cases, elicited by the *analogical* reasoning that plays a fundamental role in deliberative judgements as shown, for instance, in the practice of law. Analogical reasoning is a distinctive feature of human rationality: it does not presuppose reference to principles more than the recognition of symmetrical figures presupposes

the knowledge of the law of constructions of the geometrical space. Besides, analogical reasoning cannot be reduced to intuitions, because it involves a disposition to recognize analogies in a way which is sensitive to the context of judgement and that can be acquired only by means of appropriate training.

The interesting aspect of an analysis based on the primacy of the exemplary judgement is that the ability to spot, grasp the features of exemplarity of a particular action or character, is given by the epistemic capacities required to engage in the practice of public reasoning. In various passages of his works, Rawls seems to recognize a role for such capacities, as when he claims that the principle of reciprocity, the truly animating idea of justice as fairness, is embedded and 'shapes' not only the relations among citizens, but also their way of conducting public discussions (Rawls 1993: li). Reciprocity is a paradigmatic case of the exercise of reflective judgements in practical reasoning because considerations of what would count as a reciprocal behaviour play a role both in the premises and the conclusions of public arguments. Here, the premises are given by the shared context of other concrete judgements and interpretations of the salience of exemplary cases, and conclusions are characterized by the inferential correctness in practical deliberation.

The case of reciprocity offers us a way to understand how the capacities required for the exercise of reflective judgements have a specific political dimension. I want to suggest that the best way to understand them is along the lines of civic republicanism. According to republicans, reciprocity and truthfulness, sincerity and authenticity, respect and curiosity, open-mindedness, commitment to the good of the public and honouring promises, are those virtues in the light of which everybody would recognize himself and the others as members of a community delimited by the same constitutional essentials. Rawls himself notices that there is no opposition between classical republicanism and his political liberalism (Rawls 1993: 205). Still, he does not dig enough into this comparison to see that the 'active participation of citizens who possess the political virtues needed to maintain a constitutional regime' (ibid.) is not merely analogous of a political conception of justice, but a more basic and necessary element of the societal bond, the motivational element that makes sense of the willingness to cooperate on fair and equal terms.

The civic virtues of public reason are not 'virtues' merely in the sense of a disposition of character, neither they are 'civic' merely in the sense of referring to enclosed communities. They are, rather, 'virtues' in that they are concepts embedded in a practice of deliberation, capacities internalized to become appropriate responses to the cases at stake: not merely natural responses, but mindful and contentful reasons elicited by those cases. Moreover, they

are 'civic' in the sense that they take into account the participatory ideal that justice is not a given, but a point of view which reflects a communal ideal of citizenry. In being epistemic capacities sensitive to the novelty of whatever a plural society might present to them, the deliberative abilities embedded in civic virtues can be thought according to the paradigm of a reflective judgement. Absent the universal principles or laws, they cannot be explained in terms of the proceduralist view of principle-based reasoning. Indeed, we should admit, they require the sharing of a vast background of judgements and consolidated practices, but those very judgements and practices, rather than precluding the elaboration of a novel response to unforeseen challenges of pluralism, orient their interpretation, and help to find, or at least to envisage, a possible consensus.

## 6. Conclusion: A Role for Religious Convictions after All

Let me briefly reassess the problem we started with. There is a dualism between the demands of reasonableness and the point of view of comprehensive identities, which is mirrored in the idiosyncratic view of the persons: subjects of justice are both required to yield a political identity and not relinquish their moral and religious commitments. To elucidate this dualism, I analysed the case of religious arguments within the public sphere, saying that while they are excluded by the abstract device of the original position, they seem to be required by a full-fledged conception of the overlapping consensus. I proposed that, in order to explain away this dualism, we should pay attention to the paradigm of reflective judgement and to the legacy of republicanism, along with its theory of virtues. But nothing substantive has been said so far on the role of religious views. Now, the answer should be clear at this point: the role of religious convictions is a constitutive element of one's identity as a whole; they are part of the natural history of human beings, and as such they provide significant material in the interpretative practice essential to deliberative reasoning. Commitments, endorsements, and responsibilities of one's own identity cannot be ruled out at will. So, if there is any idiosyncrasy here, it is in the theory of persons, and not in the persons themselves.

But there is a deeper reason to support this conclusion. More than the positive contribution of religious doctrines, it is the diagnosis that should convince us. We have seen that only on a principled view does the dichotomy between principles and judgements lead us to think that one's commitment to freestanding principles can be severed from the commitments to one's own comprehensive beliefs. Renouncing one's comprehensive identity does

not leave us with our political identity; it leaves us with nothing. Once we abandon the model of a principle-based reasoning, we have no right to exclude religious convictions from the domain of public reasoning. So, a second and more fundamental reason for not excluding religious arguments from the sphere of public reasoning is methodological, not substantive: the sources of our political engagement are at one with the precipitate of our past history, in which materials of different sorts, religious and not, are indiscernibly intertwined.

Still, this does not mean that anything goes. Sometimes arguments on points of faith are arguments in bad faith, and should be rejected as such. What I proposed is to look at criteria of acceptability not as predetermined principles, but in the reflective activity involved in making judgements and endorsing commitments to the best of our capacities.

# 4. Hannah Arendt and the Problem of Public Religion

*Gábor Gángó*

Hannah Arendt's concept of public religion *ought* to be found at the crossing point of her religious critique and of her theory of the public sphere. This crossing point, however, is to be discovered nowhere; it does not exist – this study, therefore, cannot but aim to clarify the reason for this non-existence. Arendt – being as she was one of the most significant theorists of the relation between the public and the private spheres, as well as one of the brightest critics of the Christian tradition – never investigated a crucial aspect of their relation: the process of the emergence of public religion that took place right before her very eyes. She considered the idea of public religion and its positive appearance a problem of *religion* and not that of the public realm. For her, the two questions were such a long way apart that, when confronted with public religion, she had to deny point blank even its existence. She found her place on the defensive, and by means of this defensive strategy tried to oppose emerging tendencies, which fully developed in the period after her death.

I want to argue that Arendt's account of public religion pivots on her anthropology. The gap between Arendt's standpoint and that of the theoretician of public religion have become wider since her death, as it is more or less clear now that this social phenomenon was furthered not only by theological or spiritual crises but also by a naturalistic anthropological turn. First, I want to analyse Hannah Arendt's means of eluding the confrontation with the fact of the emergence of public religions; secondly, I turn to examining the progress of public religions using the Arendtian theory about the distinction of public, social and the private realm.

## 1. The Priority of the Private–Public Dichotomy

Hannah Arendt placed religion in a theoretical framework of the public sphere, which, although taking account of the social sphere, does not consider it as politically relevant. The private–public dichotomy is also given

a chronological priority in Arendt's thinking: she had already paid attention to this dichotomy in her study from 1932, 'Berlin Salon', concerning the role of women in the literary life of the German Enlightenment (Arendt 1994c: 61).

Several studies have pointed out that the notions of the political and of the social realm are in opposition in Arendt's thinking and that their relation reveals high tension: the Arendtian notion of the public sphere is, therefore, open to different interpretative strategies (Bernstein 1986: 238; Canovan 1992: 116). This sphere might be interpreted as the state, or as the political community often called *nation*, or even as the space of public discourse, where different collective identities and interests arise (Calhoun 1997: 235). Moreover, according to Arendt's alternative definition, the public sphere is 'where freedom could appear' (Arendt 1961a: 4). On the other hand, Arendt readily accepts that being out of the reach of the public distinguishes, as a crucial criterion, the private sphere from the social and not from the political one (Arendt 1958: 73, 78). Human beings are linked to each other by private affairs and these private affairs go public in the sphere of the social (Canovan 1985: 626).

Arendt's conception of publicness, in itself, could not provide a sufficiently strong argument for the exclusion of public religion from the public realm. As her critics repeatedly observed, the possible issues of public discussion are not and cannot be determined beforehand (Benhabib 1990: 195). According to Robert J. Bernstein's objection, not philosophers but participants of public life decide on what belongs to public affairs. Even if Arendt had accepted that the inventory of public affairs has undergone continuous modification in history, she never conceded that social matters cannot be separated from political ones (Bernstein 1986: 253, 251). Only under the influence of her critics did she alter her point in the debate on her 'Reflections on Little Rock', admitting that the fight for the public sphere is the same as the battle for social justice (Benhabib 1993: 79). Despite accepting in this controversial article that '[t]he only public force that can fight social prejudice is the churches' (Arendt 1959: 53), she did not reconsider the possibility of religion's public role given that the egalitarian perspective never held any fascination for her.

## 2. The Apathy of Mass Society

Hannah Arendt's vision of the social advanced in *The Human Condition* has its historical roots in Alexis de Tocqueville's insights, and in the contemporary context it might be related to David Riesman's works. Nevertheless, Arendt

approached the core problem of her theory – the general apathy towards politics – not in Tocqueville's or Mill's wake, as Riesman did, but in Marx's wake (Arendt 1994a: 20). The works of Tocqueville exerted a substantial, though never fully admitted, impact on Arendt's thinking (Pitkin 1998: 116f.; Canovan 1992: 117). She was to work with Riesman on a greater study which later became *The Lonely Crowd* but because of difference in opinion they split, and she did not realize the projected chapter (Young-Bruehl 1982: 252).

Instead, Arendt developed a social theory as part of her philosophy of history deriving from her gloomy vision of the steady decline of the *homo politicus*. The fact that Aquinas translated Aristotle's *zōon politikon* as '*homo est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis*' was considered by Arendt as a decisive point of this decline (Brunkhorst 2000: 178). The main feature of society, in Arendt's theory, is the lack of action: accordingly she considered conformism the distinctive trait of the social sphere. The more populous a community becomes, she thought, the more the social sphere overtakes the functions of the political and the more it swells at the expense of the private (Arendt 1958: 23, 40, 43f.). The lack of action means the lack of public space as well, since apathy eliminates it (Benhabib 1993: 7). This idea, however, lessens the argumentative force of Hannah Arendt's opinion about refuting public religion since it involves the end of the public sphere before the renewal of religion; therefore, religion seems to penetrate into this apathy and not into the public sphere.

As David Riesman observed, public religion appears when the tradition-directed social apathy is replaced by the non-tradition-directed one (Riesman 1950: 184). Arendt in her essay 'What is authority?' pointed out the interconnectedness of the decline of authority, of power and of religion. Hence it is obvious that measures against political apathy or the end of this apathy will not leave religion untouched. However, Arendt analysed this process only from the point of view of the erosion; her political philosophy remained crisis-centred and, besides enumerating the damages, she never proposed a satisfactory solution whatsoever. Since for her it was the emergence of Christianity as a political factor which rendered all return to the 'ideal' political life impossible, the protection of private life ('privacy-intimacy') came to be her principal philosophical aim, for she believed that only private life was able to shield human existence from apathy (Arendt 1958: 70). Arendt arrived at the diagnosis of apathy but she never arrived at sacrificing her thesis about all-encompassing secularization.

## 3. The Private Nature of Religion

For Arendt, faith was and remained an entirely private affair. Even in her early essay on Augustine from 1930, she appreciated him for establishing a personal and 'direct' human–God relation which does not leave place for any transmission monopolized by the Church. Accordingly, she read *De Civitate Dei* as a secular history of the Church (Arendt 1994b: 25). Her emphasis on the private side of faith, however, force her to overlook the basic fact that personal and collective religious attitudes might take on distinctly different shapes. In her eyes the latter was not religion at all (or it was a perverted kind), and she never believed in its moral value.

Her refutation of public religion was founded on the basically private quality of religion, not on the nature of the public. She referred to Tertullian as someone whose efforts to place Christianity outside of the political community – '*nobis nulla res magis res aliena quam publica*' – are in complete harmony with her own ideas on this point (Arendt 1994e: 380, 389 n.27). One of her arguments for the fundamentally private nature of religion is based on the covert nature of love. The idea that faith raises man from *civitas terrena* is already present in her dissertation on Augustine. Later, in *The Human Condition* she developed the idea in greater detail, claiming that love cannot be public; public love is a merely distorted one which aims to redeem the world. Arendt held the view that the sacred was already *hidden* in Ancient Greece and Rome (i.e. it was private) (Arendt 1958: 51f., 62). Religion is, thus, the immediate consequence of the existence of the private sphere – as a corollary, it cannot be opposed to privacy.

Additionally, as a number of reflections in *The Human Condition* show, religion as an institution or derivative of 'goodness' is only an extreme form of *vita activa*. Arendt held the opinion that the non-terrestrial nature of religion originates from eschatological hopes and from Jesus' teachings. Even if they did not come true, religion did not prove to be invalid, since Jesus taught 'only' goodness (Arendt 1958: 73f.). Goodness, then, has a tendency to hide itself and therefore it loses its essentially good nature when it gets involved in public affairs. If this happens, the result will be, according to Arendt, what is called by the theorists of public religion the *thin* interpretation of religion. Arendt did not entirely rule out the *thin* conception, but she turned a blind eye to its possible consequences for her socio-ontological or socio-critical project. This is one of the outcomes of the methodological gap in *The Human Condition* between the existentialist preface and the politico-economical critique of the Modern Age present in the body of the book itself. In this sense, Arendt rather identifies social with economical (Benhabib 1990:

168f.). Goodness, in a negative-paradoxical way, has its public relevance: it is not only the public which destroys religion but religion also destroys the public sphere – that is, the community (Arendt 1958: 76f.). At this point, Arendt refers to Machiavelli, who claimed that meddling with secular affairs necessarily corrupts the Church.

Moreover, religion is opposed to *Amor Mundi*, from which originates the obligation to respect political institutions as conditions of the possibility of any action whatsoever. This might be a common connecting link which, as James Bernauer puts it, 'would educe the noblest capacities of human life and create a specifically political solidarity among people of good will' (Bernauer 1987: 2).

Finally, the private nature of religion is linked to the exigency that every kind of speculation over the absolute should be excluded from the realm of politics. The basis of the political is *natality* while the basis of metaphysics is *mortality*. The Arendtian comparison between immortality and eternity intends to demonstrate that an eternal thing cannot be a public affair (Arendt 1958: 9, 20). Arendt, in accordance with the arguments of contemporary liberalism, objected to the utilization of abstract-metaphysical reasoning in politics (Trigg 2005: 32).

## 4. Arendt's Critique of Modernity

At the beginning of the *The Human Condition*, Arendt defined the Modern Age as the age of secularization (Arendt 1958: 2; Arendt 1961b: 69). In her eyes, the fact of secularization generally explains the symptoms of cultural crises; for example, in her study of Hermann Broch she found the roots of the value crisis of *fin de siècle* Austrian culture also in secularization (Arendt 1968).

The most important moment of the process of secularization for her was the undermined faith in a future state of rewards and punishments. As she noted in her *Diary*, 'the nonsense of the concept of "secular religion" consists in the fact that it eliminates the positively political element of religion, namely the award and punishment after death'; 'what is decisive in the modern age is not secularization but the fading representation of Hell' (Arendt 2002: 364, 371; my translation).

She interpreted secularization as the turning point for Western mankind – including American and European as well – in the seventeenth century. This unique interpretation made it possible for her to neglect the Christian roots of American freedom as well as the fact that America is much more

religious than Europe (Brunkhorst 2000: 192; Berger 1999: 10). From this aspect, her conception is similar to that of Jürgen Habermas, who, like Arendt, approached the dominance of secularization from the perspective of the Enlightenment Project (Calhoun 1993: 35f.).

Arendt dubbed *doubt* as the second basic feature of secularization. She refused the generally accepted interpretations of Cartesian doubt, drawing an analogy between the uncertainty of the senses and that of reasoning. The sceptical attitude towards the external world, the mind and the senses was acknowledged by her as a positive fact (Arendt 1958: 275f.). Obviously, she was well aware that doubt might destroy everything in a special sphere of representations, and that is the sphere of religion.

Her central thesis about this basic feature of modernity is being challenged and seems to be refuted nowadays. Since '[o]n the international religious scene, it is conservative or orthodox or traditionalist movements that are on the rise almost everywhere', Peter L. Berger drew the conclusion that modernization and secularization do not share a common root, nor do they even run parallel (Berger 1999: 6, 3).

## 5. Religion and the Intellectuals

By the time of writing *The Human Condition*, Arendt had already been confronted by the problem of public religion. Her 'Religion and the intellectuals' written in 1950 at the request of the *Partisan Review* displays her slight but distinct annoyance at the subject. She was asked to write about the revival of public religion. In this text Arendt refused even the validity of the starting point for the discussion: she did not consider the emergence of public religion as a rightly observed, positive historical trend. Parallel to her insights in *The Origins of Totalitarism*, she also formulated her critique on the ineffective, hollow role played by liberalism as well as the Christian Churches in the crisis situations of the twentieth century. In the meantime she was also convinced that such heroic attempts would have been principally impossible. Religion is killed if abused 'as a weapon against Totalitarianism or "a safeguard for civilized tradition"' (Arendt 1994d: 230).

Three years later, in 1953, during the discussion concerning communism as a religion, she was confronted again with the problem of public religion. Analysing the religious nature of communism, she put forward, however marginally, some relevant reflections: in her article 'Religion and politics', she considered the modern age as secular by virtue of the alleged overall phenomenon of doubt. She postulated a deeper and historically earlier shift

than the political separation of state and Church to which she paid due attention otherwise. Therefore, from her point of view, the whole tradition of modern science should be retracted to proceed with desecularization. Writing about the political and spiritual nature of secularization, Arendt altered her earlier position. Whereas in 'Religion and politics', she backed the opinion that there is no direct correlation between the decline of authority and the decline of religion, in 'What is authority?' she had concluded that there *is* a correlation between them. On the other hand, she claimed that since religion does not care about freedom, our age is not especially religious (Arendt 1994e: 369f.). Again, elsewhere she reconstructed the turn of the Church towards politics.

For Arendt, religion remained an epistemological problem, and she addressed it from the perspective of the Kantian antinomies, not from the point of view of Kant's essay on religion. She did not follow Kant's path towards his anthropological turn; she had quite a different image of humankind.

## 6. Arendt's Anthropology

The key notion of *The Human Condition* as a political anthropology is *natality*. Despite this natural notion, attributable to Arendt's refutation of naturalistic anthropologies, her image of man remained quite abstract (Brunkhorst 2000: 180f.). Her reserved attitude towards public religion as well as her only slight interest in cultural philosophy stem from this abstract image of human nature, since the object of naturalistic anthropologies – culture-creating human beings – is the group encompassed by public religion as well. Her cultural theory in 'The crisis of culture' is superficial and would not stand the trial of historical criticism. She rejected bourgeois culture on account of its functionality; and the subordination of art to life (Hansen 1993: 95) seemed to her a symptom of the crisis of culture. Accordingly, in her theory, the cultural aspects of human existence were delivered over to the public realm (Arendt 1961c: 218). However, she did not point out the difference, namely that politics creates and maintains the public realm and vice versa; they are essentially interconnected. Culture, on the contrary, only appears in the public realm, which exists independently from culture. The public realm would remain intact even if there were no *oeuvres d'art*. As a further development, under the aegis of *The Critique of Judgement*, Arendt joined the aesthetic and the political together by reference to judgement.

James Bernauer carried out an in-depth analysis of the relation between Arendt's anthropology and her critique of religion. He remarked that Arendt

appropriated some insights of the Kantian critique and she transformed them so that they fitted her theory. According to Arendt, Kant grasped humans as the object of philosophy in a threefold way: first, naturalistically; secondly, rationally; and, finally, as 'earthbound creatures, living in communities, endowed with common sense, *sensus communis*, a community sense; not autonomous, needing each other's company even for thinking' (Arendt 1982: 27). Therefore she considered *The Critique of Judgement* as Kant's most important political book and she held the view that on the basis of this work Kant's unwritten political philosophy might be deployed (Arendt 1982: 61; see Beiner 2006: 256f.).

Besides, Bernauer indicates that Arendt's religious critique includes contempt for religions on account of their action in troubled times. However, he thinks that Arendt would have found ambiguous the instrumentalized, weakened realization of her idea and that her intransigent attitude towards the otherworldliness of Christianity thwarts her from studying in more depth the dichotomy between the social and the political.

Hannah Arendt, founding the origins of the twentieth century's totalitarian hells in the irremediable loss of religious hell, makes it clear that secularization has its moral consequences. But she also warns that the solution which, although taking into account human nature, cheats nature with an anthropological turn and intends to achieve a tacit consensus about morality, is insufficient (Arendt 1961d: 133).

## 7. The Post-secular Age

For a decade or two, religion has been presenting us a public face as a sign and result of the tendencies of a new era labelled a 'post-secular age'. The recognition of the rights of public religion dates from the mid-1980s, but controversies on the proper place of religion in the public realm have a much longer history. It is often stated in the literature that in those times a fundamental shift took place in the practice of the US Supreme Court. While previously the Church's independence of the state had been sustained and vice versa, from the 1980s onwards the Brethren stopped enforcing the custom based on Thomas Jefferson's notoriously ambiguous dictum concerning the necessity of a 'wall of separation between church and state' (Witte 2003).

Religious groups do not constitute an optional voice in the social harmony expressing particular interests through their particular activity. Religions have always been protesting 'against the vast scepticism and apathy of life' (Dreiser 1: 4). According to their ethical, theological or anthropological vocations, it

is the community as a whole that makes out the concern of religions. They find themselves 'above', or 'beyond', or 'in tension with' the social and public realm, and their simple absorption in them seems impossible. The emergence of public religions, irrespective of their spiritual impact, challenges Arendt's theory on the public sphere as far as this phenomenon does not fit into the framework given by her, and reveals, therefore, the ambiguous character of the description she gave of the social realm.

The relation of religion to society can be considered from several aspects, not exclusively against the backdrop of the special needs and goals of Christian religions. Standing on the epistemological basis of the real social structure, we have to admit that religion did not appear in society as something foreign but as a dimension of a certain way of life and of a system of values whose historical and cultural manifestations are naturally given for each member, religious or not, of the society. In this case, the appearance of public religion is nothing else than the expression of the will that religious and public spheres intend to further the purposes of each other mutually. The appearance of religions which are, on the contrary, products of another, different culture and way of life will necessarily weaken the social security. As far as we consider the problem from the perspective of religion, culture and social cohesion, public religion belongs to the twilight zone of Arendt's thinking, marked by her 'Reflections on Little Rock'.

There is little doubt that in the post-secular communities, the traditional distinction or conflict between state and civil society has to be revised. Several American historians intend to delete or ignore the gap between the Church and the state even in respect to American history. There are standpoints, such as that of Klaus Eder, according to which secularization has been accomplished only in Europe. In the US, on the contrary, debates and discussions over the founding fathers' or Thomas Jefferson's views or over the interpretation of the Constitution have had quite another orientation (Bosetti and Eder 2006). In recent literature, different solutions may be found for the problem of how equilibrium can be established between the private and public aspects concerning different denominations of Christian faith. Barbara A. McGraw, for example, has reinterpreted the impact of John Locke's philosophy of religion on the thoughts of the founding fathers. She argues that some controversies on their presumptive message concerning the independence of religion from the state can be solved very simply on the basis of a more circumspect philological accuracy. According to this view, in eighteenth-century texts, 'religion' is usually used synonymously with 'conscience' (McGraw 2003; Allen 2005).

## 8. The 'Thick' and the 'Thin' Interpretations of Religion

But to answer the question this way brings more questions to the fore. For, it is evident that conscience can never be subject to public religion. American theologians seem to admit as much by introducing the distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' interpretations of religion (Mouw 2000). 'Thick' religion concerns the position of a *person* before God, while the 'thin' concept of religion has something to do with the various forms of human activities related to religion. It is only the first one that Arendt considered religion.

The first theorist of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, clearly understood this point. He put down some remarks on it in connection with the problem of public faith as a fundamental presupposition of societal cohesion. From this point of view, one can argue – which Tocqueville indeed did – that among all sorts of public faiths the most natural or useful is religious faith (Tocqueville 1954: II, 21). The key advantage of religion above other forms of public faith consists in its capacity to grasp the most general and central concepts of a society in a simple, distinct and easily understandable way. This interpretation, to be sure, directs us towards the 'thin' conception of religion. Moreover, it is precisely because of its moderate purposes that religion can grapple with egotism successfully. While doing so, the alliance between the Church and the state goes visible and public: Tocqueville could see nothing peculiar in the fact that the public presence of religion and the compatibility of its vocation with the pursuit of earthly happiness by human beings should be as good for the Church as it is for the state. For Tocqueville, standing with resignation on the platform of nineteenth-century optimism, this conclusion about the desirable place of religion in mass society seemed to be quite plausible. Arendt, on the contrary, estimating the historical enterprise of Western mankind as an entire misdirection, could not draw the same conclusion.

## 9. Conclusion

Hannah Arendt remained firmly convinced that the moral and political foundations of the Judaeo-Christian tradition had completely collapsed in Auschwitz (Benhabib 1990: 174). This might explain why the third Kantian critique held strong appeal for her: she thought that the lost morality might be replaced by a politics based on judgement (Canovan 1992: 174). There is no doubt that Arendt exaggerated when identifying Christianity with otherworldliness so that '[t]he origin of the idea of self-governing, free and

equal citizens seems to her to have no resonance or relation whatever with Christian ideas of equality and freedom' (Brunkhorst 2000: 191). This concept of Christianity was only a part of her comprehensive project: in this sense, she denied Guizot's, Hegel's and Tocqueville's concept of freedom and of civilization as a whole. Her penetrating critique of enlightened reason has not lost its special relevance: as various forms of public religions have emerged recently, it is essential to bear in mind the inherent boundaries of liberal thought. Due to the fact that Arendt tried to cope with secularization not only as a phenomenon accompanying the existence of modern Western mankind but also as a fundamental characteristic of human self-reflection, her thinking can be related in an inspiring way to recent efforts trying to grasp the essence of the religious attitude on the global scene.

# Part Two

# Challenging the Liberal Secular Paradigm from Within

# 5. Cultural Identity, Religion, Moral Pluralism and the Law

*Herman De Dijn*

## 1. Politics and Identity

As some of the more astute philosophers have observed, man is not a being striving for the fulfilment of biological needs, or a creature trying to maximize utility or pleasure. Man is a being of desire: above all, he desires the desire of other men, desires to be esteemed, recognized as somebody special, not somebody invisible. All want to be mirrored favourably in the eyes of others, especially significant others. Man is, in Nietzsche's words, 'the beast with red cheeks'; Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls man 'the esteemer' (Fukuyama 1992).

It is surprising that political thinkers such as Charles Taylor (1994) and Francis Fukuyama (1992) had to remind us that one of the central issues in politics even today is the problem of esteem, of recognition. People had almost forgotten this fundamental truth, but were forced to become aware of it again via the complaints of minority groups and immigrants that they were not only being discriminated against, but that the very nature of liberal democracy made them invisible, second-class citizens.

Modern politics, in the form of liberal democracy, gives equal recognition to all citizens, by attributing to them equal rights (as citizen *and* human being). This equal recognition is given notwithstanding all kinds of difference in ethnicity, language, religion, gender, etc. This recognition is provided by the law or the state and can be enforced via the law by any citizen *vis-à-vis* any other citizen who would deny him his basic rights. (It is perhaps a bit strange to talk here of recognition; but it is clear that these rights do confer a special *status* upon each individual who is thereby recognized as citizen and autonomous individual.) This political regime which gives equal recognition notwithstanding all sorts of difference, today seems to be unsatisfactory, to lack in full recognition. As Charles Taylor has formulated it: we now seem to need a politics not simply of equal recognition notwithstanding differences; we need a politics of recognition *of* these differences themselves (1994: 37–8). This is a truly revolutionary idea: the modern state should not only recognize

all citizens as free and equal in the eyes of the law; it should recognize certain differences ('group values') as being legally equally valuable. For example, recently the leader of a European pressure group for Arab immigrants demanded the recognition of Arabic as the fourth national language in Belgium.

What is (are) the reason(s) for this revolutionary new politics? There are at least two reasons, which are interconnected. First of all, it has turned out that there is no liberal democratic system in which certain 'differences' are not *de facto* privileged by the law, either implicitly or explicitly. This is the case – almost inevitably – with language, customs concerning attitudes towards life and death, family and sexual relations, relations with animals, with the environment, etc. Almost equally inevitably, this is also the case with matters relating to care for the sick, education, religion, etc. As long as there is a sufficiently strong homogeneity in the state, this 'favouritism' of the law with respect to peculiar 'group values' or 'traditional' values is not really noticed and poses no serious problem. But, once the society in a state becomes really pluralistic, demands for the recognition of other differences (other group values) are almost inevitable. At least, provided that a second element is introduced: the desire for the public recognition of one's identity *as* intertwined with certain group differences. The revolution can only come about if the identity-factor is introduced, i.e., if the pride and self-esteem of an individual is tied up with a strong identification with certain group differences (in language, common history, nationality, social or moral customs, common symbols, etc.). This identification is usually heightened by feelings of loyalty towards people – the living and the dead – who are or were themselves identified with these values. (Think, for example, of the struggle of the Kurdish people in Turkey who desire to keep their own family names and want to teach their children in their own language.) As Will Kymlicka (1989) has pointed out: if the identity and the self-esteem of individuals is strongly tied up with certain group values, it may be essential, in order to incorporate certain groups in the modern state, to officially/legally recognize (some of) these group values. The second reason then to plead for a politics of equal recognition *of* differences (and not notwithstanding differences) is the need of certain citizens, especially those belonging to 'minority' groups, for a recognition *in* their particular identity, which can only be done by a recognition of their differences by the dominant or majority culture via the law.

Even if, in general, one would agree with the proposal for a politics of equal recognition of differences, there are both intrinsic and extrinsic (practical) difficulties awaiting the implementation of this politics. One practical

difficulty is immediately obvious: legal recognition of all differences of a particular kind may be impossible. If, in the same state, too large a number of languages are spoken, it is impracticable to recognize them all as 'official' languages. There are intrinsic difficulties as well due to the very nature of the kind of differences for which legal recognition is claimed. Moral and religious practices, but also non-moral customs, may be more or less strongly incompatible with one another. What is honourable or sacred to one group, may be neutral or abhorrent to another. It is impossible to legally recognize 'contradictory' differences (e.g., with respect to public decency, the ritual slaughtering of animals, etc.). It is naïve to hope that such oppositions can be easily defused. A lot of group values, not only moral or religious ones, imply that special significance is given to certain objects, times, places, boundaries, etc. From an *external* point of view this looks as if arbitrary differences are given excessive importance; and from the *opposite* point of view, it looks as if worth is given to what does not deserve it. Because of the contingent and particularistic character of such valuations and taboos (e.g., with respect to what it is allowed or proper to eat, to touch, to see, and so on), it is always possible that different group values are deeply incompatible, or, by being transferred within a new cultural context, appear to be abhorrent instead of honourable, or get contaminated in an unacceptable way (e.g., the swastika-sign). If, as Hume (1968: Book III, Part 1, Section 2) says, morality is at heart a matter of sensibility, any morality, not only a religiously based one, is particularistic in some basic respects.

In view of the intrinsic and extrinsic (practical) difficulties mentioned, it is unfeasible to legalize all (even major) differences. Therefore, a political discussion as to *which* differences could be legally recognized is inescapable. Kymlicka proposes – as we have seen – that this discussion should be governed by the liberal idea of the welfare of the individual and his full participation in modern society. In this way one would have a neutral standpoint from which to judge which group differences to accept: accept those which allow for, or are conducive to, these liberal aims. It is doubtful whether this bracketing of the (intrinsic) value of differences is possible. E.g., if liberal-democratic society allows groups to themselves organize the education of their children, is it really possible for the law to completely disregard the content of this education? Secondly, as Taylor has pointed out, the individuals seeking legal recognition of their group values do not want this recognition because they need it, out of solidarity with individuals as individuals; rather they want recognition of their values as worthwhile in themselves (Taylor 1994: 38). As Arnold Burms has shown, the logic of solidarity (helping) is different from the logic of recognition (or appreciating) (Burms 1990: 67–77).

Taylor also investigates the conditions of possibility for such a discussion (1994: 66–7). The first is the *prima facie* or *a priori* acceptability of traditions as valuable in a general sense. The second is the requirement to develop new vocabularies of comparison (with the aid of comparative cultural study) so as to facilitate the gradual blending of value-horizons. According to Taylor the first condition can be accepted as fulfilled because traditions are, by their very nature, contexts which have provided a horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings over a long period of time. As such they deserve admiration and respect. To discount offhand this possibility seems a supreme arrogance. Especially from a conservative political point of view, it seems very reasonable to believe in the *prima facie* acceptability of traditions. As Michael Oakeshott (1984, ch. 4) has argued, they not only provide the inevitable symbolic framework within which people can pursue a more or less meaningful life, but they are also the *de facto* conditions of possibility for survival and progress, because they contain the tacit dimension of reasonableness, the know-how and skills making survival and progress possible. In any case, it seems much more reasonable to hold to such a conception of traditions than to think of them as pure hindrances blocking or retarding progress.

Taylor's second idea of the need to come to a blending of value horizons through the development of new vocabularies of comparison seems – on the contrary – to be rather naïve. Taylor's model of the development of new vocabularies of comparison is much too intellectualistic and optimistic. As was pointed out earlier, traditional values (including moral ones) are embedded, incarnated in concrete things, tied up with particular material things and boundaries (De Dijn 1999: 371–9). This makes it difficult or impossible to easily blend them or to accommodate them. It makes them vulnerable to contamination and change. (Think, for example, of the horror when texts of the Qur'an are displayed on the dress of a mannequin.) Particular requirements or prohibitions with respect to decency, sexual difference, food, clothing, etc., may make it difficult, if not impossible, to accommodate traditional values within the existing 'liberal' legal framework (think of cliterodectomy, ritual slaughters of animals, prohibitions of inoculation, blood transfusion, etc.). No amount of discussion based on new vocabularies of comparison or comparative cultural anthropology seems able to guarantee the integration of such differences.

If even new vocabularies or deep hermeneutical understanding are unable to produce the acceptance of certain alien, abhorrent, unthinkable or simply disgusting customs and views, the question really arises of how to deal with the desire for equal recognition of certain differences (De Dijn 1994: 27–32). Of all forms of modern politics, it is the conservative form which – theoretically

speaking at least – would seem most suited to the job. It is this form which would seem to be – in principle at least – most sensitive to the nature and importance of differences and group values, and the most careful and realistic in implementing a politics of the equal recognition of differences.

It is typical of conservatism (Allison 1984; Oakeshott 1984, ch. 7) to favourably appreciate the present, to build on those social elements which do not easily change (the nation, the family, trade, etc.), and to mistrust proposals of change especially if they are made on the basis of abstract ideals or projects. The existing social and political context is seen as a context which, through its very persistence, has proved itself to be a more than less viable life form, even though improvements at particular points are always possible and often required. Political legitimacy is understood as related paradoxically to the contingencies of the longstanding living together of people somehow sharing a common past, somehow seeing themselves – in the words of Oakeshott – as saving the dead from the shame of total extinction. From a conservative point of view no special justification is needed *vis-à-vis* foreigners or newcomers as to the privileges, rights and advantages given to citizens and groups which are the inheritors of the past, the land, the culture(s) belonging to the state. On the contrary, newcomers who are allowed into the land should – certainly if they obtain citizenship – respect the fundamental rights and customs thereof and should use the established ways to eventually realize their desires with respect to a politics of equal recognition. On the other hand, especially from the conservative point of view, the intrinsic importance of identity and dignity, and the close link between identity and group values, should be realized. Therefore, 'native' groups should be convinced that it is essential to the peaceful integration of newcomers that they can as far as possible retain their identity and dignity and that changes in the law to this effect will be necessary. Newcomers should be convinced that as 'guests' they have to obey the established basic rules, that it will take time to integrate their values and that this may involve both change for them and for the 'natives'.

It is typical for a conservative point of view not to believe in the perfectibility of man, certainly not on a rational basis. Therefore a conservative politics will not be naïve; it knows that tragic incompatibilities of the kind discussed earlier may always give rise to tensions and even violence. The best that can sometimes be hoped for is that outbreaks of violence are contained as much as possible so that time, the Great Leveller, can do its work. History teaches us, however, that some incompatibilities are extremely hard to transcend. In any case, the idea of a society without friction is nonsense.

## 2. Law and Morality

As we have seen, it is impossible for the law to be strictly neutral with respect to the endorsement of certain values, including moral values. On the other hand, especially if one accepts in principle a politics of the equal recognition of (certain) differences, it is inevitable that the law recognizes as values differences which are not considered acceptable, let alone valuable, by certain citizens or groups of citizens. This situation raises anew the old question of the relationship between morality and the law, this time within the context of a politics of the recognition of differences in a pluralistic society.

It is widely thought that, in a liberal democratic society, it is not the business of the law to enhance the morality of its citizens, but rather to merely keep the peace so as to enable people to pursue their own business with minimum frustration. But, though it is the business of the law to keep the peace, part of keeping the peace is making sure that certain values are at least publicly upheld. This implies, as is actually the case, that the law penalizes behaviour which publicly offends certain moral values considered 'evident', 'natural', 'universal', etc., by the common sense of the vast majority of people. Attempts at giving a strictly rational, e.g., utilitarian justification of all such legal prohibitions must fail or, at least, look extremely artificial. Prohibitions against cannibalism, incest, polyandry or polygamy, sadomasochism – even if perpetrated in private and with (previous) consent – cannot (at least not in a straightforward way) be justified on value-neutral grounds. They can best be understood as expressing what is unthinkable, abhorrent or sacred to the overwhelming majority of people (even of many different cultural backgrounds). On the other hand, there does not seem to be a systematic or clear line as to which values are or should be a matter of legal endorsement. Over time, changes occur as to what is of concern to the law and what is not (e.g., slapping or spanking of children at home or in school; suicide; etc.). In certain cases, legal endorsement is obviously the result of historical contingencies (e.g., in the case of prohibitions with respect to blasphemy as related to a particular religion).

With respect to the relation between law and morality, two positions are clearly out: (1) that the law has nothing at all to do with morality; (2) that the law is the endorsement of the morality of a certain group (even if this is the majority of citizens). The law is clearly more than a neutral instrument for keeping the peace in society. It inevitably contains and proposes a certain image of what it is to be human and to act in a human way. Furthermore, as Spinoza would say, real peace can only be defined in terms of what is actually a *humane* way of living together. Even though systems of law are strongly

divergent in certain respects, in some sense they are strongly similar, to such a degree that one could still speak of the implicit presence of a kind of 'natural law' (no murdering, no stealing, no dishonouring, etc.) (Lewis 1990: 49–59). On the other hand, to expect of the law the full endorsement of a certain morality (e.g., with respect to work on holy days or in matters of marriage and divorce) seems unacceptable and even unworkable in a 'pluralist' democratic society.

It is not uncommon to think that the relationship between the law and morality is particularly problematic in the case of a religiously based morality because of its non-rational and particularistic character. As we have seen, all sorts of contradictory elements may be held to be sacred, unthinkable, abominable from the point of view of religiously based moralities. However, it is wrong to think that only these kinds of morality contain such categories. Non-religiously based moralities too may be concerned with what is held to be unthinkable or sacred. It is not only religious people for whom cloning is really unthinkable, or human life sacred – even before birth, or when maintained in a deep coma. Furthermore, if Hume is right, *no* morality is strictly rational, all contain 'particularistic' elements, all are somehow related to particular attitudes towards life and death, sex and family, etc., which from an external point of view seem arbitrary instead of rational.

So, if there is no formula to decide what should be the exact relationship between the law and morality, if this can only be determined via the ongoing discussion and decision-making of society in a particular historic setting, there does not seem to be any reason why religious people or religious groups should be excluded *a priori* from this discussion. There is no reason why all sorts of groups with the exception of religious ones should be allowed to voice opinions and try to influence political decision-making. On the contrary, particularly in a political system in which the state and Church(es) are separate, it seems acceptable, even recommendable, that religious groups contribute in their specific way to political discussion and decision-making, possibly even via political parties they animate. Especially institutionalized churches with backing by large segments of the public do represent social opinion and moral group-awareness. In an interesting study, José Casanova (1994) argues convincingly that it is an asset when the voice of religion is heard in public debate on important issues. It is hypocritical – as now sometimes happens – that church leaders are praised when they take a stand which pleases political leaders, but then are rebuked when, in other issues, they voice concerns which from their point of view are equally justified. Instead of trying the impossible, i.e., to eliminate the influence of religions from the public sphere, it is better to see them as important players contributing to the ongoing conversation

between the law and social values. Of course, the counterpart of this is that churches and religious leaders are required to strictly obey the law.

As we have seen, from a conservative point of view there is a *prima facie* reasonableness and legitimacy attached to existing laws; and unless there are clear and overriding reasons for reform, the law should be kept as it is, certainly in its fundamental aspects or elements. (This is also the reason why changes in the law, especially basic laws, usually require the fulfilment of special or additional conditions.) Changing the law in substantial ways inevitably raises the possibility of side effects which were not or could not be foreseen. The law is always the result of certain historical circumstances and contingencies. Reform should cope with new demands by upsetting existing laws as little as possible. What is, politically speaking, particularly wrongheaded from a conservative standpoint is the attempt to make the law into a value-neutral or even utilitarian instrument, or to use it in order to bring about a really secular or, worse even, ideal society. How to look here for the 'golden mean' between fanatic traditionalism and fanatic progressivism? The only guideline seems to be to start from where we are, from the already existing laws, to be wary of fast or substantial changes, and to see what is advisable in the light of the largest possible consensus with respect to the value(s) in question. With respect to decency, for example, it does not make sense to give in to the extreme demands of certain fundamentalists. But what is equally wrong is to create the impression that anything goes. In view of the presence of certain traditional groups in society, it may be wise even to be somewhat more reticent than would otherwise be necessary. It is perhaps not impossible to convince the public that since requirements of decency are inescapable and desirable, individual acts which might be seen as unduly provocative should be censored.

Human beings and moral and religious oppositions being what they are, it is always possible that the golden mean is not found, that time does not play the role of Great Leveller, but on the contrary leads to an increase in tensions and even to eruptions of violence. Tragedies of this kind are not uncommon, even in these very days. It is paradoxical that religion, which is a major source of such tragedies (but not the only one), is at the same time one of the few ways to cope with them.

Inescapably, the question arises here as to what the attitude of religious people should be if the law allows what is unthinkable (e.g., abortion) or demands what is morally forbidden (e.g., inoculation of children)? And what should be the reaction of the law with respect to these reactions? Within the liberal democratic state, with its separation of state and Church, religious people can always try to change the law (e.g., in the sense of an abolition

of abortion laws) by all legal means. But, if they do not succeed, they will have to live with this supposed laxity of the law. If the law demands what to some citizens is strictly forbidden, it may be wise of the law to try and make appropriate exceptions (e.g., requiring civil duty instead of military service). If this is impossible, the only option open to believers may be civil disobedience. A wise legislator again will try and find ways to keep law enforcement and punishment within reasonable limits.

The ideal situation – if this expression is appropriate here – is, of course, that the religion in question itself allows or even proclaims a distinction between the secular and the religious realm (even though this separation can never be complete). Many, if not most, religions accept that 'worldly' affairs can never be perfect, that ultimate perfection and goodness cannot be 'of this world', and belong somehow to another dimension. In this way, religious people can and should tolerate (in the sense of anti-intolerance) certain states of affairs which offend their sense of value: such tolerance is a *religious* virtue.

Religion is not only an important element within civil society, contributing in its own way to the ongoing conversation and debate about the relation between law and morality (in a broad sense). From a conservative point of view, it can and should also play another role which it is important to mention in this context. It can contribute or give content to 'civil religion' (Lübbe 1986: 306). Strange as it may seem, even in the purely political sphere there are moments of contact with what is beyond the human endeavour, where the collective endeavour reaches its limits and is confronted with its own vulnerability, contingency and sometimes even wickedness. Everybody is aware of such moments: the beginning of a new parliamentary year, national disasters, events which deeply disturb the community (like the Dutroux affair in my country Belgium), the administration of justice, especially penal justice, the commemoration of important events like peace treaties, etc. In the case of liberal democracies with a constitutional monarchy, the institution of hereditary monarchy in a certain way symbolizes or incarnates this dimension of the beyond of politics *within* the political system. The figure of the sovereign of course plays a central role in civil religion (and when there is a strong link with an 'established' religion as in England and Scotland (Bradley 2002), the monarch even sometimes plays some central role in the religion properly speaking). The administration of justice by human beings over other human beings especially in penal justice is equally a point of contact with the beyond of politics. So, it is not surprising that it is marked with religious or quasi-religious symbols and ceremonies. The same happens at commemorations or in moments of disaster. A political community really needs civil religion, with its rites and symbols, to deal with and to express its relationship with the

beyond of politics. If only for historical reasons, it is almost inevitable that the major religion or religions within the state somehow contribute to or are part of civil religion. In the context of growing secularization or even laicization, there are regular attempts to do away with or diminish the presence of religious elements, for example at commemorative or festive political occasions or in the sphere of justice. This is a mistake. The participation of genuine religious elements in civil religion expresses the non-separation of the two in the minds of religious people. Furthermore, genuine religious rites and symbols usually constitute very powerful expressions, difficult to replace. Questions arise here as to whether non-religious citizens can be asked to accommodate the presence of these symbols and rites, and whether, as non-believers, it is proper for them, e.g., as ministers or parliamentarians, to (have to) participate in them. I think a lot depends here upon the precise nature of the ceremonies and what kind or degree of participation and/or endorsement is seen to be involved in being present. Even non-religious people can see the need and point of civil religion and, perhaps, in their participation express their own reverence with respect to what goes beyond the human endeavour (whether it is called Nature, Destiny, Fate, or whatever) (Woodruff 2001).

As new groups and their group values become more prominent in society, it may be important – especially in order to enhance full integration – where appropriate and feasible to associate certain symbols and ceremonies of the new groups to the civil religion. Again it is impossible in abstraction to determine whether, and to what degree, this should happen. That it is not possible to arrive at strict equality here is obvious in view of what was said before. That this is perhaps not necessary may be shown by the following anecdote. Sometime ago, I was struck by a discussion on BBC TV about whether or not Anglicanism should remain the (only) 'established' Church in England. Progressive Anglican spokesmen argued that one should put an end to this anachronism, especially in a society with more churchgoing Catholics and Muslims than Anglicans. Roman Catholic participants in the discussion pleaded for the continuation of the link between (state) monarch and the Anglican Church because of the importance of this link in framing English society and because this link is so central to the civil religion, which might otherwise be watered down or discarded if one insisted on accommodating it too much to the other major religions. This was the proper conservative response.

It seems to me that a conservative politics with respect to the recognition of group differences in some sense may be more easily explicable to groups favouring traditional values, than a strictly liberal politics. They will more easily understand that the 'natives' cannot be asked to give up or abruptly

change their way of living, their form of political organization; especially, if these 'natives' are prepared to conceive of immigrant groups as guests who should be able to preserve their own identity if they so wish, albeit within certain boundaries. It is precisely an individualistic politics which gives the impression that values do not count, at least not publicly, which must lead to unrealistic demands and to the perception that Western citizens do not have any real pride, because they do not seem able to really stand up for their own values.

## 3. Epilogue

Here I could have ended my story: the story of what happens to the relationship between law, religion and morality when within Western liberal democracies the politics of equal recognition of individuals notwithstanding their differences is upset by the demands for a politics of equal recognition of these differences themselves. Discussions with my Louvain colleague Arnold Burms convinced me that I should further complicate matters by adding this brief epilogue based on his comments.

Today, the situation with respect to a politics of equal recognition of differences is further complicated by the impact of liberal individualism on this politics itself. Liberal individualism means that it is up to the individual to organize his or her own life as long as this is not to the detriment of other individuals. The state should simply be the instrument *and* the referee to make this possible. If individuals feel that affiliation with a certain group is important to them, again they and their group should be left alone to do what they want (even if this looks crazy or weird to common sense, as is the case, for example, with the renewed interest in witchcraft). If the state *de facto* favours certain groups (for example, if it sponsors associations like football clubs, churches, amateur theatre groups, etc.), it should subsidize any association of individuals that does not hinder others. (In the Netherlands, this proposition led to the sponsoring of groups of Hell's Angels because it could not be conclusively or 'objectively' proven that they were not a free association for leisure which did not harass other people or other groups.) The real complication starts when individuals, in order to obtain recognition, adhere to groups which it is not politically correct to deny recognition and when these individuals ostentatiously display their adherence. The logic of this behaviour is a bit complicated. On the one hand the individual seems to want to be left alone in his or her choice of a certain group and rejects in advance any judgement with respect to that adherence. On the other hand, the

choice of the group (the symbols) is such that the individual wants and seeks recognition in the form of 'don't dare to reject my adherence'. In other words: recognition is sought through provocation. (This kind of logic is also present today in art circles when artists seek recognition through provocative art, but of course strongly deny they are after provocation in function of recognition.) Recognition is sought here not via group values as worthwhile in themselves. Evaluation of values is proclaimed to be impossible ('you cannot know what is interesting in what interests me'). Recognition is sought via provoking others to reject one's (gratuitous) adherence to certain group signs.

At the very moment the presence of minority or migrant groups seems to force upon existing communities a new politics of equal recognition of (certain) differences, this politics seems to be easily hijacked by groups of individuals who do not really care about, and are not really interested in, the group values they are picking out. The prevailing relativism with respect to values leads to a general attitude *vis-à-vis* values as if they are nothing but commodities available in the pursuit of individuals to guarantee the recognition they want, either by being fashionable, or through successful provocation.

In such a climate, established contexts and ways of recognition lose their spontaneous unquestioned validity and are forced or tricked into the activist game of acquiring or securing an 'audience', a group-following in competition with other 'brands' and groups. In this climate it is of course difficult, if not impossible, for a conservative manner of politics, spoken about earlier, to operate properly. Yet, it is doubtful whether a liberal politics would be able to deal better with the excessive demands and provocations of individuals looking upon the state as an instrument in the service of clients and as a means to secure recognition from others. What is most tragic, of course, is that in this whole evolution the very possibility of genuine recognition is more and more eroded.

# 6. Can Freedom of Religion Replace the Virtue of Tolerance?

*Peter Jonkers*

## 1. Are Freedom of Religion and Tolerance Synonyms?

Against all odds, the place of religions in modern society is, more than 250 years after the end of the religious wars in Europe, at the centre of heated debates and increasing worries again. In my view, the main reason for this is that the customary way to determine the place of religion in society, namely to keep it confined to the private sphere as much as possible, has lost a good deal of its plausibility. One cannot deny religious people the right to express their views on all kinds of social issues, to manifest their convictions in public, since that would be at odds with the principle of freedom of speech.

In this contribution I want to approach this intriguing problem by examining the question whether the basic human right of freedom of religion is able to put an end to religious intolerance. (In)tolerance by itself refers to the notion of the intolerable, which can be defined as 'what we would not want to tolerate, even though we could or even should' (Ricoeur 1996: 176, 197). Contemporary, postmodern society, which has been confronted in the recent past with extreme forms of intolerance, is convinced that the liberal principle of freedom of religion should be the bottom line of the modern, democratic state regarding religious plurality. It refers to an attitude of neutrality towards the convictions of others, declaring them as belonging to one's privacy, as politically indifferent. In the eyes of many, this offers the best guarantee for living in peace in a pluralistic world. The consequence of this position is that tolerance is not seen as a burden any more, the virtue of enduring the intolerable, but as an attitude of leaving each other alone with one's convictions and practices. The adage seems to be: as long as they don't bother me, I don't bother them.

But, in my view, it is quite questionable whether the experience of the intolerable, which made tolerance necessary, has become a faint memory of a distant, violent past, and has, as a consequence of the privatization of religion, really been replaced by an attitude of neutrality and indifference. One only

has only to refer to some recent examples to show that the disruptive reality of the intolerable has by no means disappeared. According to some, the publication, in 2005, of the so-called Mohammed-cartoons merely showed the cartoonist's rightly making use of his freedom of speech, implying that the protests of the Muslim community were a violation of this basic constitutional right. To others the cartoonist had deliberately showed his disrespect of one of the most precious (religious) convictions of the Muslims, so that the latter were right to find this intolerable. Without wanting to jump to conclusions regarding this highly sensitive issue, the least one can say is that the principle of freedom of religion is by no means able to appease all controversies about the religiously intolerable. In spite of all efforts to use this principle as a means to neutralize conflicting convictions by declaring them politically indifferent, the experience of the intolerable continues to fuel various manifestations of intolerance.

What I want to examine in this chapter are the reasons why all the attempts to neutralize our and others' substantial commitments so often do not work, or, phrased positively, why the experience of the intolerable is inevitable, and hence why the virtue of tolerance can never be replaced by freedom of religion. My basic point is that these neutralization-strategies ignore what tolerance really is and always will be: the difficult virtue, both on an individual and a collective level, of having to endure, for the sake of living together peacefully, practices and convictions that are on moral or other grounds opposed to one's own. So, I agree with Ricoeur's thesis that every philosophical analysis of the place of religion in the public sphere, especially in the current 'culture of neutrality and indifference' needs to face up to the disruptive reality of the intolerable, because it serves as a point of resistance against the erosion of tolerance (Ricoeur 1996: 189). In this chapter I first want to show why the idea of freedom of religion is unable to put an end to the reality of religious intolerance. On the basis of this negative result, I want to suggest, secondly, a minimal content for the virtue of tolerance on an anthropological level. Thirdly, I will argue that the experience of the intolerable not only *cannot* but also *should not* disappear from our minds, since it qualifies the virtue of tolerance in a crucial way.

## 2. Why is the Experience of the Intolerable Inescapable?

In order to answer the question why the intolerable will never stop to disrupt us, let us start with analysing the philosophical background of the idea of religious neutrality, as it becomes apparent in Rorty's idea of final vocabularies

and their consequences. I do not claim to give a full, nuanced account of his work, but will use his idea of 'final vocabularies' as an expression, on a theoretical level, of some quite popular ideas about people's (religious) convictions. Many postmodern people are impressed by the enormous diversity of religious vocabularies. They are convinced that it is impossible to weigh up their pros and cons against each other, since all vocabularies are equally contingent and incommensurable. For Rorty, religions as well as secular ideologies are examples of final vocabularies. The final character of them lies in the fact that 'if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse', since there is no neutral, universal meta-vocabulary (Rorty 1989: 73).

What are the consequences of this radically contingent plurality of vocabularies? Because people are constantly confronted with alternative vocabularies and are impressed by their attractiveness, they run the risk of becoming overwhelmed by doubts about the value of their own vocabulary. They constantly ask themselves if they have not been raised in the 'wrong' vocabulary, and are tempted to give it up in favour of another. However, the awareness of the contingency of all final vocabularies should not prevent us from being attached to the one we are most familiar with. A permanent doubt about whether or not our familiar vocabulary is the 'right' one would even make us completely insane, and should be avoided at all cost. Hence, ethnocentrism, which Rorty defines as the attitude that there are limits to what one can take seriously, is the consequence of the contingency of our vocabularies. So we are fully entitled to be attached to specific convictions and practices of a religious, cultural and ethical nature, as long as we realize that the reasons for this attachment are only of a psychological, not of a rational nature.

However, precisely because *all* divinity is only a contingent product of the religious imagination of our local club or community, our attachment to our sacred cows should remain confined to the private sphere, and should not have any consequences in the public domain, which is radically plural. This implies that, when our postmodern individual enters the public sphere, he has to exchange his personal attachment for an attitude of complete neutrality: he has to leave everybody else alone with their commitments, just as he wants to be left alone with his. Hence, not only the state, but also every individual has to respect a strict neutrality with regard to all religions and philosophies of life in the public domain. This means that postmodernity has 'upgraded' the modern principle of the separation of Church and state to that of the separation of religion and society. To many people, this situation is the apex of tolerance: because all opinions and convictions are equally contingent, they

can be accepted, tolerated, almost unreservedly, at least as long as they remain confined to the private sphere. The great advantage of this situation is that the intolerable has disappeared from the public scene completely. Tolerance thus has become a pragmatic way of avoiding conflicts with others by taking an attitude of neutrality or indifference towards them. If this happens, the virtue of tolerance, of tolerating the intolerable, has become superfluous and is replaced by freedom of religion.

However, Ricoeur warns us that, in a culture without precise reference points, implying that all differences have become indifferent and the intolerable has evaporated, one can expect a reawakening effect from the intolerable (Ricoeur 1996: 197). In the following, I want to substantiate Ricoeur's claim by showing why Rorty's postmodern individuals and the clubs they belong to are likely to make such an unexpected, dialectical turn.

First of all, it is important to notice that the loyalty and devotion of these individuals are not based on stable, culturally embedded reference points, let alone on an idea of 'objective or absolute truth', but are simply the result of the subjective decision that one cannot take everything seriously. This reveals a basic characteristic of contemporary, postmodern humans: they combine an awareness of the contingency of everything with taking themselves radically seriously. They take their own *selves* as the only points of reference in order to determine their attitude towards any vocabulary, which entitles them to follow their own subjective preferences, and to use the substance of our culture as raw material for an endless re-description to their own liking. Hence, an awareness of the radical contingency of all vocabularies in the public domain and a dogmatic holding on to the familiar ones in the private sphere do not exclude each other, but are, paradoxically, two sides of the same medal, which characterizes postmodern people.

However, one can ask whether humans are really able to perform the 'mental acrobatics' of a complete straddle between the private and the public domain. Is it possible to separate one's attachment to a familiar vocabulary in the private sphere from how it is valued in the public sphere? Actually, we do not at all want to be left alone with our convictions, nor are we prepared to leave others alone with theirs. The reason for this is that people find the weight of the purely subjective choice for a specific vocabulary too much to carry, and cannot rely any more on the order of things or on eternal, objective truth, as in premodernity. Hence, their only option is to strive for public recognition for their convictions and practices. By doing so they enter the public sphere, not as a neutral, detached individuals, but with their own commitments and agendas. Reversely, they cannot fence themselves off hermetically from the disturbing intrusion of others, who want their convictions to be recognized

as well. Our dependence on the recognition of others makes it clear that, on a very fundamental level, we are extremely vulnerable in our individuality: we feel humiliated when others find our deepest convictions completely irrelevant or even ridiculous. The postmodern attitude, combining the awareness of the contingency of our universe of values with a total individual autonomy to determine one's attachment to either one of them, paradoxically only increases this vulnerability, because it negates this fundamental dependence.

As for the postmodern idea of a neutral or indifferent tolerance, this explains why it is so ambivalent and can so easily degenerate into a militant intolerance. Especially when the strange ideas of others threaten to disrupt us, thereby showing our vulnerability, the absolutist flipside of his contingency crops up: we experience whatever makes us aware of our vulnerability as intolerable, and, hence, as a justification for militant intolerance. In other words, the current evaporation of the virtue of tolerance for the benefit of freedom of religion explains why our seemingly so tolerant postmodern times often give rise, against all odds, to a militant intolerance. When the self-centred individual, in spite of all his defence mechanisms aimed at being left alone, realizes the threat of being disrupted by the intrusion of a strangeness that he cannot integrate, his natural reaction is to maximally secure his own private individuality by setting his face against the other, and qualifying every unwanted intrusion of the other into his individuality as intolerable. This explains why the religious indifference of postmodernity can turn so easily into xenophobia, racism and tribalism: it offers no solution to the test of our inherent vulnerability by the intrusion of others.

As for the virtue of tolerance this implies that, not only in the private sphere, but also in the public domain we are never neutral with regard to our own convictions and those of others; we are always involved, a party to the dispute about having to tolerate what is actually intolerable to us. This shows that religious tolerance is not identical with the idea of freedom of religion, consisting in leaving everybody alone with their individuality: 'The essence of tolerance is not (and never has been) to abolish "us" and "them" (and certainly not me), but to take care for their lasting peaceful coexistence and interaction' (Walzer 1997: 92). The reality of this interaction implies that we have to recognize its possibly conflicting nature, which becomes manifest in the phenomenon of intolerance. One does not solve the problem of intolerance by declaring nothing to be intolerable any more, since such a solution negates the reality of the disruptive effect of the intrusion of the real other, in all his strangeness, in our world, and the possible clash resulting from it. This leads to the conclusion that, however important the idea of freedom of religion or neutrality in a democratic society is, it is unable to replace the virtue of

tolerance, which presupposes an active commitment to the convictions and practices of oneself and others, both in the private and the public sphere.

## 3. How to Tolerate the Intolerable?

The result of the previous section is mainly a negative one: the virtue of tolerance cannot be replaced by the idea of religious freedom, because this erroneously creates the impression that the intolerable could cease to exist and no longer be able to disrupt us. But this negative result urges us all the more to answer the question of tolerance in a positive way.

First, I want to analyse the phenomenon of militant intolerance a bit further. I will start with a quote from the famous autobiographical novel *If This Is a Man?* by the Italian author Primo Levi. In this book he describes his confrontation with doctor Pannwitz, who is responsible for the selection of the people taking part in the chemical commando in the concentration camp of Auschwitz:

> Pannwitz is tall, thin, blond; he has eyes, hair and nose as all Germans ought to have them, and sits formidably behind a complicated writing-table. I, Häftling 174517, stand in his office, which is a real office, shining, clean and ordered, and I feel that I would leave a dirty stain whatever I touched.
>
> When he finished writing, he raised his eyes and looked at me.
>
> From that day I have thought about Doktor Pannwitz many times and in many ways. I have asked myself how he really functioned as a man; how he filled his time, outside of the Polymerization and the Indo-Germanic conscience; above all when I was once more a free man, I wanted to meet him again, not from a spirit of revenge, but merely from a personal curiosity about the human soul.
>
> Because that look was not one between two men; and if I had known how completely to explain the nature of that look, which came across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the third Germany.
>
> One felt in that moment, in an immediate manner, what we all thought and said of the Germans. The brain which governed those blue eyes and those manicured hands said: 'This something in front of me belongs to a species which it is obviously opportune to suppress. In this particular case, one has to first make sure that it does not contain some utilizable element.'

> And in my head, like seeds in an empty pumpkin: 'Blue eyes and fair hair are essentially wicked, No communication possible.' (Levi 1987: 111)

In this passage, Levi describes masterfully the mechanism that lies at the bottom of intolerance. Intolerance results from a radical separation of individuality and strangeness, symbolized by the image of the glass window of an aquarium. In fact, this window serves as a defence mechanism against the disruptive effects of the stranger on the *self*, in order to dissimulate the latter's vulnerability. The race policy of the Third Reich can be characterized as an attempt to separate its own individuality as radically as possible from the stranger, and to give both sides an opposite value-sign, the Aryan a positive one, the Jew a negative one. By doing so, any contamination of the former by the latter is excluded, so that any disruption of the Aryan's individuality is excluded. The glass window completely separates Pannwitz from Levi, so that they become totally heterogeneous beings, one belonging to the element of the earth, the other to that of water.

Levi's story offers a striking illustration of intolerance, of zooming in on the strangeness of the other (in this case, the Jew) in order to annihilate him. For the Nazi the Jew figures as the incarnation of the disturbing strangeness as such. In order to defend his individuality against the threat of the stranger, and to keep it completely sound, he covers the Jew with all kinds of negative stereotypes, especially with the unhealthy counterpart of the healthy individuality of the Third Reich. The healthy, that with which the Nazis unambiguously identify themselves, is seen as the positive, the reassuring, while the unhealthy is split off from it completely and appears as its negative, disruptive counterpart, which ought to be annihilated completely. This shows why the policy of intolerance of the Nazi authorities was so appealing to Pannwitz and many of his compatriots: placing an impermeable glass window between their own individuality and strangeness has a deeply reassuring effect, since it keeps any disruption of their identity at bay. The glass window enabled the Nazis to spare themselves quite a lot of disturbing questions about the strange, unhealthy sides of their own individuality, and, above all, about their vulnerability.

The above example shows why the intolerable is intolerable: it threatens our individuality, and, thus confronts us with our basic vulnerability, not only as corporeal, but especially as spiritual and cultural beings. This is the reason why the intolerable is recognized by the passion that detects it, that it to say indignation. It is in this capacity that it breaks with the dominant apathy of a society ready to accept everything as equally insignificant (Ricoeur 1996: 197). The cropping up of the intolerable starts with the fact that we

have strong commitments to substantial values, be they religious or secular, not only in the private, but also in the public domain. But this inevitably implies that they may clash with the equally strong convictions of others, which appear strange and even disturbing to us. This clash excites a feeling of indignation, which is often expressed through a scream: this is intolerable. It is an illusion to think that this strangeness could ever stop disturbing our individuality, so that there would be no clashes any more between diverging strong commitments, implying that the reality of the intolerable would cease to exist. Although the stranger incorporates a lot of my individuality and vice versa, he and I are two irreducible individualities.

Moreover, I can only become conscious of my individuality while distinguishing myself from others and through being recognized as such by others. Someone who is Catholic cannot be at the same time Protestant, Islamic, Buddhist, however valuable he finds certain elements from these traditions and however aware he is of the contingent factors that made him being a Catholic. As far as the intolerable is concerned, this means that the reality of the clash between individuality and strangeness can never be superseded, or, phrased positively, that my individuality will always be confronted with a strangeness that disrupts me. If one denies this, the real problem of tolerance, of tolerating the intolerable, is reasoned away by an anticipation of an eschatological future, in which all people will be unified, so that the intolerable, disturbing strangeness has ceased to exist. But then, the need for tolerance has evaporated as well. So, paradoxically, the intolerable is both a threat to and essential for my individuality.

What does all this mean for the problem of tolerance, and can it help us to give it a positive content? If intolerance consists in placing an impermeable glass window between my individuality and the stranger in order to secure the former hermetically from any disruption by the latter, then one can conclude that tolerance is the attempt to construe this glass window in such a way that it allows for a kind of contact between individuality and strangeness, without leading to a complete assimilation or integration. Concretely, this means that the virtue of tolerance minimally consists in refraining ourselves from demonizing the stranger by excluding any communality with him and from disqualifying him as absolutely worthless, however odd or even repulsive we may find his convictions or practices. A tolerant person does not cover the stranger with all kinds of negative stereotypes in order to put him at the opposite side of his individuality in order to annihilate him afterwards. Although certain ways of life may disturb us and even fill us with repulsion, they nevertheless do not differ totally from our own experiences and history. One can even say that, sometimes, the virulence of our reactions is caused by

the fact that these ways of life refer to hidden or repressed experiences of our own, with which we haven't been able to come to terms. In any case, their strangeness should not prevent us from interpreting them as *human* ways of life, and not demonizing them. This shows that tolerance really is a virtue, presupposing an active commitment both to our own individuality and that of the stranger. Hence, it cannot be identified with an attitude of neutrality or indifference. It is also a difficult virtue, since one has to withstand the all-too-human tendency of covering the other with all kinds of negative stereotypes. In sum, the virtue of tolerance, of tolerating the intolerable, implies minimally a strong consciousness of one's individuality, coupled with a refraining from demonizing the stranger as one's absolute counterpart.

## 4. The Intolerable and the Limits of Tolerance

Which are the consequences of the minimal content of tolerance on an anthropological level for the question of tolerance on a societal level? I want to concentrate on one aspect of the current debate on this issue: does the essence of the virtue of tolerance – namely to endure what is intolerable for me – imply that there are no limits to tolerance out of fear of intolerance? In the eyes of many, the only really intolerable is intolerance itself. Intolerant people are seen as belonging to a pre-enlightened, violent era, and as a danger to peaceful coexistence. But in my view, however important the virtue of tolerance is, and however much sense it makes to oppose old and new forms of intolerance, an unlimited tolerance cannot serve as the final answer to the threat of intolerance. More specifically, reducing every outcry that something is intolerable *as such* to an expression that it is only intolerable *for me* and, hence, that I should endure it, cannot be the final solution to this problem. It is too easy to interpret the question of the intolerable as such only as an ideological upgrading of what is intolerable for me. Moreover, by ignoring this question one risks staying blind to the reality of the intolerable, and thus remaining incapable of making the crucial distinction between what I reasonably should and should not tolerate. The final result of this attitude is, paradoxically, the erosion of the virtue of tolerance.

So, my basic point in this section is that the intolerable not only *cannot* be superseded, because it is a fundamental anthropological reality, but also *should not* disappear, because it is a point of resistance against the erosion of tolerance. Ricoeur focuses on the principle of harm in order to show that, even in a situation in which tolerance is identified with postmodern indifference, this principle serves as a widely accepted limit to tolerance. He

summarizes this kind of neutral tolerance as: 'I approve of all ways of life as long as they do not manifestly harm third parties' (Ricoeur 1996: 199). In this context, he mentions examples like paedophile murderers, manifestations of racism, disguised returns of slavery etc. The fact that these phenomena are qualified as harm to third parties shows that our culture (still) has an awareness of the intolerable as such, and, hence, of the limits of tolerance. According to Ricoeur, the widespread indignation to which these kinds of harm give rise refers implicitly to a common morality in ruins. More importantly, this indignation has for him a heuristic function, since it alerts moral vigilance to the immense front of the fragile, that is of vulnerability to harms. Phrased positively, it refers to the forgotten roots of our culture, which must be able to block moral indifference. For Ricoeur, it is essential that these harms or expressions of the intolerable *as such* remain plural, and should not be considered as a stepping stone towards reconstituting an univocal moral objectivity that is at odds with the pluralist character of contemporary society (ibid.).

I want to use Ricoeur's analysis as a starting point to argue that the intolerable is, paradoxically, necessary for tolerance. I will illustrate this through an analysis of religious slander, which, in the eyes of many religious people, illustrates the limits of tolerance. The notion of religious slander covers a whole range of utterances, from benign jokes about the peculiar habits of Jews, Catholics, Muslims etc. to deliberate attempts to offend them in their deepest religious convictions. In order to discuss this issue adequately it is first of all necessary to realize that religious slander, especially if it is meant to offend other people, indeed is a form of harm. This notion should not be restricted to physical harm, as Ricoeur's examples erroneously suggest. Hence, it is incorrect to downplay religious slander *a priori*, and disqualify the people resisting against it as oversensitive. Secondly, it is important to distinguish slander from religious criticism. Religious slander can be defined as a way to put the members of a religious community in a poor light by covering them with all kinds of negative stereotypes. Precisely because of this, slander increases and hardens the oppositions between 'us' and 'them', and inevitably fuels hatred between (groups of) people. Furthermore, it admits of no rejoinder, because this would only result in a further escalation of the quarrel, as the victims of slander know all too well. The fact that one cannot put the person who slanders in his place – namely, on the same footing as the person who is being slandered – marks the crucial difference with religious criticism. The latter uses reasonable arguments instead of stereotypes, is fair and respectful towards the other instead of disdaining his beliefs, and always allows for an answer. Hence, although religious criticism does not necessarily

result in a better mutual understanding of each other's convictions, it at least respects religious people's sense of dignity.

Many recent incidents have regenerated debates about the acceptability of religious slander. In this context, some politicians even spoke of the 'right to offend' in order to make an issue of it. It is common knowledge that, in all democratic states, the human right of religious freedom and that of free speech are not absolute. They are limited by prohibitions against libel, defamation, obscenity etc., being concretizations of the harm that words can do to individual people and (religious) communities. Apparently, the legislator recognizes that (religious) slander is really a form of harm, and therefore is considered as something intolerable, even though the concrete application of this general principle to concrete cases always requires a careful weighing up of the pros and cons, and, hence, can only result in fragile compromises. But the juridical recognition of the possibility of religious slander anyhow hints at the point that it makes sense to distinguish between what is only intolerable for me and what is intolerable as such, or, at least for a larger community.

In my view, it is essential that the juridical prohibitions against libel etc., including those aimed at religious people and communities, remain in force, not only as a protection of the latter, but, paradoxically, also in order to safeguard tolerance, and to prevent it from eroding. The awareness that the right of free speech is not absolute, or, in other words, that slander is prohibited by law, is a means to make people aware of the fact that they cannot demonize other people unpunished. Tolerance is not only the virtue of enduring what is intolerable for me, but also the virtue of refraining from inflicting spiritual or cultural harm on other people. The asceticism of conviction and power, which Ricoeur defined as the essence of tolerance, is not only meant to protect the slanderers from the (violent) reactions of others, but also requires from the slanderers the virtue of not deliberately harming other people. In a time in which people sometimes feel entitled to abuse their fundamental right of freedom of speech as a licence to offend others, it is important to realize that the virtue of tolerance applies to the former as well.

Secondly, for the victims of (religious) slander it is important to know that they do not have to endure the slander, which they consider intolerable, indefinitely, but can file a complaint to an independent juridical instance, which decides whether their claim is justified or not. Both in the religious (e.g. anti-Semitism) and in the secular (e.g. slandering homosexuals) domain there is ample jurisprudence to illustrate that this way of dealing with (religious) slander is, indeed, a guarantee for a careful weighing up of the pros and cons, and avoids the pitfall of imposing moral absoluteness in a plural society, as Ricoeur has argued. Moreover, the fact that some words, expressions and

practices are publicly recognized as intolerable helps people to endure those things which are considered as being just intolerable for them. Examples of this are the satirical jokes about the peculiarities of specific religious communities. It would be a poor thing if nobody, out of political correctness or juridical constraint, would make jokes about Jews any more, except the Jews themselves. But, at the same time, the public recognition of the intolerable helps them to realize that, if these jokes were to become more and more hostile and turn (again) into anti-Semitism, they can try to influence the public debate by showing that this specific form of slander causes unnecessary harm, and, in any case, is a manifestation of bad taste. Eventually, they can take the matter to court in order to demand that what is intolerable for them be recognized as intolerable for society as a whole. In other words, the public recognition, however fragile it may be, that there are utterances that are intolerable, and, thus, should not be tolerated, is an important means to discourage people from demonizing each other, or, phrased positively, to create a tolerant society. So, in the end, the intolerable is not only a threat to tolerance, but, paradoxically, also a means to safeguard it.

# 7. Democracy and Moral Relativism in a Post-secular World: Reclaiming Obligation

*András Lánczi*

## 1. Equality and Moral Relativism

Does democratic equality necessarily postulate moral relativism? Is moral relativism a modern or a perennial phenomenon? Does democratic equality prescribe moral relativism due to its insistence on the equal value of each individual, thus precluding any moral stance to become a vantage point to others? And if this is the case, how can democracy ensure coherence in its deliberations? The concept of 'relative' suggests that things cannot be judged in themselves, only in relation to other entities. Therefore it is mandatory to conceive relativism as a relation to truth or the absolute, and moral relativism as a relation to justice. Truth itself is absolute; if it were not, it could not be truth. Relativity of truth implies scepticism about the possibility of knowing the truth; moral relativity expresses doubt about the possibility of one's capability of being just.

With respect to truth there are three distinct positions in a modern Western democracy: the religious; the various forms of secularism with both relativist and absolutist overtones; and, the natural law tradition. Natural law tradition denies relativist approaches to truth but admits that what human reason can have access to is only natural laws without any warrants of an absolute Creator. The secular view of truth can be both absolutist and relativist; absolutist to the extent it regards its secular and rationalist standpoint an absolute, and relativist to the extent that it allows room for scepticism. The absolutist secular view has, however, become dominant in Western culture or civilization, and as such, it is always in a potential conflict with other cultures which assert absolute truth. The other source of its latent conflicts with other civilizations is its firm conviction of the validity of knowledge as universal that can be based on human unassisted reason. Instead of God, Western secular thought appointed reason as the absolute, but this conviction or belief has lost its vigour and self-assurance, giving way to a post-secular world in

which cultural relativism, in its latest form as 'multiculturalism', seems to be supported by disillusioned rationalists proving that dogmatic absolutism may get transformed into relativism.

No serious thinker would deny that modernity is somehow connected with the general approval of moral relativism. According to the oft-cited beginning of Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, 'There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative' (Bloom 1987: 25). Bloom goes on to say that 'the relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society, or so they see it'. Bloom, following Leo Strauss' main dictum, points out that relativism is 'necessary to openness', since it is openness that warrants a free society. But what is openness? Again Bloom: 'True openness is the accompaniment of the desire to know, hence the awareness of ignorance. To deny the possibility of knowing good and bad is to suppress true openness' (ibid.: 40). This means that openness takes precedence over the distinction of good and bad, or in a more generalized sense, all forms of the absolute. The absolute can be God, nature, ethnocentrism (which is expressed politically as the national interest), the *common good*, or some mixture of these. But there is another ingredient of openness without which the requirement of openness could not be defended: firm adherence to democratic equality. Today universal human rights, dignity or esteem are meant to summarize one of the preconditions of equality. By now the natural right presupposition has faded into oblivion, or more precisely, it was superseded by a rationalist-positivist-historical justification of human equality. The universal natural right or natural law thought was ousted by the universalization of reason, the by-product of which is the universalization of the individual as the ultimate atom of any society. But by focusing on the dignity, esteem and rights of the individual, the question is if we can dispense with the absolute in order to underpin any moral claim, and trust unassisted human reason as the sole absolute. What prompted Rawls to introduce his idea of 'the overlapping consensus', and later, Habermas to include religious discourse in the deliberation process? Do these moves imply that the problem of the absolute cannot be excluded from the public use of reason?

Relativism immediately comes to the fore when Western secularized culture gets confronted with other cultures, most recently after 9/11. Habermas also noticed that the new debate on relativism is actually an old one: 'The fiery debate was stoked by problematic background assumptions, namely a cultural relativism beefed up with a critique of reason on the one side, and a rigid secularism pushing for a critique of religion on the other' (Habermas 2008). It is an old debate since multiculturalism was meant to be a response

to the problem of cultural plurality worked out by political means. So if multiculturalism is questioned, it is just a critical reflection upon the failure to find an adequate response to the problem of modern relativism resulting from egalitarianism. Cultural relativism is only a symptom of modern democratic relativism, not the cause or the source of it.

On my understanding, the moral justification of liberal democracy is suffering from a serious defect, which is the lack of political realism. The new contractual thinkers, like Rawls or Habermas, aside from their differences with respect to the limits of the inclusiveness of liberal democracy, tend to neglect the first issue of all political morality, i.e. the problem of *who rules*. Normative political theories are inclined to neglect the sovereign because it represents the absolute in the reality of politics. Such theories commit the error of regarding democracy as the people's rule – but modern democracy is probably a misnomer or an ideology that is meant to summarize a number of moral and political claims or principles for which democracy is not responsible. Democracy's central function is to provide *a public sphere* for diverse positions, such as liberal, religious, conservative etc., to argue for and against issues on the agenda, and offers the majoritarian principle to settle issues. But we have known for long that moral issues cannot be settled by votes. As a consequence, democracy permanently needs moral justification or compromise on the preliminary premise that morality should be regarded as relativistic; hence the need for openness.

I wish to argue that democracy based on the idea of equality that, in turn, supports moral relativism, necessarily produces several conflicts which partly manifest themselves in the actual functioning of democracy – like difficulties in controlling ambition, in selecting proper leaders other than those matching media requirements, and in taking responsible decisions – and partly raise serious intellectual issues connected with the antinomies of the Enlightenment like the divisibleness of the sovereign, the dichotomy of fact and value, logic and rhetoric, reason and desire, value and rule.

## 2. Moral Justification of Democracy: J. Bentham, J. Rawls and F. Nietzsche

All forms of government need to have moral justification, which does not coincide with the concept of modern legitimacy. Legitimacy is supposed to justify why just those in power have the right to wield power. Moral justification, however, is meant to support the working of institutions and actions of a particular regime. Without entering into the history of political

philosophy, it is hopefully enough to refer to the general agreement that in a democracy people regard themselves as equal, approve different lifestyles, involve people in public decision-making, thus creating a public sphere of freedom. In contrast to Plato, who definitely refused democracy as mob rule, Aristotle was more permissive of democracy, and paved the way for a much later ascendancy of the idea, especially through the concept of republicanism and *bonum commune*. Moral philosophies that did not really favour democracy put great emphasis on obligation and duties, which are characteristics of deontological moral stands, and have a Christian background. C. H. Whiteley writes: 'In fact, moral philosophies whose key terms are Duty and Obligation, in contrast to those whose key terms are Good and Virtue and Happiness, usually have a Christian background of ideas' (Whiteley 1969: 58). The point where Christian moral philosophy of duties and obligation departed from moral justification of modern republics and later democracies, came with the rise of utilitarianism that openly detached itself from Christian morality and from all moral philosophies that tackled the issue of happiness other than the Epicurean principle of 'pleasure and pain'.

Jeremy Bentham was the first systematic moral thinker who founded a regime based on the principle of the interest of the majority. What Bacon and Descartes were looking for in the field of science in general, the 'Method', Bentham tried to do in the field of moral philosophy. He managed to reduce the springs of all human actions to one dimension, 'pleasure and pain'. 'Pleasures and pains, the basis of all the springs of action. Pleasures and pains exist without the springs; not vice versa' (Bentham 1992: 11). Bentham states that 'Sensation with or without pleasure or pain are the only immediately *perceptible* entities. All others are but *inferential*' (ibid.: 6). It means that pleasure and pain are the absolute, all else is only derivative or relative, including obligation. even if Bentham concedes that there can be situations when

> obligation is not regarded as constituted. Fear of the pain of burning suffices in ordinary cases to withhold a man from thrusting his hand into the fire. But so far from his being under obligation not to do so, in certain cases he is considered as under obligation to do so, ex. gr. to save a wife or child. (Ibid.: 8)

But obligation precedes only in extreme cases, because obligation is constructed, i.e. not a real entity. No wonder that even 'the existence of virtue depends upon the existence of pain and pleasure' (ibid.: 159), and

> Obligation is a species of fictitious entity that belongs to the field of law and the field of deontology. Right belongs almost exclusively to law: with deontology it has but little to do: in deontology it is comparatively but seldom that the occasion for making mention of it presents itself. Of deontology the business consists chiefly in the distribution of obligation. (Ibid.: 171)

Except for pain and pleasure no other moral concepts have reality, they are constructed. As a consequence, the absolute political concept of *summum bonum*, as the supreme or sovereign good, cannot be but 'consummate nonsense', as he calls it.

Bentham simply followed Hobbes' argument about the plain denial that the *summum bonum* would ever exist. But Bentham, by making pain and pleasure the absolute source of morals, also placed the source of morality in the individual, thus paving the way for individualizing the absolute. He writes:

> Well-being, composed as hath been seen, of the maximum of pleasure minus the minimum of pain – the pleasure it will be seen is man's own pleasure, the pain is man's own pain – will upon a strict and close enquiry be seen to be actually the intrinsic and the ultimate object of pursuit to every man at all times. (Ibid.: 147–8)

On the general idea of utility, Bentham managed to establish utilitarianism as the underpinning conception of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' evolving democracy. Despite his high rhetoric of nature ('Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure'), he actually distanced himself from the original meaning of nature, and as a result, he naturalized morals by equating nature with the observable or discernible, i.e. pleasure and pain. He did not abolish the absolute but individualized and internalized it: the absolute is you, it is you who are capable of constructing all other moral concepts, and everyone can deduct from 'them alone … what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do' (ibid.: 11). Bentham seemed to have found the 'Method' of man's springs of action that he identified with man's morality. He simplified, therefore, the aims of human political actions to the sum total interests of the individuals constituting a community. And it was in accordance with the principle of democratic rule that prescribes that right is the will of the majority. But it is also clear that what Bentham sought was a process of replacing the transcendent absolute by a secular conception of the absolute,

i.e. pleasure and pain. Not the absolute but the source of the absolute was changed.

John Rawls' work, *A Theory of Justice*, can be read as a criticism of utilitarianism. Rawls' ambition was to provide a new system of morality that could support liberal democracy as it had developed after the Second World War. The hub of this theory is obviously concerned with correcting and not replacing the utilitarian doctrine. Rawls writes:

> The question is whether the imposition of disadvantages on a few can be outweighed by a greater sum of advantages enjoyed by others; or whether the weight of justice requires an equal liberty for all, and permits only those economic and social inequalities which are to each person's interest. Implicit in the contrasts between classical utilitarianism and justice as fairness is a difference in the underlying conceptions of society. (Rawls 1973: 33)

So Rawls tacitly accepts the presumptions of utilitarianism, i.e. the Benthamian secular absolutism; the crucial difference is to be found in the view of the society. He accepts that there is no transcendental absolute including *summum bonum*, and that society is basically the sum of the individual interests where each individual, in addition to being rational, would like to maximize pleasure. Rawls does not reject the utilitarian view of human nature; all he wants to point out is that because 'a rational choice is always possible, at least in principle' (ibid.: 555), 'a well-ordered society' is always possible, and what is possible can also be desirable and feasible. By adhering to his idea of the 'original position', Rawls' theory comes very close to being called a utopia – except we regard man as a super-creature whose nature could be amended on the basis of his rationality.

If any fault could be detected in utilitarianism it is that it failed to observe obligation. This is why he contrasts utilitarianism as 'a teleological theory', and justice as fairness – 'a deontological theory' which 'does not specify the good independently from the right' (ibid.: 30). What Rawls effects is a radicalization and correction of utilitarianism by relativizing the good, and merging it with the right. It is derived from the basic assumption of Rawls according to which what is fair is just, but what is just is not necessarily fair. He can only do it if he reduces man to his rational choices based on a fictitious initial position to a point where man's equality ends up in a total egalitarianism. A well-ordered society is described in terms of desirable social goods like liberty and equality, but the common goals – self-sacrifice, authority etc. – which are the cement of a society, are not specified, and what remains is a utopian attempt to establish an egalitarian society in which liberty would be lost independently of

the author's intention. Because classical utilitarians are 'indifferent as to how a constant sum of benefits is distributed' (ibid.: 77), Rawls set out to construct a system where distribution is the key issue, and politics is subordinated to this sole idea and democratic politics becomes identical with deliberation (cf. Goodin 2003).

At this point it is interesting to refer to Nietzsche's view on democracy, which partly revolves around political realism. Whereas he declares that 'the masses, in any nation, are ready to sacrifice their lives, their goods, and chattels, their consciences and their virtue, to obtain that highest of pleasures [cf. Bentham!] – the feeling that they rule' (Nietzsche 1881: 189) – he also draws us back to the reality of politics:

> I am speaking of democracy as of something yet to come. That which now calls itself democracy differs from older forms of government solely in that it drives with *new horses*: the streets are still the same old streets, and the wheels are likewise the same old wheels. (Nietzsche 1878: II. 293)

The masses remain masses in a democracy, too, 'the streets are still the same old streets'.

The loss of reality, or the restricting of reality according to rationalist claims, is the price that we have to pay for preserving peace through creating an open, egalitarian, and secular world. One absolutist way of thinking (religious, transcendental) was ousted by another absolutist but secular way of thinking. Modern man struggles not with his gods but solely with himself. Consequently, there is no absolute obligation either. Man can act as he pleases under the urge either of 'pleasure and pain', or under the guidance of his own 'rationality', but the command of obligation is solely derived from manmade norms and political contracts. In a post-secular world, however, the shaken confidence of the rationalists has led to the issue that without obligation there is nothing that could hold a community together. And it has also been realized that it is not religion but the relativization of man's obligation that jeopardizes Western human existence. But if that is the case, we need to re-evaluate our relationship to the idea of the rationality of the Enlightenment.

## 3. Unsolved Antinomies of the Enlightenment: The Split of Reason

By transforming the absolute from its divine form to a secular one, Enlightenment thinkers created a new context for reason. Over several

centuries the new view on reason slowly but steadily demonstrated the weaknesses of the absolutization of reason. Besides the personal impact of it – e.g., that man found himself in a position of existential anxiety – intellectually he is caught up by the following contrasts: fact and value, logic and rhetoric, reason and desire, value and rule. The fundamental flaw stems from the split of reason. The Latin *ratio* was meant to translate the original Greek *Logos* but it failed to convey both aspects of the Greek concept which involved not only thinking but also *verbum*, the way a thought is framed. As a result, the concept of modern reason opposed two interwoven aspects of human rationality, which culminated in the almost century-long debate on the fact-and-value distinction on the one hand, and logic and rhetoric on the other. Stephen Toulmin thus has this to say:

> … the insistence on explanations in terms of universal laws – with formal, general, timeless, context-free, and value-neutral arguments – is nowadays the business of Logic; the study of factual narratives about particular objects or situations, in the form of substance, timely, local, situation-dependent, and ethically loaded argumentation, is at its best a matter of Rhetoric. Academic philosophers and serious-minded theorists in any field are concerned only with the first. (Toulmin 2001: 24)

Thus modern science depends solely on logic, which is universal per se, and rhetoric has remained unscientific, a sort of art of speaking deprived of any standards of truth. Whereas logic may produce scientific insights, rhetoric can achieve no more than convincing someone of the validity of a statement. Since rhetoric is ethically loaded and tied to a particular set of circumstances, it cannot aspire to become universal.

Another outcome of the split of reason is the separation of modern reason and knowledge from moral consideration. The only measure of modern reason is its internal coherence that exempts reason from any ethical scrutiny. But if this is the case, then the measurement of knowledge is exclusively focused upon its usefulness with no respect to its overall moral impact. Also an unwanted consequence of this separation is that moral issues, including the problem of obligation, are relegated to the sphere of individual decisions, for ethically loaded questions can only be treated as particular cases, and never as universal phenomena. Modern reason torn out from its social context degenerated into an instrument, and it cannot be judged other than like any other instrument. Moral relativity, therefore, is necessary after the split of reason into logic and rhetoric simply because each individual, the social atom or particular, is ultimately the source of moral standards which are realized

through contracts and monitored by universal reason, or logic by means of discourse.

Habermas like, for instance, Hannah Arendt, has always been aware of the untenable status of modern reason. What he speaks about today by introducing the concept of a post-secular world is a continuation of what he has been recommending for long: public reason exists solely and exclusively through the public use of reason which requires communication or discourse. His communicative action and concomitant discourse theory rests on the simple insight that reason in itself cannot justify any moral claim. Only through dialogues, which incorporate critical assessment, could we work out moral standards – but, as Habermas' critics do not fail to point out, it can only fit the needs of a democratic regime. Thus his discourse ethics is liable to remain within the limits of the modern reason split between two facets of reason: logos split into logic and rhetoric. In other words, Habermas fails to produce an ethics beyond the boundaries of a particular community, in which reasonable citizens would deliberate according to their best knowledge, which is necessarily defective. Such a conception could avoid moral relativity if all human beings could participate in the same deliberative process, but it is evidently utopian, and what is worse, despite the totality of mankind involved in the decision-making, there is no safeguard against wrong deliberations. The relativity of morals cannot be refuted by the usefulness or rightness of a decision even if it is democratically made.

The question of moral relativism appears as a by-product of democratization. Earlier moral relativism was connected with the relations of cultures. Originally moral relativism expressed 'moral disagreements between societies' which, according to Bernard Williams, is 'possibly the most absurd view to have been advanced even in moral philosophy', or it is the vulgar form of relativism. It implies that 'right' is meant for a particular society, which leads us back to the central problem of moral relativism. Bernard Williams writes: 'The central confusion of relativism is to try to conjure up from the fact that societies have differing attitudes and values an *a priori* nonrelative principle to determine the attitude of one society to another; this is impossible' (Williams 1972: 23). It is impossible simply because 'the element of universalisation' is 'present in any morality', i.e. it is not the particularity of a culture or a community of people that condemns a culture or society to the lower status of morality, since 'the element of universalisation' is in there, as in all other cultures.

The same problem prompted Leo Strauss to distinguish between the thought of classical political philosophy and that of the moderns, and Roberto Unger to propose art as a means to dissolve the antinomy between the particular and the universal. According to Strauss 'the political controversy has a natural

tendency to express itself in universal terms' (Strauss 1989: 67), which was observed by the ancient political thinkers when they related themselves to political life directly, and claimed that 'political science as the skill of the excellent politicians or statesman consists in the right handling of individual situations' (ibid.: 65). Modern political philosophy or science, however, 'calls itself political theory' (ibid.: 71); the difference between the two is that modern political science is concerned with the description or understanding of political life, whereas ancient political philosophy's primary concern was the 'right guidance' of political life. The split of reason, therefore, has led up to the opposition of the particular and the universal.

Unger was also occupied with the same issue: how we could transcend 'the antinomies of Enlightenment'. Unger proposed 'an entity whose universality consists precisely in the open set of concrete and substantive determinations in which it can appear' (Unger 1975: 143). Art, according to Unger, seems to provide the pattern of bridging the gap between the particular and the universal, for there is a universality of meaning in the particularity of art. This line of argument is similar to that of Leo Strauss – both political views and pieces of art, as such and by nature, unite particular and universal aspects of a phenomenon.

In the field of politics or the public realm this split has undermined the coherence of a democratic regime. Democracy has produced equal citizenship and openness by removing all absolute vantage points, making all judgements 'relative', including moral judgements. But by creating such a context, deliberation has become an insurmountable problem in a democratic regime. Deliberation needs activity, in a democratic regime, the activity of the citizens. But in a modern liberal democracy, where all views are welcome with equal respect, people, as in any other form of government, cannot become philosophers. Thus they do and act as modern 'theorists' think it most advisable for them – but 'theorists' themselves refrain from action; they would like merely to understand politics. Therefore people are utterly confused and exposed to an ideological way of thought, which provides them with a surrogate of faith and belief. Since truth, the guiding principle of human existence is relative in the modern era, all decisions are relative, all actions are relative, and all obligations are relative, too. This seems to underlie the conjecture that democracy is necessarily especially susceptible to moral relativism.

But one vexing question still remains to be answered. Who are the subjects of the theories?

## 4. Democracy: Natural System of Moral Relativity, or Craving for the Absolute – a Return to the Concept of Obligation?

If the religious or other forms of the absolute are removed in order to secure the moral equality of democratic citizens, does it mean that human craving for the absolute (captured in questions like 'What is life?' and 'Does it have any meaning?') is also removed? Could democracy erase this primordial urge? It does not sound real. Even if democracy is declared to be an instrument to preserve peace, and maintained only by rational means and a framework of institutions, the first question will remain: 'How should I live?' After the two world wars Western societies created a new regime: the liberal democracy that is meant to unite the merits of a mixed government. It has worked out well politically, but gradually deprived itself of all vantage points, making the citizens the subjects of the 'theories' – the debate over the post-secular world might be a new phase of admitting that man cannot live without absolute vantage points. Habermas, remaining within the paradigm of the Enlightenment, still believes that deliberation can and should be based on discourse, a process of open communication.

Religious views were confined to a certain public realm but were not allowed to partake in real democratic deliberation. What Habermas proposes is that these views ought to be let into the deliberation process, for modern democracy as a form of government has been losing impetus; the public realm needs rejuvenation with the inclusion of the complete experience of human existence, thus counterbalancing the dominance of the logical by the rhetorical. But is democracy capable of such a transformation? The great impediment is the system of moral relativism that is the moral foundation of liberal democracy.

## 5. Conclusion: Not Only One but Many Religions

The relativization of truth in the modern world, and the questioning of the One in the name of openness to the Many, have led to the multiplication of truth, and as an unexpected concomitant development, an unquenchable craving for the Absolute. But due to the liberal taboo of the truth as one, or the reality of the absolute, not one but many are being created everyday. This is really the phenomenon of *Ersatzreligion* or surrogate religion. But I would call it a craving for the Absolute – people crave for it, and it is unavoidable. Without outside vantage points, the political system of moral relativism will destroy itself. Thomas L. Pangle has a point here:

> The equalization of values is the greatest danger. Values and cultures can and must be ranked in accordance with the degree of resoluteness or seriousness with which the basic values are held or advanced, and in accordance with their depth or shallowness, their comprehensiveness or narrowness, their honesty or hypocrisy, their communal responsibility or irresponsibility, their degree of venerations for their past and of revolutionary creativity looking to their future. (Pangle 2006: 33)

Modern democracy has always struggled with its natural defect; namely, how to create and maintain obligation from their citizens. It has become clear that it is not enough if a secular regime, i.e. liberal democracy, by allowing a plurality of views, openness to all ideas, creates a public realm on the foundation of moral relativism. The coherence and the integration of a society or a regime cannot be maintained without obligation. And it is also problematic if the advocates of a secular society believe that a secular society can secure obligation purely by secular means, i.e. by enlightening the people or simply benefiting from the remaining attitudes of religiously conditioned or educated earlier generations. Rawls' emphasis on 'deontology' in contrast to Bentham's position betrays the defect of both democracy and the contractual justification of morality. Habermas may be right with his propositions about a post-secular age if he does not regard moral concepts of religious and natural law theories merely as instruments for liberal purposes.

# FROM POLITICAL THEORY TO POLITICAL THEOLOGY

## Part Three

# Radicalizing the Challenges: Recuperating Religion

# 8. Religion, Democracy and the Empty Shrine of Pluralism: Some Reminders

*Walter Van Herck*

## 1. Introduction

When reflecting on the relation between religion and democracy attention is drawn to the ways in which the changing societal conditions of our time dictate a new type of interaction between the state and the different religions which are to be found within its borders. The relation between religion and democracy also poses in a different way the problem of multiculturalism. Reconceptualizing 'multiculturalism' and in most cases also 'multireligiosity' deepens our understanding. Using the notion of culture creates a rather mild approach to societal problems. Different cultures have different ways of cooking, courting, negotiating, greeting, mourning, and so on. There is little clash or conflict in this. By learning a language, by reading, by communicating with people of different cultures and by a willingness to learn from the other, much of what is problematic can be remedied. Cultural divides can be bridged; suspicion and ignorance supplanted with knowledge and understanding. Cultures are connected with rather irenic virtues like folkloristic dancing, music and playing games.

Religions however have a reputation of being a possible source of violence, war, torture, exclusion and persecution. More than cultures, religions have strong symbols to which the followers of that religion are strongly attached. There are flags and crosses, altars and relics, icons and temples, cathedrals and sacraments, holy cities and even holy monkeys. All of which have to be kept from profanation and attack.

Taking religions into account makes the problem more of a problem. Democracies can no doubt tackle the challenge of accommodating different cultures, but how can democracies survive the fury of religions, this clash of passions? The impression from the historical and anthropological landscape certainly is that by their very nature religions install deeper and more intense bonds between people than cultures do. Religions – perhaps also secular

worldviews like atheism – are about our strongest allegiances. In his *Rhetoric* (1412a11) Aristotle gives an example of analogy: 'in philosophy also an acute mind will perceive resemblances even in things far apart. Thus Archytas said that an arbitrator and an altar were the same, since the injured fly to both for refuge' (Aristotle 1984: 2253). Religion, so it seems, is all about our last refuge.

There is of course a tendency to equate culture and community in the sense that a community can be defined by referring to a common cultural tradition. But people that share the same culture and/or the same language do not always belong to a more profound symbolic community. Northern Irish Protestants and Catholics share language and most of their culture, but when it comes to their deepest symbolical allegiances they differ.

Against the tendency to underestimate the difficulties of a multireligious society I want to offer in this chapter some philosophical reminders of its gravity. The first set of reminders concerns ideas which contribute to the answering of questions like these. What type of religion is most in agreement with the logic of a democratic society? What type of religion would a democracy want to cherish? And is this type of religion a reality or only a democratic dream?

A second set of reminders concerns the unity of democratic society. There are several arguments according to which religion cannot do without a community or a collectivity, but can a society do without a bonding worldview, without some sort of religion? Is it possible or necessary to have a pluralist community rather than a pluralist society?

## 2. A Suitable Religion

Ideally a democratic citizen is informed about the factual situation of the society he is part of. The legal, political, social, economical facts would be of interest to him. He is also informed about the views of different political parties, their ideology and programme. Thus informed, and by following ongoing political debates in the media, the democratic citizen is able to make decisions and choose the party and representatives which according to his mind are most suited to lead his country. Rousseau is said to have opposed the formation of political parties, since it is not consistent with his individualist presuppositions. The idea that a large group of people all think exactly the same could only be either an enormous coincidence or else a sham.

A suitable religion would be first of all a religion that would not contain any anti-democratic ideological elements. Next to this negative condition, it would be positively – in order to be in agreement with the democratic predicament

– a religion in which the aforementioned factors recur: a religion namely that can be the object of individual choice and decision and that can be built on strong and clear opinions.

Contrary to the subjects of traditional societies, who meekly follow the collective flow, the democratic citizen is an emancipated individual with strong opinions. I would like to comment on the three characteristics given, namely that religion would be about (1) an individual who (2) has opinions and (3) makes choices.

**1. Individualism**

No doubt the development of democratic and capitalist societies has partly caused the transformation of Western religion in the direction mentioned. It goes without saying that most Protestant denominations are more in accordance with this ideal type of religion in a democracy than the Roman Catholic Church is. Some denominations, for example, refuse to baptize children but postpone this until an individual, well-considered choice is possible. And indeed there is no democratic necessity for religion to be offered in a collective form of a church. Individual spirituality is just as good. Of course, the organization in churches can have its benefits in social terms because churches can be powerful elements in civil society. Such a democratic appreciation for a church as an element of civil society has in itself nothing to do with its being a religious institution. Although democratic societies will tolerate most non-violent religions, I think it is clear that they agree more with – and favour more – an expressive individualism.

**2. Opinions**

Politics is about ideas and opinions, but how central are opinions in religion? According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1998a, 1998b),[1] who devoted two books to the crucial concept of 'belief', it is very confusing to treat religious belief as if it is an ordinary belief, i.e. a kind of conjecture or surmise. Smith announces his position as follows: 'We shall suggest … that those who make belief central to religious life have taken a wrong turning' and 'Those primarily concerned with beliefs, pro or con, may turn out to be barking up a wrong tree' (Smith 1998a: 36–7). What brought belief to the foreground in recent Western history? Belief does not play a significant role in either the Qur'an or the Bible. And although Christianity has a predilection to express its faith in intellectual form (next to ritual, artistic, moral forms) – given its integration of Greek thought – Smith contends that this predilection 'has been manoeuvred by modern conditions into strikingly novel forms' (ibid.: 39). In recent times the meaning of 'to believe' has changed dramatically.

In the premodern concept of belief, belief is faith. The medieval meaning of 'to believe' is close to the German words 'belieben, Liebe'. It means to hold dear, to love, to prize, to give allegiance, to be loyal, to value highly. In Chaucer, 'accepte my bileve' simply means 'accept my loyalty'. In Latin it is rendered with 'credere' which literally means 'I set my heart' (*cor*, heart + *-dere*, to put). 'Belief in God' meant a commitment and loyalty to God. 'I believe in God' testifies to loyalty, to not wanting to betray God. Such a statement is directed against the possibility of sin, against the possibility of betrayal. It is not directed against the possibility that God doesn't exist. It is not a confirmation in the light of threatening atheism, but in the light of the possibility of a life as if God didn't exist. 'I believe' resembles the 'I do' of marriage: it is a promise, not a description of my opinions.

The premodern concept of belief has as its object mainly a person: one believes someone. Its subject is chiefly specified in the first person singular and in the second person (mostly in imperative form: 'Believe me!'). Hardly ever is it found in the third person. In Shakespeare for example 90 per cent of the uses of the verb 'to believe' are in the first and second person singular.

What changes in the modern age is, first of all, the object of the verb 'to believe'. Even quantitative analysis of texts can show that while in the premodern meaning one believes mainly a person (I believe you), this shifts to belief in things (I believe your word) and in propositions (I believe that …). For Hobbes, for example, 'to believe in God' signifies 'to hold all for truth they heare him say' (ibid.: 47). This is an intermediary form between trusting a person and accepting a verbal statement (*that*-clause). On the ground of trust in his virtue the sayings of a person are accepted. In contemporary English this element of trust is no longer required. To believe a person's sayings, and at the same time not to trust him, is no longer contradictory. Further on in the nineteenth century 'belief' is reduced to propositional belief, 'I believe that A is B' (ibid.: 51).[2] Even when a distinction is made between 'believing in' and 'believing that', it is said that all instances of the first must necessarily contain belief of the second kind.

Also the subject of belief changes. The focus of attention shifts to what other people believe, whereas the prototypical premodern form was in the first person singular. There are important differences between first and third person uses of 'believe'. 'I believe' is of course self-engaging, but it also makes a claim that goes further than the description of a state of mind. 'I believe it rains' is about the weather, while 'He believes it rains' is not. And although it is possible to say, 'What he believes is false', it is a contradiction to say 'What I believe is false'.

A third feature concerns the relation to truth. Smith cites a dictionary (Random House) in which the first example given is: 'The belief that the earth is flat'. The first belief that comes to mind for the compilers of this dictionary is a belief that is false. And indeed, the view that the earth is round would today never be called 'a belief'. Whereas in its early uses the concept 'belief' added something to knowledge, it gradually began to indicate uncertainty and doubt. Now, it seems to point to plain falsehood.

> Belief, once meaning trust, and adding something to knowledge, designating the difference between knowing inertly and knowing responsively, came increasingly to denominate rather a situation where lack of trust is in order. So-and-so knows that Canberra is the capital of Australia; so-and-so believes that Sydney is. (Ibid.: 65)

The modern meaning of belief is rendered in Latin by 'opinio'; its verb is 'opinor', 'opinari'. This is a negligible category in medieval Christian thought.

**3. Choices**

In our day and age every self-respecting citizen and *a fortiori* every intellectual must have an explicit worldview. In some circles it is undoubtedly more important to have thought about values, than to really have values. When a worldview is failing, two courses of action are open. The first consists in joining a faith group or church. One absorbs for the largest part the worldview of that church. This is the ready-made solution. The alternative is to produce an individual worldview oneself. Since most of us haven't got the worldview-constructing capabilities of, for example, Spinoza, many integrate elements from worldviews that are on offer.

The first possibility has lost much of its former attraction. Choosing the ready-made option indicates a lack in courage (as Kant says in the opening lines of his essay on Enlightenment), in creativity, in personality. If the first option receives any respect it is by turning it into a case of the second option. One had developed a view of one's own and then found – it is a small miracle – a church that gives expression to the views one already had. The value of a collective worldview is made dependent upon an individual worldview. Worldviews are essentially private and individual. Collective worldviews can be used by individuals as means to the realization of their individual goals.

Choosing a worldview (or parts of it) implies the use of a criterion in the light of which this view can appear as relevant, pertinent or valuable. Every non-arbitrary choice presupposes the use of a criterion, or to put it another

way, a value. I prefer water to beer, because I think health is important. Health is here my value or criterion which permits me to make a choice. So, if I would say that I have chosen some values, this would imply that I have a different, higher set of values which I have used in making this choice. Ergo: in a way, it doesn't make sense to say that one has chosen one's highest values. The most precious in life always presents itself as given, as a gift, as a vocation, as a calling, as a falling in love, not as something chosen. Of course a vocation can be suppressed and a gift can be refused. This is however the reactive choice to ratify or to decline what presents itself to me. In that reactive sense, it is of course not nonsensical to say that one has chosen a worldview or a value. But, in tinkering with my own worldview, religion or spirituality, which criteria could I have used to make my choice or to decide which parts of existing religions I can use? I must already have a worldview, a set of values to do this. The construction of an individual worldview is parasitic upon an already interiorized worldview that one has received simply from being brought up in a culture, a religion, a family, a community.[3] To think of oneself as completely autonomous in this respect amounts to a case of infatuation.

In concluding this section, I am inclined to say that the individualist, opinion-based and chosen religion which democratic societies favour is more or less a dream image. Religions are not individualist but collective phenomena. Even if they are individualist, they remain parasitic upon collective forms of religion. Religions are not opinion based, although opinions may play an important role in them. And religions are chosen only in the reactive sense of the verb 'to choose'.

## 3. Unity and Community

In 1930 Ludwig Wittgenstein made a first sketch for a foreword. It was an early draft of the foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks*. He makes use of the distinction between a culture and a civilization which is so important in H. Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. I quote a small part of it:

> A culture is like a big organization which assigns each of its members a place where he can work in the spirit of the whole; and it is perfectly fair for his power to be measured by the contribution he succeeds in making to the whole enterprise. In an age without culture on the other hand forces become fragmented and the power of an individual man is used up in overcoming opposing forces and frictional resistances; it does not show in the distance he travels but perhaps only in the heat he generates in overcoming friction.

> But energy is still energy and even if the spectacle which our age affords us is not the formation of a great cultural work, with the best men contributing to the same great end, so much as the unimpressive spectacle of a crowd whose best members work for purely private ends, still we must not forget that the spectacle is not what matters. (Wittgenstein 1992: 6)

There are here two things I want to take note of. First, in a culture everyone is in one way or another directed towards a common good or goal. There is unity in a culture, which for this reason could also be called a community. A civilization, however, threatens to dissolve in fragmentation. Secondly, because of the loss of unity there are only private reasons for upholding a civilization. When the best members only work for purely private ends, this means that there is a kind of instrumentalization of society. Individuals make use of society as a means to furthering their private ends and society is nothing more than this conglomerate.

Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections on rules and language give us, however, another picture. From these reflections the conclusion forces itself upon us that humans cannot do without communities.

The private language argument wants to demonstrate that the idea of a language which is spoken by only one person is not intelligible. This solipsistic speaker would not have access to reality through the conceptual framework of a shared language, but can only name his own private sensations. Such a solipsistic speaker can never be certain that what he named yesterday with a particular term is the same as what he wants to denote with that term today. All he can do is try to remember yesterday's factual constellation. This is, however, not a valid method to attain the required certainty. In this way the actual use of the term functions as a starting point for remembering and singling out yesterday's usage. What if he remembers wrongly? In this solipsistic setting there is no difference between remembering wrongly or correctly, between making an identical use of that term and only thinking that one makes an identical use of it. There is no criterion, no yardstick; there are no other language users who can offer corrections. A language in which no difference can be made between correct and incorrect language use is no language at all. A rule that is not in some sense shared would not be a rule, because 'otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it' (Wittgenstein 1994: §§202, 258). Adam had to wait for Eve to be able to follow a rule. The psychological makeup of the human individual is not able to create language or thought. These Wittgensteinian ideas go against the grain of much modern philosophy. For Hobbes, for example, language is but a means which the individual can use to name the contents of his

intellect. Wittgenstein demonstrates that the following of a rule presupposes the existence of a community. An example could be that a confusion of tastes, in which there is enormous disagreement about what is sweet and what is sour, would have an undermining effect on my own ability to classify tastes privately. The stable background against which I make these distinctions would have vanished.

Man as a rule-follower is not just an information processor, but someone who strives to meet certain norms and standards; someone who makes the distinction between what he does and what he ought to do, between what he believes and what he ought to believe. Only public standards of correctness can give sense to a distinction between what is right and what seems to be right (O'Hear 1991: 50). Public space is exactly the place where these public standards are formed and used in processes of evaluation. Wittgenstein tells us that language – and by way of extension any rule-guided activity – cannot do without a public space. This public space is constitutive of our speaking, moral acting, religious feelings, and so on, even when these activities, this speaking and acting concerns the most intimate and the most personal. 'What this distinction [between deviant and non-deviant applications of a rule] requires … is the existence of a community, united in education, training and judgement and at one in the application of rules and the use of concepts' (ibid.: 51). What follows from this is that public space must be seen as the oxygen room that makes private and individual life possible. It is not the other way round: as if individuals would make communal, public life possible. An empty or neutral public space is nothing to be wished for. Without a community of scientists, there is no individual scientific thinking; without a community of citizens, there is no individual citizenship; and so on. If linguistic public space would be neutral, nobody would correct another's spelling, grammar – anything would go. Confusion and the disintegration of language would result.

As Aristotle says in the opening lines of his *Politics* (1252a1–6).

> Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good. (Aristotle 1984: 1986)

The idea of a neutral state is foreign to Aristotle. Man is always directed to the realization of some good.

With the modern restriction of the divine legitimation of worldly society and the coming of pluralist society since the Reformation, understanding the unity of society has become a problem. For Hobbes, for example, the unity of society cannot reside any more in a common worldview, religion and ethical system, but its unity is purely political. The contract and its manifestation, namely the sovereign, are the bearers of unity. Here is a small quote from the seventeenth chapter of his *Leviathan*:

> The only way to erect such a Common Power … is, to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safetie; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgements, to his judgement. This is more than Consent, or Concord; it is a real unitie of them all, in one and the same person, made by convenant of every man with every man, in such a manner, as if every man should say to every man, I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner. This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence. (Hobbes 1983: 227)

Next to this solution for the unity of society is the possibility to install a kind of secular religion with symbols, myths, temples, holidays – a religion of citizenship. In some countries patriotism reaches the status of a civil religion. The shrine of pluralism may be empty, but it is still a shrine. Rousseau dedicated the penultimate chapter of his *The Social Contract* to civil religion:

> There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject. While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the State whoever does not believe them – it can banish him, not for impiety, but as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life to his duty. If any one, after publicly

> recognizing these dogmas, behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death: he has committed the worst of all crimes, that of lying before the law.
>
> The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas I confine to one, intolerance, which is a part of the cults we have rejected.
>
> Those who distinguish civil from theological intolerance are, to my mind, mistaken. The two forms are inseparable. It is impossible to live at peace with those we regard as damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them: we positively must either reclaim or torment them. (Rousseau 2001: 78–9)

The shrine of civility is not without dangers. This makes the question what a pluralist community would look like all the more urgent. In search for an alternative for the premodern, monoreligious community, Hobbes and Rousseau still emphasize unity. For Hobbes all citizens surrender their power to the sovereign in pious obedience. Not without reason this sovereign is called a mortal God. In this way the citizen is brought into a relation with something that transcends his private interests. Transgression of the law not only results in – for example – damage to my neighbour's property, but it also comprises a breech of the contract with all my fellow citizens. The offender stops recognizing the value of the common good and substitutes it with his own private goals. Rousseau has no trouble describing in the above quotation resistance to the law as a kind of sacrilegious act.

Modern democracies have tried to accommodate religion. In the process they have tried to squeeze religions into the mould of individualism. Some fitted better than others. On penalty of disintegration, however, these democracies develop – implicitly or explicitly – notions of a common good that transcends all individual interests and installs unity. It is better to take this heteronomy into account.

# 9. Religion after Auschwitz: Jonas, Metz, and the Place of Religion in our World Today

*Balázs M. Mezei*

## 1. Introduction: Varieties of Religious Renewal

'Religion' in the traditional sense had slipped into an ever-deepening crisis by the time of the French Revolution. Since then, a good number of attempts have been formulated to renew, in one form or another, traditional religion in its cult, morality, and dogmas. We can divide these attempts into two main groups. The one considers religion in its history and tries to reshape it on the basis of history. The other considers religion in the wider context of human intellectual and spiritual endeavours and attempts to reshape religion on the basis of openness to this context.

Historical reforms of religion have been proposed in Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam at various points of their histories. These reforms are fundamentalist in the sense that what they consider as decisive for their reforms is some construct of the past. I emphasize the notion of construct as, in spite of the references, fundamentalist reforms are rarely based on actual earlier forms of religious history.

The second group of attempts to reshape religion considers religion as a dynamic process and does not see the religious past as authoritative. Such attempts characteristically modernize religion, as they see it, on the basis of actual requirements of the surrounding society. These attempts may affect religion in one or more aspects; but only rarely do we find an overall attempt to reform, as was the case in original Buddhism or Christianity, which tried to reshape the religion of their respective age in a general fashion. Islam too may be seen as such a general reform of then contemporary religion; and since the time of the Renaissance, history has not produced a similarly general and successful reshaping of religion with important consequences.

European and generally Western modernity have emerged as a complex process of religious reforms; all the important representatives of modernity, in its first period, were closely connected to religion, mainly Christianity.

Many of these personalities had not only some important spiritual, scientific, philosophical or artistic invention or contribution, but a wider conception too as to reshaping religion in some way. Modernity may be seen as a movement of religious reforms, a movement belonging to the second group I mentioned above.

At the same time it must be seen that European modernity, with its technical civilization, has been detached from its religious roots and turned against religion as such at a certain point, emphatically during the second half of the nineteenth century. This process of ever-lessening religiosity and ever-increasing technological force led to the tragedy of the world wars; and the same tendency led to the overall attempt to exterminate the European Jews by Nazi Germany.

The main feature of the process leading to the world wars and the Holocaust was anti-religious; Nazi Germany was at the same time anti-Christian and anti-religious. Modernity has arrived at its extremes with the Holocaust, as it was detached from its original objective of renewing religion as religion. Secularity was a necessary part of modernity if and only if we understand thereby the attempt to renew religion in important ways. If however secularity is understood as a militant anti-religious movement, it is already a form of extremism and does not belong, in my understanding, to the creative core of modernity.

In what follows I shall try to understand religion in terms of its development, a development where modernity, secularity and Auschwitz have their important place.

## 2. A Secular Age: Charles Taylor's Thesis

Let me approach the problem of religion after Auschwitz from the point of view of secularity. Secularity is defined here as a reform of religion in terms of revising its traditional role in politics, society, culture, morality, and the sciences. I distinguish between secularism and secularity, as the latter is a descriptive and the former an evaluative term. Secularism can serve as an *Ersatzreligion*, a complex ideology as is observable in some contemporary movements. Secularity, however, attempts to reshape the place of religion and does not necessarily entail atheism. Secularity has reached its extreme realizations in twentieth-century political ideologies, one of them being German National Socialism. Following the collapse of Soviet-type communism, we are already in an age after secularity. To use Charles Taylor's expression, today we live in 'a secular age' (Taylor 2007).

According to Taylor, we can distinguish three meanings of secularity:

(1) secularized public spaces;
(2) the decline of religious belief and practice;
(3) the new conditions of belief (being only one option among many others).

To characterize the first point, let me mention that today religion does not figure in our everyday public life; religion is not in the centre of political, economic, or financial news; religion does not even appear in artistic events. In the *New York Times*, religious news, if it appears, is relegated to the 'Life' section.

To characterize the second point, let me mention that we live in a secular age where the position, content, importance and meaning of religion are almost fully changed. We have a religion fundamentally different from the religion of the 1500s in Europe; and a religion different even from the 1800s of Victorian England. Just think of Catholicism before the First World War; or of the Protestantism of the nineteenth century. If we compare those religious practices and understandings with those of our days, we see the important differences. Even among religious people, certain tenets and views are undeniably outmoded; many dogmatic formulas are simply not held or are even forgotten (geocentric view; the activity of demonic and angelic beings, etc.).

To characterize the third point, let me mention that religion has become an option in our societies, yet it is an open question as to *what kind of option*; obviously not an option with fundamental importance in our daily lives. The conditions of religious belief are determined by industrial and post-industrial societies; by the mass media; and by our normal, human interests. In these realms, religion rarely appears as a basic or important option.

Can we say that religion has become a 'hobby'? In some countries in the North-Atlantic world, yes, it has become a hobby or something close to it. Instead of practising religion, people jog, hike, go for long travels around the world, or just read novels and watch TV. Instead of going to church, they go to shopping malls and plazas. These are everyday evidences in our Western societies, rich or poor, developed or not so developed.

We can thus say that religion seems to have lost its decisive, fundamental, and encompassing importance for human life – especially in the North-western world. Is there anything else, similar to religion, that has taken over this fundamental importance? We have a number of candidates: politics (religion has become politics, as Feuerbach noted), the media, wellness, comfortable

middle-class life. Yet none of these objectives possess the fundamental importance religion had in the lives of our ancestors.

## 3. The Religious Dimensions of Secularity

There is another side of the problem of secularity: religion tends to disappear from public life, from official belief and church practice, and tends to become merely an option among many others. Nonetheless, the great majority of our contemporaries still believe in some conception of God. Even Richard Dawkins agrees with the following sentences from Albert Einstein:

> 'To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense, I am religious.' [Dawkins adds:] In this sense, I too am religious. (Dawkins 2006: 19)

The Gallup International Millennium Survey shows that the overwhelming majority of our contemporaries believe in some sort of God (Gallup 2000). Other statistics demonstrate too that the majority of leading scientists in our day tend to believe in some ultimate intelligent design of the universe that is not transcendent in the old sense but gives meaning to scientific endeavours; that is, they too tend to believe in some understanding of God (Livescience 2009). This intelligent design may even have personal features, as intelligence goes together with such features in our experience. I note here that the majority of leading scientists in the USA tend to deny that they believe in any personal God.

Historically speaking, secularity is a development of religion; the denial of certain forms of belief is derivative of those beliefs themselves. It is strongly arguable that, historically, secularity is a development of earlier religious forms, and atheism is dependent on theistic beliefs logically, historically, and psychologically. Christianity, as the religion that emphasized the death of God, can be seen as the kind of religion that leads beyond particular forms of earlier, archaic religion. Such transcendental forms are political ideology, atheism, or even certain kinds of philosophy. No other religion in known history has ever produced anything similar to these developments. Secularity is indeed the fruit of Christianity.

From the point of view of religion, it is the general and particular evolution of religion that resulted in modern and contemporary secularity. The question

is this: whether secularity is the ultimate successor of religion or only a phase in a more general development of religion.

There are important authors emphasizing one of these views. Feuerbach or Marx stressed the point of secularity as the ultimate successor of religion. Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Derrida appear to have argued for the point that secularity is merely a phase in a general development which is fundamentally that of what has been traditionally termed religion. On this view, traditional forms of religion cannot be seen as determining religion in a more general and more fundamental sense; and thus secularity cannot be the sole determinant of developments of classical Christianity.

An analysis of the history of the meaning of the Latin word *religio* underpins the latter view. *Religio*, after its beginnings in pre-Christian Roman literature, came to refer to Christianity in its entirety. No expression either in Greek or in other languages can render the full meaning of *religio* as it developed by the fifteenth century in the matrix of Christianity. Still, under the influence of historical events, such as the fall of Constantinople, the Protestant Reformation, or the new geographical discoveries, the meaning of *religio* started to lose its position as being close to a proper name (meaning Christianity) and slowly developed a primary meaning, that of a genus. The genus *religio* can of course have a number of species, such as Islam, the Protestant denominations, or later on the other 'religions'. As a genus, it became stabilized by the beginning of the nineteenth century. From this time on, we take it as natural that there is the genus 'religion' and Christianity is only one species thereof.

This development can be taken as expressing a general tendency of religion to become at the same time pluralized and unified; pluralized in the growing number of 'religions' (cultural formations identified and acknowledged as religions), and unified in a non-positive, philosophical notion of religion. In this development of religion, secularity is rather about one or more positive forms or species of religion and not about the genus 'religion'.

## 4. Religion after Auschwitz

In the history of the notion of religion, the catastrophic events of the twentieth century are of special importance. In particular, the attempt at the total annihilation of the Jews in Auschwitz has become symbolic. Today, the name of Auschwitz is seen as virtually synonymous with (i) the evil of Nazi ideology; (ii) traditional European anti-Judaism; (iii) Christianity's historic failure; and (iv) the need for a new beginning in religion, in our belief in God.

Nazi ideology inherited anti-Judaism that was already present in some forms of Christianity, and took it to its extremes. The attempt to exterminate the Jews can be seen as a logical consequence of European anti-Judaism rooted in Christianity. Do we not read in the Gospel of John (Chapter 8) that the father of the Jews is Satan? Did not Christianity for many centuries regard the Jews as the murderer of Christ? Were not the Jews banned from Christian communities for a long time, as the Nazi propaganda movie *Jud Suess* accurately demonstrates?

If European culture could accept the extermination of the Jews, the founders of Christianity, then is it not correct to say that the death of the Jews was a reference to the Death of God and the Death of – Christianity?

Reactions to this point vary. In general, we find the following important types of answers:

(1) Christianity's anti-Judaism was a mistake, even a misconstruction of the original Christian message; we need to purify Christianity of anti-Judaism and then we can save the classical Christian contents and continue its path.
(2) We need to mistrust classical European culture and its anti-Judaism; we need to perpetuate only those lines that do not show any sign of anti-Judaism; thus, for instance, we may like Brahms but refuse Wagner.
(3) We need to eliminate classical European and Christian culture in its entirety.
(4) We need to return to the values of traditional Judaism and see them as the basis of a new epoch in history; Christian evangelicalism shares this view to some extent.
(5) We need to dispense not only with Christianity and classical European culture, but also with Judaism's traditional values and seek a new pattern of understanding religion on the basis of the trauma of Auschwitz.

Type 1 I call *the traditionalist model*. I identify its core problem as being that Christianity's relationship to Judaism is too complex to let a simple process of purification be easily achieved. In this relationship, both Judaism and Christianity suffered and have profited too; and they have embodied for each other a perpetual challenge.

Type 2 I term *the moderate model*. Its core problem is this: classical European culture produced the richest heritage in world history available for us in literature, philosophy, music, the sciences, and architecture. It is difficult to argue for the stance of 'mistrust' for this culture in its entirety.

Type 3 I call *the radical model*. Its central problem is the same as that of the previous type: would you burn your boats?

Type 4 we can term *the orthodox model*. Its problem is that of fundamentalism. I doubt that by going back to a historically previous position we can find actually viable answers for our problems today.

Type 5 is *the innovative model*. I find this possibility a dangerous and risky path. Yet at the same time, since religion needs innovation, this is the possibility we may want to probe. The innovative model gives us the chance of rethinking religion in its history and development.

## 5. From Closed Religion to Open Religion

Copernicus' hypothesis of a heliocentric universe proved to be the most influential and important discovery in the history of sciences. This change has become known as *paradigmatic* since the book of Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn 1957). The philosopher Alexandre Koyré analysed the implications of this change in a cultural perspective and pointed out that the collapse of the notion of a closed universe and the emerging of the idea of the infinity (or open) universe has put humanity and its culture into a radically new perspective (Koyré 1957).

As I argued elsewhere, the geocentric view of the universe can be called Plato's 'Planetarium', as the writings of Plato, as we inherited them from Hellenism, are obviously based on such a geocentric world interpreted in a mystical-philosophical, and at some points astrological, perspective. Plato's Planetarium is the name of the astrological theology that most of the ancient authors accepted and expressed, even if in a latent form, in their writings. It is a wider notion than the geocentric view of the world, as the former implies an overall theological and philosophical interpretation of the geocentric cosmos, an interpretation that imbued all aspects of Western culture from logic to astronomy, and from rhetoric to theology.

Plato's Planetarium is thus the name of the cosmo-theological view of the world where the obvious phenomena of the universe – especially the movements of the sun, the moon, the planets and stars – were seen as expressive of the life of a cosmic and meta-cosmic being, an archaic understanding of God. Christianity, in spite of its strong emphasis on transcendence, borrowed many features of ancient cosmo-theology, as can be seen for example from the stellar architecture of the liturgical year.

After the collapse of Plato's Planetarium – after Copernicus and his followers, and after the new philosophies and theories of the nineteenth century – we may know much more of the universe than earlier; but we lack a unified view of reality comparable to what was offered in the Planetarium.

We do not have a general and consistent cosmology today; but two things are clear:

(1) the closed world conception is over;
(2) the universe is infinite or at least open to infinity in its existence.

I want to consider the history of religion along the lines of the history of the collapse of the ancient worldview and the emergence of a new understanding of reality. This new understanding is not yet at hand; but, clearly, we need an understanding capable of dealing with the phenomenon of the objective, physical world on the one hand, and with the mind as something non-physical on the other hand. Similarly, religion has lost its archaic character and must be liable to be reinterpreted and further developed in accordance with the new knowledge and experiences of modernity.

The discovery of the open universe or open reality has a number of implications:

(1) The notion of a closed world was in its given form certainly false. The earth may be an exceptional place in the universe but certainly not a geometrical centre; humans may be exceptional beings in the universe, but certainly not as observers located in the geocentric centre.
(2) The notions of the universe and human being have to be reinterpreted; but the old ways of interpretation are closed, as they are bound, in important senses, to the notion of a closed world.
(3) The notion of religion as representing and revealing the structure of reality as a closed and predetermined world has to be reinterpreted too.
(4) The role of religion in human communities has to be rethought in various ways.

Let me comment on the last two points.

A religion as revealing a closed universe can be called a *closed religion*. The notion of a closed religion, in accordance with our new experiences, must be re-evaluated. I believe this is indeed a must and an important task of our age – one that aims to understand what an *open religion* means.

*Open religion* has a role in contemporary societies different from the old roles of the old religions. The old religions revealed a closed world and effected the stabilization of a closed society and a closed mind. The old religion understood humans as predetermined, structurally closed beings. I agree with the view that Christianity substantially contributed to the emergence of modernity; but this contribution stopped at a certain point and today it is an

open question whether this contribution can be continued. Open religion is to enhance the development of mind and society, to further a new understanding of reality and human beings; it is to develop a new morality and a new politics; it is to contribute to the development of new patterns of understanding.

In such an endeavour, open religion has to consider as its starting point the historic trauma of Auschwitz: it is to be learned from this event that there is a *responsibility* in the endeavours of religion: the open religion must be open, cooperative, and responsible intellectually, morally, politically, and culturally.

The basis of open religion is that of what we traditionally call God. If we are waiting for God, for the God of tradition, we are waiting for Godot. We need a new understanding of God, along the lines of the best thinkers of our age, the German theologians, Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Derrida. We need exact and clear thinking in this question, a kind of thinking that we find in analytical philosophy. And we need the courageous reception of new sorts of thinking as is demonstrated by contemporary French thought.

We need to start a new process: the process of understanding open religion, the openness of religion, the openness of God, God's openness or even God as openness.

## 6. Jonas and Metz as Two Cardinal Figures of the Possibilities of Open Religion

Let me at this point consider two important works on theology with consequences for the notion of open religion that I raised above. Hans Jonas' *The Notion of God after Auschwitz* has become famous for the notion of a suffering God that renounces omnipotence for the sake of enhancing human freedom and responsibility. J. B. Metz's *Memoria Passionis – The Memory of Suffering* is the fulfilment and crowning work of the career of one of the most influential theologians of our age. Metz uses Hans Jonas' notion of a suffering God as the starting point of a systematic elaboration of a philosophical and theological vision of religion, which takes seriously the moment of suffering and resists the temptation of its systematic isolation characteristic of theological and religious works before the shocking experience of Auschwitz in the twentieth century.

I use these works as examples of the efforts to free ourselves from the ancient conception of a closed religion (originating in the notion of a closed universe) and to disclose the outlines of an open religion, a religion which takes into account the experiences of modernity and the suffering caused

by extreme secularity in our past two centuries. Let me emphasize here the following points.

The centre of open religion is the notion of God. The notion of God must be rethought along the lines of a revision of the closed religion and its rigid notion of a God (rooted again in the geocentric view of the universe and in particular in what I term Plato's Planetarium). Jonas' idea of a suffering God that renounces omnipotence, for the sake of enhancing human freedom and responsibility, is a form of rethinking of God in terms of a God that opens himself to the good and bad effects of his creatures, humans especially. The point here is that God cannot be conceived along the lines of a closed world. Or, to use Heidegger's term, God cannot be conceived onto-theologically. To use my expression: God cannot be conceived cosmo-theologically.

Open universe, open religion, open God: Open to what? Open to humans, open to change, open to cooperation, open to freedom and responsibility. An important theological-philosophical task, human freedom and responsibility are to be interpreted as theologically important moments. We are responsible not only for ourselves, for the others, for the future of our culture and the world, but also for God that has given Himself for us and renounced His omnipotence for our freedom.

Metz emphasizes that Catholicism cannot remain closed into its traditions; most importantly, Christianity and Catholicism must open themselves to the community of suffering. On the basis of the community, there becomes possible the rethinking and restructuring of Christianity; its opening to the future.

There are important theological, cultural, liturgical and organizational consequences of such restructuring. Let me however stress merely these points:

(1) Religion must go ahead and become once again the ferment of development: in church, in society, in culture, and in politics.
(2) Religion is to respect its own history and traditions; the proper respect is, however, not imitation but development.
(3) Religion must contribute, not necessarily to a given state of political form, but rather to the development of established political forms so that they become more open, more responsible, showing more solidarity, enhancing more freedom, more development in all fields of human life. *Open religion, thus, is able to become an important factor in contemporary society. If liberal democracy is the sort of open society we need today then open religion is an important element in such a society. Such a religion is an integral part of an enlightened, republican society.*

(4) However, we must avoid some dangers with respect to the notion of an open religion. There is the danger of religion turning back into archaic integralism or fundamentalism; this is true of Islam as well as of Christianity and Judaism; we must escape this danger – as I pointed out above – since fundamentalism is not a viable option for renewing religion. There is the danger of confusing religious development with the freedom of wishful thinking or irresponsible practice. But religion has its history and this history must be known and its lessons learned; traditions kept in a number of ways but renewed too in a number of other ways.

There is the danger of confusing the notion of open religion with sectarian movements; such movements, however, are very often mere archaisms in the form of self-propagation. There is the danger of confusing the political responsibility of religion with working out new forms of ideology; but religion should not become an ideology. Religion has always been an ultimate moment or ultimate concern in human life and history; in this role of religion, in the form of an open religion, I see the possibility of reaffirming the traditional importance of religion.

If we successfully avoid the above dangers we can put serious efforts into the work of establishing and developing open religion. Religion is not an ideology but rather a dynamic attempt to understand, think and rethink reality in its fullness. Religion is active openness in every conceivable sense; religion is about the human person's self-donation or self-sacrifice, on the basis of solidarity, for the common good of the world, humanity, and God. Open religion is to reinterpret and further develop the legacy of the ancient and traditional notion of religion.

# 10. Politics Without Dénouement, Faith Without Guarantee: A Critical Appraisal of the Politics of Religion of the Left and the Right

*Theo de Wit*

## 1. Two Conceptions of Politics

'Politics', according to the definition given by the French philosopher Dominique Janicaud during a discussion a few years ago, 'is the art of the possible which allows people of flesh and blood to co-exist, here and now, and in general while dispensing with the prior luxury of psycho-analytical therapy and the comfort of distance'. This apparently rather laconic definition harbours a great deal of sorely acquired pragmatic wisdom. For while in a democracy one may well think or say of a political rival that he or she is 'crazy' or 'stupid', one does this in the full knowledge that at some future point one may well need to pass through the same door again. The reference to 'flesh and blood' entails the recognition of the *déjà là* of people, local specifics and contingent sensitivities, of the weight of history. And the 'here and now' reminds us that, should we want to facilitate progress in, for instance, Afghanistan, we actually need to be dealing with real Afghans – and not some dreamy conception of a *homo democraticus* of the future.

It is no big revelation when I state that for the past hundred and fifty years *leftist* politics have frequently tended to view the above definition as far too modest. In fact another, very different, definition of politics does exist. In this definition, politics should rather be viewed as a space which is fully open to a realizing will. This will is *a priori* without any self-restriction, for it is the sovereign will of the people. In this conception, all is politics. It is based upon the idea that we are the complete masters of our own destiny.

Whereas in the first definition politics is something *a posteriori*, derived, prudent and reasonable rather than rational, in the second it is an original, vital and utopian project: the revolutionary or evolutionary passage of the people as subject towards its own completion. It concerns the final resolution – the dénouement – of history, the triumph of the will, and the emancipation of every form of heteronomy in a completed autonomy – irrespective of

whether one wants to define this terminus as 'classless society', 'rational state' or 'realized emancipation'. This moment of a final resolution and of complete self-possession is at the same time also the *end of politics*. As soon as society has found its authentic social existence, the separate existences of a political sphere and a 'state' become superfluous.

These two forms – traditions – of politics assume very different attitudes with regard to traditional religions. In the first tradition, in which the art of coexistence is emphasized, one is only able to speak of democracy on condition that freedom of religion is being respected. In the second, that of 'politics of dénouement', the place and status of religion is determined by the people or its representative agency. Paradigmatic of the first tradition is the United States of the founding fathers; of the second, France after the French Revolution. At least initially some continuity with the *cuius regio ejus et religio* of the French absolute monarchy must have existed. For as Marcel Gauchet puts it, this absolutist inheritance is 'completed' in the French Revolution 'precisely at the moment in which it breaks with it; it coaxes forth the state like a butterfly from the royal cocoon' (Gauchet 1998: 37). Politics now determines matters of religion, and finally also the question of whether religions still have any place at all; of whether they should not rather be abolished altogether. Religion is here often defined as an epiphenomenon or relict which will wither away of its own accord as politics – interpreted as a clash between the powers of past and future – nears its historical resolution. Religion is interpreted as the symptom of an ill society, a society which, along the road to recovery, will eventually shed the crutches of both religion and politics.

The two traditions also present different arguments in the context of the current struggle against religiously sanctioned terrorism. To the rationalist – and in a literal sense apocalyptic – politics of resolution, religiously sanctioned terror yet once more proves that religion is an irrational – and therefore dangerous – factor which needs to be marginalized, if not altogether eliminated. To the tradition of the art of coexistence, soldiers of a religion which, through the use of violence or terror, aims to enforce a monopoly on truth, cannot be tolerated, for they endanger the right to freedom of religion (Lübbe 2004: 363).

From as early as the 1930s the tradition which I have here termed 'the politics of resolution', has sometimes been referred to as a secular 'political religion' by various historians and political theorists (Voegelin 1939; Maier 1995; Burleigh 2005; Gray 2007). In their view, rationalist leftist politics, rooted in a philosophy of history – certainly with regard to its radical and communist variants – forms part of a broader political-religious history. After all, the state or party is made into the subject of salvation, and secular history

is assigned the place of what is termed 'eschatology' in Christian theology.

Apart from leftist variants, the politics of resolution, of historical dénouement, also includes rightist and liberalist variants. Further on in this chapter I will give some examples of the most recent rightist-populist variant and its attitude towards religions. A recent example of a liberal variant is constituted by Francis Fukuyama's famous essay on the 'end of history' – in which he, by the way, openly acknowledges his indebtedness to (Alexandre Kojève's version of) Hegelian-Marxist thinking. Fukuyama merely replaced the leftist avant-garde of history (the proletariat / the Party) with a liberal one (European and American 'liberal democracy'). Also, progress-driven 'neoconservative' thinking, intent as it is on bombing Afghanistan and Iraq into modernity, turns out to be a sad copy of the politics of dénouement. Let us therefore first of all concentrate on the original version of this 'politics of the final resolution', and on its treatment of traditional religions. Here it is worth the effort to focus briefly on the communist tradition, for not only is it instructive in a number of ways, but also it is not at all certain that this way of viewing religions has met its demise along with that of communism.

## 2. 'In bright sunshine one no longer needs a lamp'

As is known, the state-sanctioning communist party held the view that in a communist society religion will eventually wither away. 'Concretely existing socialism' presumed to know the truth of history. At the very most, religious practices and representations could be tolerated in the private sphere only, and then also just for the time being. In one of the short stories in *Laughable Loves* (1969) Milan Kundera confronts us with a tragi-comic clash between a communist regime and traditional religious piousness, regarded by the regime as merely an archaic relic. 'Eduard and God' is set in a small Czech town during the communist era. We meet Eduard, a teacher who falls in love with Alice, a pretty, pious young girl who resists premarital sex on religious grounds. In order not to frighten her off, the religiously indifferent Eduard initially pretends to still be in the grip of an inner religious struggle, only to subsequently end up accompanying her to church. His church attendance does not go unnoticed by his boss, the communist headmistress – which forces Eduard to take refuge in a new untruth. 'I wanted to have a look at the church's baroque interior', he explains.

Because his advances to an immovable Alice still fail to bear the desired fruit, he decides to surpass her in piety by publicly and ostentatiously making the sign of the cross in front of an old crucifix. Now he is really in trouble

with his bosses – in communist jargon, his 'comrades'— for one of them had witnessed this performance. The school board of enquiry to which he is summoned informs him that 'religious freaks' cannot be tolerated as teachers. In order to try and save his job, Eduard is forced to yet again invent a more or less credible explanation. This time he assumes the role of the communist who knows that 'God is a medieval anachronism', but who in his heart still finds himself unable to prise himself away from it. This proves to be a successful strategy: he presents himself to his interrogators as a malleable object for re-education, and he is allowed to keep his job. 'After all', as one of his interrogators mildly puts it to the headmistress,

> the struggle between old and new not only plays itself out between classes, but within each man individually. This struggle is also playing itself out in our comrade here. While with his mind he knows, his feelings keep pulling him back. You need to help our comrade in his struggle, so that his mind may triumph.

The headmistress takes the task of re-education in hand, but at the same time also peruses her own agenda: in the young teacher she scents the sexual prey that could bring a measure of lustre to her otherwise bleak existence in service of the communist promise of salvation. Once again Eduard sees no other way out than to oblige her, that is to say: with the help of cognac in order to overcome his physical revulsion, he ends up in bed with her. The tale becomes totally hilarious when Alice decides to discard all her religiously inspired prudishness once she learns that her friend has become a victim of the communist inquisition, therefore a brave and deserving religious martyr. But, as we already know, her suddenly passionate behaviour is ultimately built upon the quicksand of Eduard's deceit.

Kundera's narrative is instructive for a number of reasons. In the first place the story reminds us of the fact that in a universalistic progress-orientated ideology such as communism, religion is regarded as a prehistoric relic, as a developmental stage in which heart and feeling have not yet yielded to knowledge and truth. The progress of humanity is here equated with the conviction that man is entirely able to grasp his own meaning and destiny himself, rendering man and society *transparent*. Here intolerance is the result not of that kind of irrational outburst with which religious fundamentalism is frequently associated, but precisely of the illusion of the *omnipotence of reason*, the conviction that the methodology and approach of the (natural) sciences may be applied to social and political phenomena. 'In bright sunshine one no longer needs a lamp', observed the Dutch socialist poet Herman Gorter in

1909, putting into words the insight that, to the proletarian who had become *aware*, religion becomes superfluous. The socialist society of the future will 'lie … clear and transparent in front of our eyes' (Gorter 1978: 62). In short: communism teaches us that, in a modern democracy, it *does not suffice* merely to sever the link between crown and altar, to detach citizenship from religious identity. For also secular ideologies are capable of appropriating a monopoly on truth (Finkielkraut 1995: 54).

This rationalist illusion has however not disappeared with the demise of communism. A contemporary variant exists, a militant and not incidentally just as anti-religious liberalism which has, to some extent justly acquired the epithet of 'Enlightenment fundamentalism'. Also here we see the pretence of a scientific elimination of religion which is at the very most tolerated within the private sphere, a relic of irrationality, and we find a secular substitute for the religious message of salvation, the (if necessary also violent) triumph of Reason and its blessings. A crass example was given when, not so long ago, a critic of Islam Ayaan Hirsi Ali called upon the Turkish *army* – as the avant-garde of Reason, in her point of view – to come to the defence of state secularism in Turkey. Here the army has taken the place of the Communist Party of yesteryear: rather dubious progress.

In the second place, Kundera's narrative is also instructive in as far as he makes it clear that within a truth-regime such as that of communism, *hypocrisy* in the end becomes ubiquitous. In Kundera's tale, Eduard and the other protagonists become increasingly entangled in a web of shifting roles, lies and adaptations.

Sure, while lies and hypocrisy are as old as humanity itself, in a regime which presumes to hold a monopoly on truth, more than being merely a survival strategy, deceit may eventually even become a virtue. 'Should I persist in telling the truth to the world to its face', Eduard puts it to his brother, 'then it means that I am taking the world seriously. And taking something so unserious seriously means becoming unserious oneself. I *need* to lie, dear brother, if I do not want to take these fools seriously and become a fool myself.'

This is indeed the paradox of both religious and anti-religious truth-regimes: they *appear* to take truth seriously in as far as they put it upon a (political) throne so that it may shine brightly and enlighten the darkness within society, and also to the extent that they, if necessary, are willing to violently defend it against any perceived threat. But fairly soon the regime itself is no longer being taken seriously, leading to a situation where it becomes capable of only generating lies and hypocrisy, and for all its grimness, becomes hilarious. In short: truth now resides *elsewhere*, it has migrated to 'the other side' of the regime.

And this also seems to hold true of the signifier 'God' at the end of Kundera's tale. With this I come to the third instructive aspect of 'Eduard and God', and perhaps the most intriguing, even authentically religious, element of the tale. Here 'God' ceases to signify both an ultimate guarantor of the political order in the premodern regime, as well as the disturbing sign of an as yet not completely vanquished prehistory, as in communism. In this tale of a laughable love, God has become an indication of the longing for *another* world to that universe in which Eduard finds himself, one in which everyone had become stark raving mad and where one is no longer able to take anyone or anything seriously. For after the rather sad affair with Alice, Eduard every now and again goes and sits on a wooden bench in an empty church. And Kundera writes: 'Eduard longs for God, for only God is exempt from the confusing duty, to *appear* and be purely allowed to *be*, for only He creates (Himself, the only and non-existing) the essential reverse of this inessential (but therefore all the more existing) world.' In Eduard's universe 'exist' and 'appear' are equated with the world of inessentiality and hypocrisy. The 'divinity' of God thus exists precisely in its non-existence, in the fact that it *has been exempted from this existence*. And the longing for God here is something akin to the desire that this world of 'concretely existing socialism' *cannot be all that there is*.

Whoever today rereads Marx's famous 'opium of the people text' cannot fail but to be impressed by the acuity of his insight into the enormous affective potential, historically seen, with which religion stands invested. Religion is

> the general theory of this world, her encyclopaedic compendium, her popular logic, her spiritual *point d'honneur*, her enthusiasm, her moral sanction, her solemn elaboration, her universal comfort and justification … the lament of the tortured creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of dispirited conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Marx 1972: 440)

Marx, just like Kundera, knew that not infrequently religion expresses a longing that the world 'as it is' cannot be all, that the religious breast even may harbour revolutionary protest. However, at the same time, one cannot say that the Czech communists of Kundera's tale had misunderstood Marx. For the revolutionary emancipation which Marx envisioned implied that the 'freedom of religion' would be replaced and superseded by the 'freedom from religion', and the 'emancipation from the Jews' by 'the emancipation of humanity from Judaism'. Also Marx thought that in the brightness of day the lamp would become superfluous (Marx 1977: 369).

## 3. A History of the Victors

Only in the aftermath of the immense catastrophe of the First World War, from the 1920s onwards, did sensitive German (neo-)Marxist minds such as Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno start to pose searching questions with regard to the grand ideas of emancipation and progress as were being proclaimed by the German social-democratic party of their time. When the horizon of the socialist project is conceived of in terms of the complete self-possession of mankind and of emancipated humanity (Marx's *Wiedergewinning des Menschen*), then which status should be assigned to the 'enslaved ancestors', the victims of history? Are they then nothing but 'dead wood', the waste products of history's march to its successful completion? Would this not imply a cynical version of history, one written by victors' willing to sacrifice what has come before? What is the sense of these tragic, no longer redeemable inequities of the past? Are remembrance and anamnetic solidarity – and then precisely in moments of danger (when we are at risk of becoming serfs to the existing order) – not supposed to belong to the fundamental stock of a leftist way of approaching history? (Lenhardt 1975).

The above questions and considerations, posed by the thinkers of the Frankfurter Schule as well as contemporary critical thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, have led to a rediscovery and (often rather wayward) processing of religious inheritances and theological motives, such as the 'ghostlike' presence of the past in the present, the notion of salvation, the figure of the messiah and messianic time, negative theology, the riddle of evil, and even of theocracy. The last term is interpreted then, not as totalitarian domination by a priestly caste, but as a fundamental spiritual independence towards every established order: there are no meaningful political goals which one can embrace *sans réserve*; only God reigns. This anarchistic independence is, for example in the work of the Jewish philosopher Jacob Taubes, a central moment of each and every leftist political attitude. Spiritual independence always spells danger to the defenders of the established order (Schmitt and Taubes 2009; Terpstra and de Wit 2000).

## 4. Atheism and Religion

Our quest needs to be for a politics that dispenses with the notion of a final resolution – a politics that accepts that human beings continue to have longings and desires, and not mere wants and needs, as in a utilitarian treatment of religion. The longing is in essence always also a longing for recognition,

one for which people may even be prepared to put their own lives at stake. That in addition to needs people have longings was of course recognized by the sharpest spirits of the twentieth century. Thus Hannah Arendt's thinking is firmly based upon the polarity of labour (necessary fulfilment of needs and reproduction) and freedom (political action), a complementary relationship that Georges Bataille understands in terms of servility (life in service of provision for the future) and sovereignty (free disposal, eroticism, expenditure, etc.).

A politics that dispenses with resolution would furthermore also accept that there are limits to what constitutes appropriate objects for political intervention. It does not deny that every bit of progress also entails a certain loss. The triumphant exultations on the blessings of globalization and unlimited connectivity are foreign to it. It has taken leave of the idea of an avant-garde which is the embodiment of universal Reason, and which on its behalf receives absolution from the *Weltgeist* for Reason's actions and transgressions. And last but not least, such a politics realizes that there are existentially urgent questions which do not lend themselves to scientific treatment or political intervention. These questions – as those posed by the *Frankfurter Schule* in the 1920s – may perhaps lend themselves to being communicated, but are not suitable for *problem solving*. Often these concern questions with regard to events that simply overcome us, to which we have no real response; events that we would prefer to immediately repress: a loved one suddenly being diagnosed with a terminal disease, a fatal accident because this child stood in the wrong place at the wrong time, an earthquake that wreaks death and destruction, the senseless slaughter of the poor and disenfranchised, the euphemistically dismissed *collateral damage* currently being perpetrated in our name in a number of war-torn areas.

According to the great German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, religion has the function of 'as yet enabling communication where it has actually become impossible' (Luhmann 2000: 122). Along the same lines, his compatriot Hermann Lübbe defines religion as the acculturated way in which we seek to find a relationship with that which is contingent, that which befalls us in life and that which we are unable to determine (*das Unverfügbare*) (Lübbe 2004: 149). This definition also makes clear that when we talk about things that are not of our own doing but that befall or overcome us, we must think not simply of painful or grievous experiences. Rich traditions of expressing gratitude for that which has fallen into our laps – for instance, the talents with which we have been blessed, for a start – are present in all of the great religions. In comparison, few things are as embarrassing as meeting someone who smugly claims recognition for what in effect is not his or her own accomplishment.

Against this background one needs to put into perspective the frequently accentuated differences between atheism and religious faith. Both these positions are responses to the same set of existential questions. An atheism which wants to be relevant today needs to detach itself from what after the twentieth century has become a hollow worship of the progress of humanity, and needs to part ways with the cult of the unstoppable march of Reason. An adequate attitude towards this cult of Reason would nowadays be one of *unbelief* and scepticism.

True atheism is – in Slavoj Žižek's formulation – 'a belief without the support of the authority provided by an assumed great Other'. Faith *without guarantee* therefore. But is this not also true of authentic religious belief? Žižek himself provides an example here. In the time of Louis IX of France ('Saint Louis' of the disastrous Seventh and Eighth Crusades), the chronicler Yves le Breton wrote of an encounter with an old woman. In her left hand she carried a bowl filled with fire, and in her right, one filled with water. When asked why she was carrying the bowls, she replied that with the left she wanted to set paradise ablaze, and with the right, extinguish the flames of hell. For, she added, 'I do not want anyone to do good on account of paradise or the fear of hell, but exclusively for the love of God' (Žižek 2006: 14). Here belief is stripped of both any divine insurance policy as well as the threat of divine punishment; it is a *credo* without any previously agreed-upon credit.

Also in their attitude towards modern democracy no fundamental difference exists between atheism and religious belief. Both need to make peace with the *offence to narcissism* which democracy does not spare any outlook on life from. Our democracy after all rests upon the dissociation between the (shared) *equal freedom* of each and every citizen and the (not shared) *truth* which exists in a state of permanent suspension. After all, the decision of the majority does not necessarily coincide with truth, and as a member of an outvoted minority one is at complete liberty to suspect that the truth lies elsewhere. In short, in a democracy both religious and non-religious convictions ultimately dispense with guarantees, with political sanctioning.

## 5. The Latest Populist Politics of Dénouement and its Stance towards Religion

These observations are of relevance with regard to a topical issue that can be formulated as follows: can the so-called populist parties that are currently popping up all over Europe, parties that interpret democracy as the direct reflection or expression of popular will, still be termed democratic? And

what is their attitude with regard to religious plurality? To illustrate these questions, let us take a look at a Dutch and a Belgian example. The Dutch so-called Party for Freedom (PVV, *Partij voor de Vrijheid*), recently managed to capture international headlines when it proposed to have the Qur'an, the Holy Book of the Muslims, banned in the Netherlands. What are we to think of a party that proposes denying freedom of religion to some of the citizens of a polity?

As is argued above, such a limitation is only possible through the establishment of a truth-regime that views and treats 'dissenting' fellow citizens as straying dissidents and enemies of the state. But let us take a closer look at the PVV and its politics of religion.

The PVV's proposal to have the Qur'an banned in the Netherlands – 'chucked into the dustbin', as the leader of the Party, Geert Wilders, formulated it – was initially greeted, both within the Netherlands as well as abroad, with a mixture of laughter, astonishment and alarm. Yet, up to now, responses to Wilders' comments – including that pertaining to similarities between the Qur'an and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* – in the Dutch parliament have been rather timid. Thus some parliamentarians seemed to suppose that a mere statement to the effect that the PVV should be more appropriately termed 'the Party *against* Freedom' would suffice. In doing so, they actually showed how little they understood of the particular logic of Wilders and his party.

Specific to this party's way of reasoning is the logic of a political state of emergency, one in which freedom needs to be dialectically 'rescued' through provisionally suspending or denying certain *liberties* to groups of people or parties which are held to pose a threat to the very *order of freedom*. In Wilders' own words: 'Sometimes it is necessary to limit the freedom of some people in order to protect the freedom of the totality.'

We therefore need to ask what exactly the PVV understands by this 'totality' which 'is in need of protection'. For such a totality – the Dutch political community – then seems to become founded in a common truth or preamble which precedes the constitution and any (always contingent and therefore threatened) majority culture. But the intriguing question remains whether the dreamt-of political community merely exists thanks to a clearly outlined enemy (Islam), or whether it is actually constituted by a substantial 'us' which is by its very nature incompatible with any other collective.

Here a comparison with 1930s Germany may be quite useful. Shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933, certain critics of National Socialism raised the following question: are the Führer and his people in a National Socialist Germany firmly tied together in a substantial homogeneity (the Aryan race), or is an 'Aryan' only determinable by the fact that he or she is *not a non-*

*Aryan*? One of these critics, the philosopher Karl Löwith, argued that our answer to this question must clearly be in terms of the second formulation: this new, powerful German identity is made possible through a purely polemical delimitation against an *artfremde* enemy. Löwith referred to this as the 'nihilism' at the heart of National Socialist ideology (Löwith 1969: 117).

To the PVV and other proponents of a powerful new national identity such as the equally populist Flemish Interest (VB, *Vlaams Belang*) in Belgium we therefore need to ask the following question: what exactly is that national identity or 'order of freedom' that must be rescued? Three answers are possible: (1) our identity is founded upon a quasi-natural unity or homogeneity; (2) it is a contingent and finite singularity which by its nature is not compatible with everything, and therefore also knows and acknowledges alterity; or (3) we need Muslims, or 'allochthonous' groups in general, in order to provide us with the sense of identity that we would otherwise lack. In the last instance, our (for example) Dutch identity would then mainly consist in at any rate *not* being Muslims. The suspicion that I would like to elaborate on here is that the Belgian VB is leaning towards the first answer, and the PVV towards the third. The second answer, and the one that is being argued for here, is that of a politics *without dénouement*.

Let us first look at the Belgian VB, a party that is often mentioned as akin to the Dutch PVV. The central slogan of this party, namely 'out with foreigners', blames Flanders' existing social problems on a so-called 'alien' group. In a remarkable analysis of this political movement – one that has managed to gain 24 per cent of the vote in Flanders – the politicologist Gorik Ooms made an attempt to reconstruct the political unity envisaged by the VB. According to him, when one adds up all the negations ('we are *against* foreigners, *against* crime, *against* corruption, *against* abortion, etc.') it becomes possible to trace the outlines of the ideal political community envisaged by this party.

> The utopia of this movement is a society where everyone knows one another (putting one's own people first; foreigners to be tolerated only in as far as they are prepared to adapt completely and therefore cease to be alien), where all are brothers. In such a society all problems will resolve themselves. The true leader will not endanger his own people, and corruption is thereby excluded. The person who is tied to his own people will not steal from his own brother, and hence crime will cease. Children to Flemish parents will be conceived in love, and abortion will no longer be an issue. Within the nuclear family, much warmth and attention will be accorded to children, and mothers will therefore not want to work, which will solve the problem of unemployment … The Flemish youth will grow

> up in harmony with his environment, and therefore have no desire to take drugs. The Flemish employer will not be purely motivated by self-gain; together with his Flemish employees he will build towards the progress of Flanders, whereby trade unions will become completely superfluous … Parliamentary democracy reinforces superficial differences of opinion: a people which is once more in touch with its own nature, will strive towards unity; no problem will exist which cannot be solved through mutual consultation; in a popular democracy one single party suffices; those who fail to recognize themselves within this true party do not deserve to burden the people with their conflicts. (Ooms 1995: 7)

Also here we run up against a politics of dénouement, the utopia of the end of politics and of freedom from conflict. It does however assume a different form to those engendered by the expansive and universalist conceptions of communism and scientistic rationalism. The utopian society of the VB is characterized by peace and harmony, and here religion functions naturally as a *reinforcement* to, and not a *disturbance* of, social cohesion. The 'integration' of newcomers means in this version of the national unity the *incorporation* into a quasi-natural popular identity, the ultra-conservative form of a politics of resolution. In this interpretation, politics is assumed to possess an internal tendency towards an organic totality in which everyone 'knows his or her place'. The ideal political community is then a completed form of fraternal unity in which religion and politics fit together like a lid on its pot.

## 6. From Multiculturalism to Populism, a Remarkable Instance of Plagiarism

Whereas in the Flemish Interest a certain longing for an organic popular unity – one in which religions either promote the 'cohesion' of the whole, or represent intolerable *Fremdkörper*, foreign objects – can be discerned, the political community promoted by the PVV appears to primarily assume a polemical identity.

Remarkably enough, the political diagnosis which the PVV endorses, but which some other parties also seem to have caught on to, in all important respects represents an inversion of the leftist-liberal politics of multiculturalism that had been so influential in many European countries at the end of the twentieth century. It therefore also *shares* in liberal multiculturalism's most important shortcomings. In this 'progressive' analysis of the 'alien question' and of the multicultural reality which was widely endorsed in the Netherlands

during the 1990s there was a strong conviction that the old tension of the own and the foreign was increasingly obsolete, 'a museum piece', as the influential Dutch political philosopher and social-democrat Lolle Nauta called it (Nauta 1997: 189). But it is a mistake to conclude from this that the multiculturalism that someone like Nauta endorsed was really hospitable to the cultural or religious alterity of newcomers. Let us listen to the following statement of Nauta: 'Foreigners solicit the right to a dignified existence, and what they understand by that, they have, understandably enough, learnt from us … *What they have in mind, is [therefore] not foreign in any single aspect* (Nauta 1994: 14, my emphasis).

This passage is revealing, for it shows that the 'obsolete' problem of the own and the alien is only a 'museum piece' thanks to the evident universality of the own standards about what can be called a 'dignified existence'. Thus a philosopher of law, Hans Lindahl, writes in an analysis – which is as fair as it is incisive – of Nauta's text: 'Nauta's statement that what foreigners have in mind "*is not foreign in any single aspect*" is, precisely because of its good intentions, an extremely refined way of neutralizing any possible foreignness which the foreigner may possess in advance' (Lindahl 2002: 38).

In the last decade, we are experiencing – intensified by a number of dramatic events such as 9/11, the London and Madrid public transport attacks, the assassination of the artist Theo van Gogh – a kind of 'return of the repressed'. When we simply invert the liberal-multiculturalist statements we can come up with a blueprint for what is currently a popular and 'populist' diagnosis of the problem. Let us take a look at its most important elements. While someone like Nauta is *implicitly* pleading for the exclusive right of the own, populists and so-called 'Enlightenment fundamentalists' nowadays are doing it in the name of an *openly* avowed superiority of our own civilization. Just as the multiculturalist berates people who talk about the tension between the own and the alien, claiming that they are stuck in the past and are insufficiently modern, in the past few years precisely this reproach has been levelled at large groups of allochthonous citizens and their 'culturally relativist' intellectual spokespersons. Whereas the liberal multiculturalist has relegated cultural and religious differences to individual lifestyle choices, too many contemporary matters are exactly the opposite. What separates us is 'culture'. This new discourse, of which the American political philosopher Wendy Brown has provided a brilliant analysis, goes as follows: us modern people *have* culture (civilization, freedom, equality, tolerance etc.), 'they' – first and foremost, Muslims – on the other hand *are* culture, that is, in the grip of non-liberal cultural values and a backward religion (Brown 2006: 151). Given this dissymmetry, the demand for assimilation is no more than a matter

of promoting civilization. Whereas leftist multiculturalists proceed to take up the cause of those who have been colonized by the West, today's supporters of rightist-populist political parties style themselves as victims of some sort of 'reversed colonization', a looming 'Eurabia'. And whereas for example in Nauta's texts foreigners and asylum seekers are frequently described as the 'new Jews', to Wilders and his ilk precisely these culturally alien Muslims are those who, blindly attached to the Qur'an, pose the risk of a new fascism.

In short, whereas Nauta's moral impulse during the 1990s consisted in extending paternal protection to foreigners at a time when the first cracks in the multicultural ideal were already becoming visible, we today see in many European intellectuals exactly the reverse: what needs to be protected is the national culture and the citizen who is seeking refuge towards the extreme right of the political spectrum.

## 7. Contingency

In conclusion I would like to point out two aspects of this new rightist discourse of assimilation, aspects that not only remain polemically dependent upon the rejected multiculturalism, but also tragically fail to recognize the real nature of the new problems, especially with regard to religion and religious extremism. In the first place, the emphasis on the 'culture' of the other which anti-multiculturalism shares with its predecessor fails to recognize that the nature and also the specific danger of contemporary forms of (political) fundamentalism lies precisely in the fact that they concern forms of belief which have become detached from culture and religion. The French Islamist Olivier Roy has provided an extensive analysis of the phenomenon of the *cultural deracination* of Islam in Europe (and, by the way, also of Protestantism and Catholicism) (Roy 2005).

According to Roy, the political risk of this new form of fundamentalism precisely does not lie in a renewed intrusion of tradition and 'backwardness' into modernity. Rather, it concerns the fact that a religion in a deculturalized form not infrequently becomes reduced to a set of abstract dogmas, codes of behaviour and *sound bites* – which may well provide its supporters with a religious identity, but which also make some of them into unguided political-religious missiles.

In the second place, both multiculturalism and its contemporary populist inversions continue to occupy themselves fighting a war of the past. They are still concerned with a struggle against 'fascism' (by which is certainly meant National Socialism). Either foreigners and asylum seekers are the 'new Jews',

or the Qur'an is a 'fascist' text: whether from the left or the right, we remain under the spell of 'never again'. *The Nazis and their victims*: this binary moral encoding of political problems is a sure way of rendering political conflicts insoluble. After all, with a Nazi or a racist one cannot negotiate.

For these reasons a politics without dénouement pleads for the relative independence of the political sphere beside and with regard to morality (de Wit 2005). Such a form of politics acknowledges that the tension between the foreign and the own constitute a legitimate question within each and every political order, in as far as no order can be conceived of without an element of exclusion. Precisely the denial of this leads to posing the own as an absolute, as can be discerned in Nauta's texts. The fact that each order has an 'outside' is the insight therefore not of xenophobic culturalists, but precisely of a politics that not only realizes but also affirms the contingent nature (and therefore the contestability and openness) of each and every order. And does not the notion that our political order is 'not all there is' represent also a central moment of the religious mind according to Marx, Kundera and so many others?

## Part Four

# Political Theology *as* Political Theory – Prospects

# 11. Reinhold Niebuhr and the Crisis of Liberalism: Augustinian Realism and Democratic Politics in the Post-Enlightenment

*Alexander Rosenthal*

Great errors in politics are rooted in errors concerning human nature. One of the keenest minds to diagnose the particular errors that led to the twentieth-century political cataclysm was Reinhold Niebuhr, a rare example of a Christian theologian who exercised a profound impact on practical political life in recent times.[1] The framework Niebuhr developed – Christian realism – helped provide moral clarity and political prudence to the American foreign policy establishment at a time when his nation moved from the periphery to the forefront of the international system and confronted the totalitarian systems of Nazism and Communism. George Kennan, one of the principal architects of US Cold War Policy, referred to Niebuhr as 'the father of us all'. In 1964 President Johnson honoured him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Involved in the Civil Rights movement, Niebuhr received honourable mention in Martin Luther King's famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Moreover, Niebuhr has been broadly praised and cited across the American political spectrum – Michael Gerson remarked upon his formative influence on the neoconservative movement (Gerson 1997), but he was also cited by now President Barack Obama in 2007 as his 'favourite philosopher'. His direct and indirect influence on American political thought is both deep and broad though there are disputes among realists, neoconservatives, and liberals about his legacy and the contemporary policies that should follow from it.

Though initially involved with the liberal Protestantism of the Social Gospel and associated with both moderate socialism and pacifism, Niebuhr's political outlook came to a new maturity in the approach to the Second World War. However, as Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany, Niebuhr became an ardent advocate of American interventionism. As he rethought his own positions, he came to regard all of the factors and attitudes that hindered a response the Nazi regime in the Western democracies – the hailing of the Munich capitulation as the victory of 'reason over force' (Niebuhr 1940),

the banal confidence in the persuasive powers of the League of Nations over the Axis, the widespread pacifism among liberal Christians – as symptoms of a much deeper crisis within the project of modernity that began with the Enlightenment:

> The errors and illusions of our culture, which have made an estimate of the crisis of our civilization difficult if not impossible, are, almost all, without exception, various versions of a single error. They are all expressions of too great an optimism about the goodness of human nature … (Davis and Good (eds) 1960: 9)

The peculiar character of Enlightenment thought – a confidence in human rationality, a belief in progress understood as transcending particularistic loyalties, and a faith in the moral effects of science and education – constituted the basic presuppositions of Western liberalism and underlay the ideals of democracy. Yet these same presuppositions proved inadequate to confront the threats of the twentieth century. Until the noose was already around their neck, the democracies found themselves unable to respond to or even recognize the danger posed to their very existence by Nazi ideology. This tribal creed of race and blood which glorified blind force and will to power, and whose possibilities for evil were augmented rather than hindered by modern science and education, was one for which liberalism was wholly unprepared (ibid.: 24). The significance of the rise of totalitarianism in both its Nazi and Marxist forms in the twentieth century was therefore to undermine confidence in the modern project. The belief in human perfectibility and inevitable moral progress no longer has credibility after Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago. Since the Enlightenment anthropology that grounded the development of modern democracy has been undermined by historical reality, Niebuhr was concerned that the credibility of the democratic ideal was also imperilled. In this chapter I will first provide a brief exposition of Niebuhr's analysis of the Enlightenment's understanding of man, showing the relationship between its rationalism and its progressivist conception of history. Then I will show how Niebuhr draws upon Augustine's concept of man and history in the formulation of his doctrine of Christian realism as an alternative foundation for the democratic ideal. Third, I will discuss Niebuhr's rejection of pacifism and defence of the Christian ethic. Finally, I will endeavour to give an account of the relevance of Niebuhr's Christian realism to the contemporary world situation.

## 1. The Enlightenment's Anthropology and Philosophy of History

Niebuhr's thought may be best understood as an effort to vindicate the democratic ideal while extricating it from the Enlightenment's vision of man and history. It is this project which led Niebuhr to St Augustine, whose alternative understanding of human nature and the drama of history provided the foundation for Niebuhr's Christian realism. This effort to vindicate the continuing relevance of Christianity for political thought in this avowedly secular age runs of course against modern civilization's general suspicion of religious discourse. Consider for instance the recent contention over whether Christianity should be mentioned in the EU constitution as a historical influence alongside the Greeks, Romans and humanists. Clearly contemporary Europe finds itself in a difficult relationship to the historical memory of fifteen centuries during which Christianity gave spiritual unity to its civilization, defined its moral ideals, inspired its artistic and intellectual life, and suffused all of its political, economic, legal and educational institutions.

The reasons for this suspicion are partly theoretical; religious truth-claims – especially those with the deepest historical roots – are deemed to be a threat to the values of tolerance and pluralism. But the origins of the diffidence of the modern West to its religious roots are also historical, for the political form of modern democratic culture was established in the context of a middle-class rebellion against an aristocratic culture closely identified with the idea of Christendom.[2] The French Revolution – the paradigmatic event that inaugurated the modern era of European politics – was inspired by a set of counter-ideals against the *Ancien Régime*; liberty against monarchical authority, equality against aristocratic hierarchy, and secularism against Roman Catholicism. To be sure these contrasts can be drawn too simplistically. Anglo-American liberalism was on the whole far less hostile to religion than the *philosophes* and French revolutionaries and involved less of a sense of rupture. The American Revolution and constitutional development, while sharing with that of France much of the same hostility to monarchy and aristocracy, recognized America's historical origins as a haven for many devout religious dissidents who were already opposed to the close union of throne and altar. Still it is accurate to say that the political project of modernity with which the progress of democracy has been intertwined is rooted in the Enlightenment worldview. Its more radical protagonists, the *philosophes* of the French salons, thought of themselves as pioneers of a new form of European civilization that would be built on the ruins of Christendom.

To this new form of civilization corresponded a new understanding of man and history which deserves consideration here since it served as Niebuhr's principal foil. The Enlightenment as the 'Age of Reason' drew deeply of course on the classical Greek vision of man as pre-eminently the rational animal. But this is not the revolutionary element in the Enlightenment's philosophical anthropology. The culture of Roman Catholic humanism (whether we consider the medieval scholastics or in a different way the Italian Renaissance) had long assimilated the Greek Aristotelian doctrine of man as the 'rational animal' into the biblical doctrine of man as the image of God. Before the radical biblicism of the Reformation and the radical rationalism of the Enlightenment broke up the medieval synthesis, Rome had sought and indeed achieved a certain concord between Athens and Jerusalem – a synthesis which lies at the heart of the European idea. Modern civilization's rejection of Christianity is not rooted then in its embrace of classical humanism. It is rooted rather in its particular approach to the issue of evil in human society and history. As Niebuhr writes:

> The certainty of modern anthropology is its optimistic treatment of the problem of evil. Modern man has an essentially easy conscience; and nothing gives the diverse and discordant notes of modern culture greater harmony as the unanimous opposition to Christian conceptions of the sinfulness of man … it is this rejection which has seemed to make the Christian gospel simply irrelevant to modern man … (Niebuhr 1996: 23)

The Enlightenment on the whole understood evil as principally a defect of reason, i.e. as a problem of ignorance. One might think of Baron D'Holbach's claim that 'Men are unhappy, only because they are ignorant; they are ignorant, only because everything conspires to prevent their being enlightened; they are wicked, only because their reason is not sufficiently developed …' (Holbach 1772: Preface), and later 'to discover true principles of morality men have no need of theology, of revelation, of gods' (ibid.). This idea of evil as ignorance has Greek and specifically Socratic-Platonic roots. Sometimes in Plato vice is presented as a consequence of the soul's involvement with sensuality and the body, as in the chariot image in the *Phaedrus*. But at other times vice is not primarily a consequence of reason's failure to restrain the appetites, but rather of reason's ignorance. Socrates argues in Plato's *Protagoras* that 'When people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains – that is of good and evil – the cause of their mistake is a lack of knowledge …' (Plato 1989: 348).

The Enlightenment takes up this Socratic conception of evil as ignorance, and makes it the foundation of a progressivist concept of history. Since

ignorance is open to correction, it follows that human nature and society can be perfected through the diffusion of knowledge and education. Through reflection reason can meditate upon the sources of ignorance and vice in society and history and undertake to remove them by removing the obstacles to knowledge. Given the perfectibility of human nature through reason and education, religious institutions are not only superfluous but also to the more radical *philosophes* profoundly pernicious since they are the principal historical obstacles to scientific thinking, and are purveyors of ignorance, superstition, and intolerance: 'Theology' says D'Holbach' far from being useful to the human species, is the true source of all the sorrows which afflict the earth …'[3] while Helvetius writes 'What does the history of religions teach us? The religions have kindled the fire of intolerance everywhere. They have filled the plains with corpses … religions have never improved men.'

This view of human perfectibility led to a new view of human history. Since human vices are rooted in ignorance, and ignorance can be overcome through education, it follows that human society will progress as knowledge and education are disseminated, and the hold of social sources of ignorance (such as 'superstitious' religious dogmas and mysteries) are replaced by modern, scientific thinking. For the astounding progress of the sciences in modern Europe was the principal inspiration for the boundless confidence in progress. Just as science had revealed the deep harmony between human reason and the rationality of nature, and made it possible for man to understand and domesticate his natural environment, so would it be possible for man to use reason to advance in his moral and social life. As the Marquis de Condorcet noted, if science had revealed the laws of nature 'Why should this principle be any less true for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties of man than for the other operations of nature?'[4] History would progress from a more primitive state to a condition of ultimate rational perfection.

This dream of achieving the perfection of history and society was a *cosmopolitan* vision embracing the whole of the human race. As Condorcet hoped that all societies would achieve the 'state of civilization', so Kant in his *Perpetual Peace* dreamed of a cosmopolitan federation of nations achieving a lasting world peace and transcending particularistic loyalties through a rational harmony of nations. Kant's cosmopolitan idea of course is a principal inspiration for such international institutions as the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the European Union. In its own way Niebuhr sees even Adam Smith's capitalistic vision of a world knitted together by trade and commerce as guided by this vision of the peaceful and prosperous cosmopolitan world community (Niebuhr 1944). The major figures of the Enlightenment for all their many differences shaped the quintessentially modern ideology of

liberalism, defined by Niebuhr as the 'faith' that 'society is moving towards a universal community and a frictionless harmony of all social life by forces inherent in history itself' (Niebuhr 1940: 11).

The liberal confidence in historical progress has real foundations. One can consider the dramatic improvements in human material conditions made possible in modernity by the advance of technology and the release of creative energies in the free market system. Moreover, a number of very real moral advances in Western civilization can be credited largely to the heritage of the Enlightenment – a greater recognition of individual rights, religious freedom, and humane legal reforms. And yet it is clear that the Enlightenment project had reached a point of crisis by the first half of the twentieth century for which its doctrine was wholly unprepared. On the premises of optimistic rationalism a totalitarian movement like Nazism should not have even existed:

> For the liberal faith in reason, Nazism substituted the romantic faith in vitality and force. For the simple faith that right makes its own might, it substituted the idea that might makes right. For the hope of liberal democracy that history was in the process of eliminating all partial, national, and racial loyalties and creating a universal community of mankind it substituted a primitive loyalty to race and nation … so the tragic events of modern history have negated practically every presupposition upon which modern culture is built. (Ibid.: 24–5)

Nazism then is the absolute negation of the values of modern liberalism; and yet the Enlightenment contributed to the modern crisis first because it created a spiritual vacuum which the 'political religions' like Nazism and Communism could fill, and secondly because acceptance of its assumptions left the modern democracies with few defences against the unexpected persistence of evil into the modern age.

## 2. Niebuhr's Augustinian Conception of Man and History

Against the Socratic and Enlightenment conceptions of vice as mere ignorance, Niebuhr turns to Augustine's profound reflections on the problem of evil that so absorbed the Bishop of Hippo's life and work. Upon his conversion, Augustine came to reject the Manichean conception of evil as an independent principle. God being perfectly good could not create anything evil. But while he accepted the Neoplatonic doctrine of evil as a privative rather than positive reality, he rejected the Platonic idea of evil either as rooted in ignorance or

the soul's involvement with the body.[5] The deepest root of human evil is far more sinister than either ignorance or sensuality. As Augustine writes in the *City of God*:

> What could begin this evil will but pride, which is the beginning of all sin. And what is pride but a perverse desire of height, in forsaking Him to whom the soul ought solely to cleave, as the beginning thereof, to make the self seem the beginning. (Niebuhr 1942: 186)[6]

Evil is not remediable through intellectual knowledge for its roots rather are found in a disordered self-love which escaping all bounds leads man not to *will* the good of his fellows but instead to glorify himself against them.[7] This 'perverse desire of height' manifests itself in political life particularly as the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*).[8] This pride of power – aggrandizing the self through the subjugation of others – is of course the contrary of the Christian ideal of *agape* which is ready to sacrifice the self out of love for God and neighbour. Thus the soul of man is enmeshed in a war between love and self-love represented by Augustine in the famous image of the two cities; the earthly city founded by Cain, born in the hatred of fratricide, and the city of God founded by Jesus Christ, and born in sacrificial love. Each city lives after the example of its founder, one by the blood of the sword, the other by the blood of the cross; one by the 'love of self even to the contempt of God' the other by 'the love of God even to the contempt of self'.[9] Augustine does not deny that the political ruler can belong to the city of God when he sees himself as the humble servant seeking the good of those under his authority.[10] Yet his basic picture is that the earthly city is 'itself dominated by the lust to dominate'[11] (*ipsa ei dominandi ipsa dominatur*) and trapped in the endless struggle for power in which 'the city is often divided against itself by litigations, wars, struggles, and such victories as are either life-destroying or short lived'.[12] Augustine sees the political order as constantly menaced on the one hand by the possibility of a violent and chaotic collision of wills where different factions and wills struggle for domination or, on the other hand, by the tyrannical domination of one will over all others.

Traditionally in European political thought, while liberal political theories were associated with the relative optimism of the Enlightenment (e.g. Locke, Condorcet), realist theories of human nature (e.g. Luther, Hobbes) were associated with authoritarianism, for given human malice a strong authority is required to hold chaos in check. Niebuhr argues that Augustinian realism actually furnishes the grounds for the *vindication* of democratic politics. If human beings are 'dominated by the lust to dominate', the danger of tyranny

is all the greater where the ruler's power is absolute and unrestricted. In one of his more famous passages Niebuhr writes:

> Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary. In all non-democratic political theories the state or the ruler is invested with uncontrolled power for the sake of achieving order and peace in the community. But the pessimism which prompts and justifies this policy is not consistent; for it is not applied, as it should be, to the ruler. If men are inclined to deal unjustly with their fellows, the possession of power aggravates this inclination. This is why irresponsible and uncontrolled power is the greatest source of injustice. (Niebuhr 1944: xiii–xiv)

On the premises of Christian realism, the long conflict between the idealistic political theories which see morality as the end of politics, and those 'cynical' theories which see power and interests as the essential variables, is in a sense a false dichotomy. If concentrated power inevitably raises the spectre of tyranny it follows that the 'realist' political task of achieving equilibrium of power is a necessary prerequisite for a moral political life:

> Justice is basically dependent on a balance of power. Whenever an individual or group or nation possesses undue power, and whenever this is not checked by the possibility of criticizing and resisting it, it grows inordinate … a balance of power is something different from, and inferior to a harmony of love. It is a basic condition of justice given the sinfulness of man. (Niebuhr 1940: 26)

Niebuhr stands here in an existing American tradition. For though the founding fathers were deeply steeped in the culture of the Enlightenment, many of them did have a sober attentiveness to the realities of human nature and the role of balance of power in creating a just polity. Thus James Madison famously wrote that:

> Ambition must be made to counteract ambition … it may be a reflection upon human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections upon human nature? If men were angels no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men neither internal nor external controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men the great difficulty lies in

> this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place you must oblige it to control itself.[13]

Niebuhr provides a powerful defence of modern democracy as a historical achievement worthy of preservation beyond the optimistic theories which spawned it; he does not however yield to the 'idolatry' of democracy which would 'identify our particular brand of democracy with the ultimate values of life' (Niebuhr 1940: 191).

The perils of anarchy and tyranny of course threaten the international system as much as the domestic political order, for nations are in different ways animated by the *libido dominandi* as much as are domestic political groups, and they operate under fewer constraints. For this cause reliance on reason, moral persuasion, and the formulation of legal and moral principles are inadequate by themselves to safeguard a just peace.

## 3. Pacifism and the Relevance of the Christian Ethic

During the lead up to the Second World War, Niebuhr was particularly critical of the Christian form of pacifism that sought to conjoin the perfectionist anthropology of the Enlightenment with the Christian ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Proponents of this synthesis argued that to take up arms even against the Nazis was a violation of Christ's law of love which required that love and forgiveness be extended even to the enemy and the evildoer. Niebuhr saw the error of Christian pacifism as consisting in the belief that Christ's law of love was available as a 'simple historical possibility' in a fallen and sinful world:

> They [the pacifists] assert that if only men loved each other, all the complex, and sometimes horrible, realities of the political order could be dispensed with. They do not see that their 'if' begs the most basic problem of human history. It is because men are sinners that justice can only be achieved by a certain measure of coercion on the one hand and resistance to coercion and tyranny on the other hand. The political life of man must constantly steer between the Scylla of anarchy, and the Charybdis of tyranny. Human egotism makes large scale cooperation on a purely voluntary basis impossible. (Niebuhr 1940: 14)[14]

In fact then, statesmen are rarely confronted with the possibility of choosing an absolute and unconditioned good. The concrete choice in the 1930s was not

between war and a peace like that of Augustine's city of God – an 'everlasting peace in which self-love, and self-will have no place, but a ministering love that rejoices in the common joy of all . . .'[15] The choice rather was between the 'anarchy' of war and the 'peace' of submission to Nazi tyranny. By preferring tyranny to conflict, the moral absolutism represented by pacifism becomes in a strange way guilty of complicity with radical evil:

> Modern liberal perfectionism actually distils moral perversity out of its moral absolutes. It is unable to make significant distinctions between tyranny and freedom because it can find no democracy pure enough to deserve its devotion … it is unable to distinguish between the peace of capitulation to tyranny, and the peace of the Kingdom of God, it does not realize that its effort to make the peace of the Kingdom of God into a simple historical possibility must inevitably result in placing a premium on surrender to evil. (Niebuhr 1940: x)

While Niebuhr's repudiation of Christian pacifism might seem to imperil the relevance of the Christian love ethic for political life, Niebuhr insists that the cross is pregnant with consequences for political life. The use of power to achieve security and justice in history is a necessity of a fallen world. And yet whatever good is achieved through political strategies is always imperfect because the use of power in the world is inevitably corrupted by sin. While the achievement of a stable balance of power is a relative good when compared to the alternatives of tyranny and anarchy, it cannot be the final and absolute moral norm. The highest ethical possibility is realized in the life of Jesus Christ – pure, self-sacrificial love. While there is no simple triumph of such love over self-love in history, the cross points to an ultimate fulfilment of the good *beyond history*. As the same time it qualifies whatever political power can achieve; for 'perfect goodness in history can be symbolized only by the disavowal of power. But this did not become clear until the One appeared who rejected all concepts of Messianic domination . . .' (Niebuhr 1996: 22). For Niebuhr, the cross is at once God's judgement on sin, the mercy that saves from sin, and a repudiation of all messianic dreams of using political power as a vehicle of world-redemption.

Niebuhr's critique of political messianism is a major contribution of Christian realism to contemporary political analysis. Even our modern history shows that the effort to create the kingdom of God on earth through political power and technique is a recurrent theme, even if it appears in secularized forms. For Niebuhr, Marxism was essentially a secular form of political messianism which believed that capitalism and the class structure

were the roots of injustice, and that its overthrow would usher in a classless society of universal brotherhood from which all greed and self-centeredness would be eliminated – a kingdom of God on earth. The result was a form of violent, expansionist totalitarianism fuelled by a revolutionary zeal that long threatened the peace of our world.

## 4. Christian Realism and the Present World Situation

In different ways contemporary America and Europe remain reluctant to confront the reality of the *libido dominandi* as an ineradicable factor in global politics. America, as Niebuhr had pointed out (Niebuhr 1952), often has an image of its politics as a selfless pursuit of disinterested justice. This moralistic component to American political tradition tends towards a certain naïveté about the role of power in international relations. While this idealism has preserved the nation from the unvarnished cynicism to which other nations in a position of power have sometimes yielded, it has also caused it to alternate between an isolationism that seeks to disavow the responsibilities of power lest the nation's moral purity be affected by foreign entanglements,[16] and an idealistic interventionism that fails to recognize the limits of power and the recalcitrance of historical forces to rational domestication. Europe on the other hand, with its long tradition of *machtpolitik*, was so traumatized by its twentieth-century history that some Europeans seem to imagine the European Union in utopian terms as the definitive supersession of power politics and national particularism in favour of a cosmopolitan ideal.[17] The democracies can ill afford illusions as they confront the unique challenges of the twenty-first century. Our world sees the ascent of new centres of power as the great historical nations of Asia – e.g. China, India, and a resurgent Russia – assume a place within the international system commensurate with their demographic, economic, and military positions. We can expect that a multi-polar world (should it emerge) would be characterized by overt and covert contests of power and complex, shifting alliances. It is to be hoped that that the inevitable rivalries between and among emerging and established world powers can be domesticated into a relatively stable and peaceful form of competition, but the dangers of stumbling into disaster are real. What will be required is a carefully calibrated statecraft, committed to achieving justice and peace, but also attentive to the incorrigible realities of power and interest, lest the mistakes of the twentieth century be repeated in the twenty-first.

Meanwhile, the resurgence of religion as a force in world politics has unmasked the conceit of the Enlightenment, viz. that the progress of world

history would be marked by universal secularization. Instead we have seen a powerful resurgence of religiosity around the world, in both regenerative and problematic manifestations. This is a factor whose political import was too long ignored by foreign policy elites, who fail to understand religious motivations and so failed to anticipate events like the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. The Islamic resurgence in part expresses a protest against the perceived materialism of the modern West in both its capitalist and Marxist manifestations and the threat secular modernity poses to a traditional religious culture.[18] But in its extremist manifestations it is also a form of political messianism seeking an earthly kingdom of God. It is this factor which gives the movement such great potential for violence. Syed Qutb, who is widely regarded as the forefather of modern Islamic radicalism in the Sunni world, explicitly rejected the Augustinian dualism between the earthly and heavenly cities, charging that in the West 'God's existence is not denied, but His reign is restricted to the heavens and His rule on earth is suspended. Neither the Shar'iah nor the values prescribed by God and ordained by Him as eternal and invariable find any place …'[19]

Qutb contrasts this separation of the spiritual and temporal realms with the idea of God's law ruling over both heaven and earth.[20] This more or less corresponds to similar ideas among Shi'ite radicals – for instance the Ayatollah Khomeini stated that '… in Islam … the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty … no one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the law of the Divine Legislator'.[21] As with communism, what makes this Islamic form of political messianism particularly dangerous to international concord is the intensity and sincerity of its zeal, the universality of its aims and the willingness to use force and violence to achieve them. Thus Qutb writes,

> The establishing of God's dominion over the earth, the taking away of sovereignty from the usurper to revert it to God, and to bring about the enforcement of the Divine Law (Shari'ah) and the abolition of man-made laws cannot be achieved only through preaching … Islam is not a defensive movement in the narrow sense which is today called a 'defensive war'.[22]

The radical Islamic movements set in motion by Qutb and Khomeini so far lack the discipline and internal cohesion of the communist movement. Many Muslims wholly reject these ideas and join with others of goodwill in seeking to contain violent extremists. Other than Iran and the Sudan, few governments in the Muslim world have fallen into the hands of religious revolutionaries. Yet Islamic radicalism has demonstrated vitality as well as global ambition

and scope, and its followers will not be easily deterred from their ends. In several elections, such as in Algeria and the Palestinian Territories, Islamic radicals achieved a modicum of electoral success. Even more ominously, terrorist strikes across the globe in places like the United States, Great Britain, Israel, India, Spain, Russia, the Philippines, Morocco, Thailand, Argentina and Indonesia demonstrate the continuing value of Niebuhr's warnings about those who would take the kingdom of God by storm (Matt. 11:12).

Niebuhr's Christian realism, drawing upon the Augustinian tradition shared by Roman Catholics and Protestants, offers many insights useful for both philosophical anthropology and modern politics. In some ways, formulated as it was during the horrors of the twentieth century, Niebuhr's vision of man is too pessimistic. There is a tendency to focus on the tensions rather than the possibilities of harmony between the classical and biblical heritage of the West. Christianity knows that man is a sinner, but it also knows what St Gregory of Nyssa called man's 'royal dignity', which raises him above the rest of the visible creation. Pushed to an extreme, Niebuhr's critique of rationalism becomes part of a project of 'de-hellenization',[23] which rejects a Christian humanism capable of assimilating the finest insights of the classical tradition. Nonetheless, as a diagnosis of the excesses of the Enlightenment, Niebuhr's project still has great value. Niebuhr's warnings about political messianism, his understanding of the problem of pride and will to power, and his profound insight into the perils and responsibilities of power are as applicable today as in his time. Naïve conceptions of human nature, disbelief in the reality of evil, excessive trust in international institutions, reflexes of appeasement, messianic pretensions, and the utopian belief that history is moving inevitably towards a 'universal community and frictionless harmony of all social life' remain dangerous errors in our world. Niebuhr's Augustinian realism aimed to equip the democratic ideal against naïveté on the one hand, and, on the other, against those forms of modern realism which yield to cynicism because they abandon any horizon of eschatological hope.

# 12. Genuine or Elitist Democracy? Christianity and Democracy in the Thought of István Bibó and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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## 1. Introduction

The distinction between 'genuine democracy' and 'elitist democracy' has come to me from the major work of South African reformed theologian John de Gruchy on the relationship of Christianity and democracy. To put the difference in a succinct way, while the genuine democrat fears the rule of an elite, the elitist democrat fears popular rule (De Gruchy 1995: 19). Genuine democracy stresses a broad participation in political decisions, while elitist democracy emphasizes the expertise and skills of those in charge. In general, the first option may be based on a rather optimistic view of human nature while the second one represents a more cautious evaluation of human possibilities. At the same time, the actual phase of a society's process towards mature democracy may determine the choice between the two options. In fact, when I first encountered this distinction some ten years ago, I tended to side with elitist democracy, arguing that 'in a young democracy the role of a leading elite is crucial, and since usually more than one elite emerges and tries to control society, the real question for the people is not whether they want a genuine democracy or elitist democracy, for themselves (it may be an academic question for them at best), but which elite they may trust' (Csepregi 2003: 53). However, Hungarian society has been evolving and, at the same time, my thoughts may have gradually evolved as well. This chapter could be regarded as an update of my earlier thoughts about a possible politico-theological reading of the Hungarian democratic process, in which some thoughts have been modified while others are once again affirmed.

## 2. A Postcard from Hungary in 2008

Three years ago I wrote an essay about the process of transition to democracy in Hungary (Csepregi 2005). At that time I pictured my country as a rather

balanced polity, where freely elected governments were able to stay in office for their full term, where people were experiencing steady economic growth and some of them even an improved standard of living, where strikes and public expressions of dissatisfaction were relatively rare, and where extremist political parties where unable to secure seats in parliament. However, I also indicated that there might be a more complex world behind the apparently calm surface, a world that was burdened by contradictions. It was, for example, not at all clear whether the calm life of society meant peace or resignation, whether the lack of strikes expressed a general satisfaction or a lack of initiative. I also pointed out the sharpening ideological war between the leading political parties as a sign of tensions that might have been waiting to play a more formative role in the life of my apparently peaceful society. I also reminded my reader that the 1989 changes were not fought for by the people but rather given to them as a present (I think of the unintended results of Gorbachev's reforms), and the new democracy was not founded on the irresistible desire for a genuine democratic order on the part of the people as a whole, but on a wise consensus among some groups of the political elite. Therefore I thought that our struggle for democracy was not over yet; rather, this struggle was still to come. In other words, we had a 'democracy from above', or an 'elitist democracy' that had not built on and into the mentality and experiences of the Hungarian people.

Today the picture is rather different. Since the autumn of 2006, groups of people regularly occupy public places to demand the resignation of the government. Strikes of different organizations of employees have become more frequent and widespread. Small but effectively organized groups have been able to perpetrate violent attacks on the streets, sometimes surprising the police, who have little experience of this mode of expression of civil dissatisfaction. Anti-Semitism and anti-Roma attitudes gain a growing place in public discourses. Paramilitary groups are organized to defend the security of the majority – groups that wear uniforms and symbols that resemble those of the Hungarian Nazis of the early 1940s. Although explicitly extreme-rightist parties still cannot have seats in parliament, in some local governments they have started to secure positions.

These phenomena are interpreted by the opposing political forces, naturally, in opposite ways. According to the governing socialist party this unrest has been initiated and supported by the opposition, which has been unable to accept that, following its defeat in 2002, it again lost the general election in 2006. According to the opposition, which regards itself as a Christian and national political force, the unrest is nothing but the spontaneous resistance of a people disappointed by, as they suggest, the liars in government that

have betrayed the real interests of voters. To this the answer is that it is the opposition that deceives the people. The point is that, amidst the growing unrest, not only do the political elite seem to pay more attention to the people, but also the people seem more than ever to realize the power they have acquired since 1989. While a typical struggle for power is going on, there is probably a process of learning and creating a democracy; that is, a building of 'democracy from below', or a 'genuine democracy', may be developing as well.

However, the character and also the possible outcome of this experiment of democracy from below are interpreted by political analysts in different ways. Some think that the present state of Hungary can be compared to that of the Weimar Republic, where liberal-democratic institutions proved to be insufficient and a substantial part of the German people finally voted for a strong Chancellor, Adolf Hitler. Others argue that the example of the Weimar Republic is rather distant from us. They think that power relations in Hungary are more balanced, Hungarians are more familiar with Western democratic values than the German people were at that time, and, they add, Hungary is part of the European Union and a turn like that simply cannot happen within the EU.

We cannot yet decide who is right, but this situation offers a renewed opportunity for me to reopen my investigation into the political and democratic implications of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and of István Bibó with respect to the transition to democracy of Hungary.

## 3. Two Ways to Freedom: Christianity and Democracy in the Thought of István Bibó and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

While investigating the possible relevance of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the process of transition to democracy in Hungary, I find it helpful to invite the intellectual legacy of István Bibó into the discussion. Born in 1911, Bibó, who is regarded as *the* Hungarian political theorist of the twentieth century, made an unparalleled impact on the clarification of the possibilities of Hungarian democracy. His life, to a remarkable extent, is comparable to that of Bonhoeffer: a broadly cultured middle-class background; intellectual achievements at a young age; years of study abroad; a responsible position in the state administration; anti-Nazi activity; and action on behalf of the Jews in 1944 leading to arrest by the Gestapo (Bethge 2000). For Bibó there followed major political journalism after the war; silencing by the communists in 1949; membership of the Imre Nagy government in 1956; arrest in 1957

followed by a life sentence in 1958; release by amnesty in 1963; and finally enforced silence until his death in 1979, subsequent to which it is impossible to exaggerate the incomparable effect of his writings on Hungarian intellectual resistance. In addition, he was a devoted Christian of a Calvinist background (Csepregi 2003: 13; Szilágyi 1991; Berki 1992).

Despite the several exciting parallels in their lives and also some of the personal decisions of the two men, Bonhoeffer's and Bibó's ways of thinking show surprisingly little in common. To find a more or less limited common topic of their thought, I focused on their understanding of freedom, using, as a background, the terminology of *negative freedom / positive freedom*; that is, freedom from something/somebody and freedom for something/somebody, established by Isaiah Berlin (Berlin 1969). I have found that, while in Bibó's case we can reconstruct a structure that is close to Berlin's view – that is, positive freedom is rooted in and established upon negative freedom – in Bonhoeffer's case human freedom is exclusively positive freedom, and negative freedom, strangely enough, simply does not have a place in his thought (Csepregi 2003: 241).

This radical difference in their respective notions of freedom reveals their similarly different view of the human person and establishes their rather distinct idea of human sociality. For Bibó, the healthy core of human personality can be characterized by 'spontaneity'; this concept was elaborated on the basis of Henri Bergson in Bibó's first dissertation, *Coercion, Law, Freedom* (Bibó 1986a; Csepregi 2003: 77f.). For Bonhoeffer, person means the 'ethical collective person' who is ready to take the 'vicarious representative action', in its most specific case as 'Christ, existing as church-community', as worked out in his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio* (Bonhoeffer 1998; Csepregi 2003: 165f.). For Bibó, the community of spontaneous people may turn into a balanced human society (Bibó 1986b; Csepregi 2003: 106–22), while for Bonhoeffer the ethical collective person, inspired by Christ, 'the man for the other', may build up the church that 'is the church only, when it exists for others' (Bonhoeffer 1973: 380–3).

These few, rather technical terms reveal the vast difference between the worldviews of Bibó and Bonhoeffer. To begin with Bibó, we can learn the message of a political philosopher who intended to take seriously the experience of persons and communities, experience that is mirrored in spontaneous feelings and conscious decisions. On the negative side of such experiences he regards *fear* as a decisive factor behind human deeds and historical processes; fear, which in certain circumstances can be developed into a closed system of *political hysteria*. On the positive side, however, he is ready to recognize the possibility of overcoming fear, nurtured by the – frequently hidden –

capacities of the human soul, and the wish for and hope in a more just and balanced society. For Bibó, fear is the worst as well as the most dangerous experience of the individual and the community alike, the opposite of love. Between the two, freedom plays a transitory role, both in its negative and its positive form: freedom from fear of the other may result in freedom for love of the other. Against the background of this terminology Bibó formulated his famous definition of democracy, which is rooted in Central and Eastern European experience.

The existential fear for the community was the decisive factor that made the situation of democracy and democratic development unstable in these countries. Mature democracy corresponds to the psychological state of adulthood, and the historical shocks that befall a nation correspond to the individual shocks that involve the not sufficiently resistant, non-adult psychic types in all kinds of hysterics. Accordingly, the political culture and morals of mature, democratic societies are not undermined by historical shocks, but rather they strengthen them even more. On the other hand, they upset the development of communities that are at the beginning of the road to democracy, and involve them in spasms of communal psychology that are difficult to release. To be a democrat means first of all not to be afraid: not to be afraid of different opinions, different languages, of a different race, of revolution, of conspiracies, the unknown, evil designs of the enemy, hostile propaganda, derogation, and altogether of all the imaginary dangers that become real dangers because of our fear of them. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were afraid because they were not mature democracies, and since they were afraid, they were unable to become mature democracies (Bibó 1986b: 334f.; Bibó 1991a: 42).

On this basis Bibó built up the metaphor of 'political hysteria' that he first applied to Nazi Germany, and later to Hungary as well (Csepregi 2003: 107–13). Sadly, this diagnosis also seemed to hold true for the countries of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, and we cannot be sure that this sickness has as yet left Central Europe altogether.

This attentive concentration on experience, the emphasis on human spontaneity, his understanding of freedom as primarily *freedom from* but equally importantly *freedom for*, lends the political thought of Bibó two unique characteristics.

First, far from being an ideologically closed thinker, he was ready to move his ideas within all the three great democratic traditions: liberalism, socialism and conservatism. On the surface of his works it seems that the main strength of his political philosophy was his ability to unite liberal and socialist ideas (Bibó 1991b: 485–7; Berki 1992), but it is equally important

that, albeit largely without reflecting on it, a solid conservative conviction served him as a background for more richly expressed liberal and socialist thoughts. (Conservative ideas probably were too close for him to reflect on.) He admired the civil revolutions of England and the Netherlands,[1] putting personal and political liberties before all others, blaming Nazi Germany and communist Hungary alike for depriving their peoples of these liberties in the name of the declared interest of their societies. Further, having been involved in the social experiments of the left-leaning intelligentsia of the interwar period, he knew equally clearly that without real social possibilities, liberties are empty. But, in contrast to his evaluation of the revolution of England and the Netherlands, he gave the great French Revolution a rather ambiguous estimation: he considered it the most successful and, at the same time, the least successful revolution of European history. 'Most successful because it made possible such a thorough and rational re-organization of society as had never before been accomplished by a revolution, least successful, because it aroused so much fear that the Western world has not recovered from it since' (Bibó 1991b: 449). This evaluation reflects the conservative character of Bibó's thought: he preferred a slower, what he called 'organic', change of society, a transition of power-relations from a rigid domination of power-centres towards a more participatory society, characterized by mutual service. Likewise, although he considered revolution as a sometimes necessary step on the road of social progress, he rejected violence. He did not think that violence can be avoided altogether, but he was convinced that the level of violence might radically be reduced. Close to the end of his life, he built up a coherent theory of the *social development of Europe*, in which fear, power, violence, the humanization of power and active non-violent resistance are the key terms. He originates this process in the person of Christ and the movement of Christianity, saying that modern European democracy is a late but 'organic' fruit of the early Christian experiment of non-violence. To put it in Bibó's characteristic terminology:

> The technique of rights and liberties, labeled bourgeois but in fact having universal applicability throughout the West and combining such features as parliamentary representation, multi-party system, freedom of press, independent judiciary, and the protection from administrative measures offered by the courts, is one of the greatest, most permanent and most successful achievements of Western civilization, and represents at the same time the only realistic and lastingly productive remnant of the violence-free Christian ideal in the organization of society. (Bibó 1991b: 466)

His opinion may closely be related to the famous definition of democracy offered by American biblical theologian, Walter Wink. It can thus be discussed alongside contemporary politico-theological efforts to understand violence and non-violent possibilities:

> Ideally democracy is non-violence institutionalized. It is the only political order that rejects domination in principle and grounds itself in equality before the law. Democracy generically is a system for the non-violent resolution of conflict and disputes through representative forms of government and civil life. (Wink 1992: 171)

The second characteristic of Bibó's thought is its therapeutic approach to social conflicts. We have already mentioned the metaphor of political hysteria, applied to Germany and the rest of Central Europe. The metaphor of sickness and, in relation to it, health, also has theological significance in Bibó's theory. Sickness replaces sinfulness in Bibó's views, as his conscious intention of avoiding moralization and acting as a therapist instead requires. The metaphor of sickness allows one to see a – probably tiny – healthy core in the other that may be a starting point of their recovery. Also, it allows me to recognize a similar sickness – even at a different level – in myself, that creates a consciousness of relatedness not only with respect to the common hope but also to the common predicament. There may be two effects of this possibility: a greater understanding of the other and liberation from misplaced roles, such as being a judge of the other (Csepregi 2003: 121).

From Bonhoeffer's understanding of person, human community and freedom, however, a rather different approach of social and political conflicts arises. As I concluded in my earlier investigation, the basic structure of Bonhoeffer's understanding of human sociality did not change from *Sanctorum Communio* to *Letters and Papers from Prison*: it remained within the limits of the heritage of his family, which was intellectually liberal and socially conservative (Csepregi 2003: 242). From this neither a free acceptance of the three great democratic traditions follow, nor a therapeutic approach that prevents one from judging the other by allowing one to recognize the sickness of the other in oneself. Rather, an elitist conception of leadership comes about, which makes a distinction between the peasant and the bourgeois, relating order to the first and free responsibility to the second.[2] In this social structure even the famous *being there for the other*, the *taking risk for the other*, or *suffering for the other* are understood in a hierarchical order, since those on top are the best placed to perform such an act for those who are unable to do so. 'The rabble only know how to live, but the noble also know how to die'

(Bonhoeffer 2000: 36). It is not at all certain that an act of 'being there for the other' creates a deeper understanding of the other, between the acting one and the one 'being acted upon'. The life of the other may be saved, but the quality of the relationship can remain the same.

## 4. Possible Fruits of the Comparison of Bibó and Bonhoeffer

Having arrived at this point of comparison between Bibó and Bonhoeffer we must stop and ask: what is the meaning and the purpose of this experiment? Why don't we just leave this issue here, clarifying their differences, which are not unusual at all? I think the accurate understanding of these differences may help us to understand otherwise difficult political and theological issues better.

*The first issue* is the relationship of theology and political development in Hungary. Confining this to the Hungarian reception of the legacy of Bibó and Bonhoeffer, we can make some related observations. While both thinkers have attracted small but passionate circles of interpreters, these circles have also met the limits of the effect of their interpretations. In the case of Bibó's interpreters this limit is *rejection*; in the case of Bonhoeffer's interpreters it is *temptation*.

Turning to Bibó, we have to see that Hungarian society as a whole did not step onto the road that Bibó had shown to it. The lack of democratic tradition and democratic mentality is increasingly obvious, and the political elite are more interested in exploiting this for short-time success than *leading the nation out of Egypt*. Thus, the otherwise realistic theory of Bibó is regarded by many as simply *utopian*.

Against the background of the immature political culture in Hungary, Bonhoeffer's legacy may become a temptation in several ways. During the 1960s and the 70s Bonhoeffer was mainly discussed as the critic of the Church, who urges the Church to give away her privileges and be there for the other. Given a church that was threatened in her very identity and was deprived of its material resources, this message had an alienating effect, thus preventing the Church from discussing freely her own problems as well as those of the broader society.[3] The picture of the resistant Bonhoeffer was not discussed earlier than the 1990s, that is, when communist dictatorship was over. This picture – which, in my opinion, transmits a very important message to a community that suffered two dictatorships of opposite ideologies during the twentieth century – attracted relatively little attention and is practically ignored now in mainstream scholarship. The anti-modernist Bonhoeffer,

the adamant critic of Western democracy, emerges instead. It is difficult to question this reading, since many pieces of his text support it. Thus, while in societies of a strong democratic tradition the legacy of Bonhoeffer can act as an interesting corrective that leads beyond commonplaces and banalities, in a society of immature democracy the same legacy may be effective as a temptation, a hindrance and discouragement for the people in their progress on the democratic road.

Now we have arrived at our basic question: genuine democracy, or elitist democracy? Can we make place for the idea here that democracy needs real democrats, and that the best democrats are those who are deeply aware of the values represented only by the aristocrats of earlier times? To be sure, there are some moral values and wisdom that come from the elite – in a sense, from above – but these will not nurture a democratic process until they reach and penetrate the 'masses' below. Thus, the responsibility of the elite is not only to represent such values but also to share them with others, taking the risk, naturally, of accepting a reformulated role of the elite and ultimately losing its prerogatives and privileges.

Probably this change of the traditional role was in Bonhoeffer's mind when, in early August 1944, he wrote his famous *outline* about the future of the Church. Similarly, the training he gave to young Lutheran pastors on behalf of the German Confessing Church used a rather elitist tradition of interpreting the Bible and spirituality (I think of both *Discipleship* and *Life Together*). Half of the students of the illegal seminary perished at the Eastern Front during the war – they were used as cannon-fodder – but the surviving half went on to play a crucial role in building a normal Germany after the war.

Turning to a core issue of theology, we have to give a thorough examination of the role sacrifice plays in shaping the understanding of human community as well as political theory. In Bonhoeffer's case, self-sacrifice is the highest service a responsible member of the elite can offer to the rest of society. This conviction can be related to pieces of Hungarian political heritage: think only of Pál Teleki, the prime minister of 1941, who committed suicide out of shame when Hungary invaded Yugoslavia. Bonhoeffer was rightly criticized from the perspective of Asian women, for whom his example is irrelevant: they cannot sacrifice themselves, since others' lives are dependent upon them (Kyung 1997). This criticism applies equally to Hungary, where self-sacrifice is likewise held in high esteem. It is all the more important, then, that in Bibó's political theory we cannot find any celebration of traditional Hungarian self-sacrifice. Even when he discusses the significance of Christ, he speaks about his victory without mentioning his sacrifice, in contrast to traditional theology (Bibó 1991b: 431–4).

Against this background it may be revealing to interpret Bonhoeffer's emphasis on sacrifice. We may value his awareness of the fact that in extreme situations taking a personal risk or even offering personal sacrifice is unavoidable. On the long and difficult road to democracy people might fall victim to violence, and these victims need help, need the other. In some cases it may mean saving lives. But we must never forget that 'being there for the other', even giving one's life for the other, is not identical to promoting democracy. Doing something in place of another person may help them and certainly fills one with a good feeling, raising one's self-esteem, but democracy develops when more and more people are able to think, act, and decide for themselves. And *leaving the other to be what the other can and wishes to be*, leaving her alone, is probably more difficult a task than being there for her.

To conclude: the parallel reading of Bonhoeffer and Bibó against the background of the changing situation – and, hopefully, a transition towards mature democracy – in Hungary may provide us not only with a theological understanding of the political process, but also help us open up important elements of traditional theology for a fresh contemporary reading. A detailed analysis of the political relevance of sacrifice may be a next step on this road ahead.

# 13. The New Political Theology as Political Theory: Johann Baptist Metz on Public Suffering[1*]

*Péter Losonczi*

## 1. The New Political Theology in Critical Engagement with Modernity

Johann Baptist Metz is one of the most renowned figures of contemporary Catholic theology. His intellectual temperament may be best characterized by the phrase *passionate one-sidedness*, a slogan invented by a Hungarian theologian and translator of the works of Metz (Görföl 2006: 410). This feature of the frame of mind of the German theologian is equally advantageous and a source of difficulties for the interpreter. Partly due to these facts the present chapter leaves several essential problems unspecified and tries to follow a more or less narrow path.

His theological programme has been worked up from the 1960s as an intensive critical engagement with the modern developments in theology and the social sciences in particular and with the conditions brought about by the cultural advancement of modernity in general. He developed this programme in dialogue with the ideas of his tutor and friend Karl Rahner and other central figures of the post-Vatican II theologians on the one hand, and set the framework of a similarly intensive critical-adaptive relationship with different generations of the German critical theory from Benjamin, Bloch, and Adorno to Habermas on the other hand. The complexity of the nexus between Metz's thought and the respective theories of the thinkers belonging to these two main intellectual camps that serve as the points of reference of Metz's new political theology cannot be underestimated. Even so, one may argue that an important point of intersection among the divergent sources, motivations and developments within the Metzean synthesis is the emphasis on the practical nature and determinedness of the theological work within a cultural milieu

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shaped by the influence and consequences of the Enlightenment and the advancement of secularization.

According to the Metzean definition, political theology is practical fundamental theology (Metz 1980a: 49). This practical orientation is driven by the conviction that theology by its very nature should bear essential political aspirations. In this regard, Metz counters the dominant principles of the modern secularist paradigm shared by many political theorists and theologians alike. At the same time, the political nature of this theology implies a critical treatment and the surpassing of the so-called middle-class religion (*bürgerliche Religion*, cf. Metz 1980b), thereby bringing into light the controversies not merely of secularization but also of the modernizing religious consciousness. Neither the privatization nor the political neutralization of the Christian message is acceptable for Metz since these attitudes per se disqualify those elemental aspects of Christian religion that, in his interpretation, bear inevitable political relevance. But it is similarly unacceptable for Metz that we interpret this political role in such a way that renders religion the 'cement' of the political community in the sense of political religion or political theology in the traditional sense.[2] The 'new' prefix is added to his concept of political theology exactly because he wants to sharply dissociate his programme from that of Carl Schmitt. But he is equally critical of Peterson's conclusions regarding the impossibility of political theology per se, as well as of the latter's denial of the political relevance of a monotheistic political theological stance.

Therefore, Metz is criticizing the modern tendencies of the privatization of religion, but he equally opposes the traditional and modern forms of 'political Catholicism', as well as other versions of political and religious integralism or totalitarianism. Contrary to these trends, the Metzean political theological programme is meant to provide the specifically theological sources of a democratic political praxis whose essence comprises in standing up 'for all men as subjects in the face of violent oppression and of a caricature of solidarity in a violent absorption by the mass or an institutionalized hatred' (Metz 1980a: 47).

In this closing chapter of the book, I would like to discuss a theme that belongs to the very essence of the Metzean programme, namely the question of suffering. I approach this question from such an unusual point of view that it may turn out to be quite surprising at first. However, as I hope to demonstrate, this attempt can fundamentally contribute to the interpretative tools in virtue of which we can analyse the Metzean programme. Moreover, in my study, I hope to develop a reading of Metz that may help in canalizing his ideas into the larger context of contemporary debates on democracy and

religion. I intend to unveil certain elements of this work in the light of which the Metzean new political theology can be characterized as a programme whose significance exceeds the framework of theology or political theology in the strict sense, and may aspire for the attention of a wider audience of political philosophers and political theorist alike.

## 2. Asad on Pain as Agency: The Question of Public Suffering

The specific problem from the direction of which I propose to analyse Metz's new political theology is what I call the question of *public suffering*. I introduce this term drawing on Talal Asad's inquiries concerning different cultural praxes in which pain proves to be functioning as a form of public agency. I do not want to create a direct link between Asad's analysis and Metz's political theology. Despite certain interesting resemblances there are essential differences between the two thinkers' perspectives. In the present study, Asad's work serves as a point of departure. By relying on it, it becomes possible for me to introduce the theme of public suffering. Asad's specific sources, as well as the specific anthropological outlook and the Foucauldian and postcolonial theoretical background he works with, are not part of the German theologian's purview. Nevertheless, as it will be argued, the concept of public suffering may be adapted to the interpretative apparatus of the new political theology.

In his *Formations of the Secular* (2003) Asad discusses the problem of pain and suffering, countering the opinion according to which when one classifies the possible models of interpersonal and social relations in view of these problems there are only the two, mutually exclusive options to choose between: *either* agency *or* passivity. According to this dualist position, a participant in these social interactions would be 'either an agent (representing and asserting himself or herself) or a victim (the passive object of chance or cruelty)' (ibid.: 79). Asad depicts this view as a typically secular position and cites three case studies in which this model evidently proves to be mistaken. One of his examples is the case of Christian martyrdom. Following and critically integrating into his own investigations the results of Judith Perkins' studies concerning early Christian representation of bodily pain and questions of martyrdom, Asad arrives at a very interesting conclusion.

In Perkins' interpretation '[t]he martyr *Acts* refuse to read the martyr's broken bodies as defeat but reverse the reading, insisting on interpreting them as symbols of victory over society's power [in this way] rejecting that they experienced pain or defeat. Christians rejected the power structures

surrounding them, and rejected the social order these supported' (Perkins 1995: 117). However, Asad argues that since in analysing issues regarding social power-structures Perkins is drawing on secular premises, her interpretation falls short of the most crucial element of these specific events; namely, that this Christian openness to pain was the essential part of the martyrs' agency as *Christians*. In fact, this attitude was 'what it claimed to be: an empowerment through the endurance of what Christ was believed to have suffered on the cross' (Asad 2003: 86). Nevertheless, this is not the symbolic meaning of suffering that concerns Asad with regard to the martyrs' openness to pain. His focus, rather, is on the overall change that was brought about by the Christian attitude to suffering. The self-subjection to pain brought it about that the Christians' 'public suffering made a difference not only to themselves … as members of a new faith but also to the world in which they lived: it required that one's own pain and the pain of others be engaged differently' (ibid.: 87).

In this way, Asad demonstrates how suffering functions not merely as a cause of action but 'can also be a *kind* of action' (ibid.: 69). Asad's train of thought here is the source of my introduction of the category of public suffering. It is important to mention that in a subsequent study to the one concerning agentive suffering, Asad detects as a symptom of the secularizing tendencies within Christianity the fact that 'Christianity, which was traditionally rooted in the doctrine of Christ's *passion*, consequently finds it difficult to make a good sense of suffering today' (ibid.: 106). According to Asad, contemporary Christianity is secularized insofar as it aims at eliminating pain from the world of human interaction: 'the secular Christian must … abjure passion and choose action, [and hence pain] is not merely negativeness [but] literally a scandal' (ibid.: 107). My view is that this issue is in fact much more complex even today than Asad admits. It is evident that there is a complicated and dynamic relationship to suffering in modern Christian consciousness that stimulates intensive debates even within contemporary Christianity.

However, Asad himself mentions a case where public suffering plays an important role within the modern political milieu. The question of public suffering comes to the fore once more in the Asadian investigation. He makes a comparative analysis between the attitudes of Martin Luther King's and Malcolm X's rhetoric, and detects a deep and primarily Christian tone in the former's way of speaking and behaving. According to Asad, the prophetic and Salvationist languages of the Old and New Testament were fused in the rhetoric and action of King, while Malcolm X's discourse was derived from a human rights discourse (ibid., 146). Asad adds to this that the latter form of rhetoric essentially shapes the American political culture and the striving for

the accomplishment of a project of humanizing the world. According to Asad, this self-image is of such a kind in the light of which very many Americans see themselves in contrast to their 'evil opponents' (ibid., 147). He contrasts with this attitude that of King's, whose . . .

> Christian discourse, being tied to the *practice of non-violence* and eschewing the language of *evil enemies*, presupposes a readiness on the part of civil rights activists in the South to suffer, a readiness that is not to be detected in the U.S. project of redeeming and humanizing the world [and thereby] King extends the experience of pain – like Gandhi before him – from sympathy to compassion, and makes it relevant and effective within a particular secular state. (Ibid.)

This example is important not merely because it reveals the complexity of the modern Christian consciousness of suffering, but also because what Asad finds specific in King's attitude is akin to the Metzean conception of *compassion*.

As I emphasized above, my intention is neither to go into a discussion of the problem of martyrdom nor to draw direct parallels between Asad's and Metz's treatments of the question of suffering. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in Asad's investigations we can find some important elements that are worth introducing into the interpretative framework of Metz's thought. The most significant element of Asad's theory is the concept of *public suffering* which, together with its complex layers of meaning explicated above, I intend to endow with a quasi-terminological status in my reading of Metz. In what follows I hope to demonstrate that this concept can be applied with an illustrative power within the context of Metz's new political theology and can contribute to the interpretative analysis of it.

## 3. From *Memoria Passionis* to *Compassion*: The Theological and Political Nucleus of Metz's Programme

It is important to emphasize that the public role that Metz attributes to suffering draws on the evident theological background in which the passion of Jesus gains a central role. In this regard it is a crucial element that in this context the very event of crucifixion carries political meaning. As in his *Zum Begriff der Neue Politische Theologie* (1997) he declares: had He been politically neutral, the Son of God would never have been crucified (ibid.: 84). It is not surprising in itself that according to Metz 'Christian faith declares itself as the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*' (Metz 1980a: 111). The decisive

moment in his understating of the essence of this faith can be understood if we consider the motifs and the consequences of his emphasis on *memoria passionis* and the accompanying demythologizing gestures of his theological programme. The concern about the mythologizing threats detectable within Christology is a central worry of Metz and it is essentially conjoined with the invention of his political programme, both theologically and politically. Speaking about the threats of myth or mythologization, Metz refers to those triumphalist tendencies that often characterized the development of Christian self-understanding and contributed to the formation of a false imagination about the Church as well as to the mistaken political applicability of this triumphalist vision. According to Metz, it is a most important mission of the new political theology to serve with an alternative agenda, one that equally draws on the deepest truths of the Christian tradition and that is able to represent these truths for the contemporary world in a politically relevant way. The theologian declares that the memory of resurrection, *memoria resurrectionis*, cannot be dissolved from the memory of suffering, *memoria passionis*. In fact the former should take its shape in the latter. That is to say, the two must belong together in an authentic Christian consciousness and constitute the internal content of genuine Christian faith. This emphasis on *memoria passionis* as the distinctive character of this faith is expounded by Metz as follows:

> There is no understanding of the resurrection that does not have to be developed by way of and beyond the memory of suffering [and a] *memoria resurrectionis* that is not comprehensible as *memoria passionis* would be mythology pure and simple. (Ibid.: 113)

The *theological* significance of the *memoria passionis* is similarly highlighted by another statement according to which '[t]here is no understanding of the glory of resurrection that is free of the shadows and threats of human history of suffering' (ibid.). Suffering is an elemental experience in human existence and neither the religious nor the ideological attempts at 'explaining away' the brute factuality of this suffering is acceptable for Metz. In sum, Metz interprets suffering as a scandal, but even so he very closely binds his programme to the *passion*-tradition which, according to Asad, ceases to influence the secularizing Christian consciousness.

As in his *Memoria Passionis*, Metz asserts that those who remain deaf to Jesus' cry on the cross and embrace only the joy of Easter will celebrate not the event of God but an ancient myth of triumph (Metz 2006: 102, cf. also ibid.: 7). Therefore, mythologization in Metz's vocabulary refers to any form

of religiously contextualized negligence of the just-mentioned brute factuality of suffering and the resulting contingency, or the rational-theological domestication of the scandalous presence of this suffering within the created world in the fashion of modern theodicies. In his view, human suffering is such a 'negative mystery' that it can and should not be pacified even through the idea of a suffering God (ibid., 17–23). Perhaps those difficulties regarding the implementation of an orthodox Christological position that may follow from this stance can account for the 'Christological lacunae' (Ashley 2004: 253) which is detectable in Metz's theology. Paradoxically enough, despite these difficulties, Metz's theory inevitably generates questions pertaining to Christology. In other words: the Christological dimensions of the Metzean theology needs to leave behind any triumphalist scheme, but they also need to be driven out of the traditional, ontologically framed paradigm of the hypostatic union. However, given the centrality of the passion of Christ in the new political theology, the demand for a restated Christology evidently prevails in Metz's endeavour. In my interpretation, these quandaries can be treated in view of the certain important characteristics of the Metzean programme that touch upon both the theological and the political facets of this enterprise and are in essential connection with the problem of public suffering. The post-metaphysical revision of Christology is intimately conjoined in Metz with the general problem of faith as *memory of God* and the respective question of *memory of suffering*. It is a general theological principle of Metz that these two questions cannot be divided from one another, and their unity, as Johann Reikerstorfer puts it, is the warranty for an *equally* universalistic and pluralistic standpoint in which theology can be 'political', but not in the sense that it would be a 'politicized' theology in line with the formation of modern social theories, or it would account for problems related to social and political interests. Instead it is meant to articulate the eschatological conscience of Christianity and its responsibility towards the world (Reikerstorfer 2008: 6). This unification, at the same time, cannot result in a glorification' or cult of suffering, but reveals the exclusive importance of the sufferer – thereby generating the essential political connotations of this theological topic, as well as a tone that rejects not merely tendencies of mythologization in religion but also the equally triumphalist attitude of any kind of evolutive logic of history pertaining to Enlightened modernity or any other forms of ideological absolutization. As Metz writes about the association he proposes to make between the Christian *memoria passionis* and political life:

> In the memory of this suffering, God appears in his eschatological freedom as the subject and the meaning of history as a whole. This implies, first of

> all, that for this *memoria* there is also no politically identifiable subject of universal history. The meaning and goal of this history as a whole are instead, to put it very summarily, under the so-called 'eschatological proviso of God'. The Christian *memoria* recalls the God of Jesus' passion as the subject of the universal history of suffering, and the same movement refuses to give political shape to this subject and enthrone it politically. (Metz 1980a: 117)

The general relevance of *memoria passionis* as dangerous memory comprises exactly in the fact that it disqualifies every forms of mythological, utopian or aesthetical gaze and disqualifies them as the genuine source of religious and social imagination.[3] This passage is a crucial one in the respect that three key-elements are mentioned in it that are essential in view of the theological and political character of the new political theology: passion of Jesus as an exclusive theological event, the general profane history of human suffering which Metz locates as the nucleus of his political programme, and the special historical and political theological principle concerning the 'eschatological proviso'. However, Metz's position is not really clear as to the concrete *relation* among these constituents. Paraphrasing John Milbank – who in his *Theology and Social Theory* queries Metz: 'why should one remember Christ, beyond all others, if his provocation were not recognized as supremely great?' (Milbank 2001: 239) – one may also ask: why should we remember suffering *specifically*?

I would like to propose one possible way of understanding this relation. In a chapter of the *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie* Metz develops a criticism of theodicy and speaks of the 'mystery of resistance and acquiescence' (*Mysterium von Widerstand und Ergebung*) that is expressed in the 'cry from the deepness' (Metz 1997: 114). As Metz argues, the content of this cry cannot be explained in theological language but even so it is not speechless. Reading these words one can hardly ignore their tone, which recalls the biblical narratives about Jesus' death and cry on the cross. However, immediately after this passage Metz comes forward with another serious question and in this respect he introduces the theme of the dignity of loss of identity, a concept which I find crucial for the interpretation of both the theological and political character of Metz's programme. When he focuses on the challenge that Auschwitz brings to contemporary theology Metz declares that it is not a proper strategy to treat the dreads of human suffering in such a way that we construct a system of identity around it – thereby, in fact, we suppress this challenge without addressing it – but, instead, he holds that we have to defend a *dignity of the loss of identity*

(*ein Würde der Nichtidentität menschlichen Leidens*) *pertaining to human suffering* (ibid.). My suggestion would be that the notion of the dignity of loss of identity may be a possible, albeit inexplicable, referential category between Jesus' suffering and the history of profane human suffering. This is not meant to deprive suffering of its negative mysterious character, explaining it away as though it can somehow reveal the 'meaning' of human suffering. The experience of suffering remains an inexplicable *brutum factum*, but my view is that without any associative category between Jesus' suffering and human profane suffering the Metzean political theological programme would lose not merely its theoretical integrity but also its political originality and ability to appeal to one's *moral* imagination – though, as we immediately see, the latter point plays a key role in Metz's conception.

However, we have to be precise when treating questions of suffering and dignity together. As Milbank puts it, '[t]o try to give Jesus a dignified death … is to miss the point: in his death, Jesus entered into absolute solidarity with each and every one of us' (Milbank 2003: 96). I believe Metz avoids the mistake that Milbank warns against, and precisely turns our attention to the event of this absolute solidarity as revealed by the paradoxical Divine 'I am' of Jesus. Introducing the concept of dignity in the form of the *dignity of loss of identity*, the German theologian does not dissolve the negative mystery of suffering but deepens it, and, at the same time, renders it a central *political* concept. These themes are linked to the context of the eschatological proviso we have touched upon above. This proviso implies that no race, party, church, nation, or the globalizing market and its 'gurus' can identify themselves as the subject of universal history. The 'Christian *memoria* must oppose [these gestures], and unmask the attempt as political idolatry, as political ideology with a totalitarian or, in apocalyptic terms, a 'bestial' tendency' (Metz 1980a: 117). Instead, there is a, so to say, 'negative essence of history' revealed in the *passio* and it brings all the aforementioned elements under the force of the eschatological proviso. In consequence of the above-mentioned theological demand for the defence of the dignity of loss of identity and the accompanying eschatological proviso, the *memoria passionis* may bring 'a new moral imagination into political life, a new vision of others' suffering which should mature into a generous, uncalculating partisanship on behalf of the weak and the unrepresented' (ibid.: 117–18). This is the principle that I interpret as the Metzean formulation of the question of public suffering.

The theme of the suffering of the other comes to the fore in recent developments of Metz's work where it is discussed in a specific context. Here his main focus is on questions generated by the context of the contemporary global and pluralistic world. As a most important development of these

enquiries he invents the specific concept of *compassion*, which, at the same time, is introduced by Metz as the 'world program of Christianity in the age of cultural and religious pluralism' (Metz 2006: 158). Metz's attitude towards globalization is in harmony with the eschatological proviso, as he warns against the threats of the romanticism and utopianism of any *ideologically* formulated *pluralistic* or *globalizing* position, as well of the dangers of their ideological and fundamentalist counterparts. Metz preserves pluralism but alongside this seeks for universalizable guidelines for living and acting.

He defines this universalizing element through the principle of compassion, a conception derived precisely from the nucleus of the new political theology, namely, the idea of *memoria passionis* (ibid.: 166). He considers compassion as being the precondition for any politics of peace or any sort of social solidarity. We can clearly see that in the light of recent developments the contours of the Metzean notion of public suffering can be drawn even more sharply. Metz emphasizes that the term compassion is introduced as a concept that might be best applied for expressing an elementary sensitivity towards suffering. In this way compassion can be rendered a very peculiar obligatory principle, one that exceeds the general connotations of the notion of empathy. Metz finds this invention necessary because he finds that the notion of empathy is inappropriate for discussing questions pertaining to actual praxis and the sphere of the political. The specific character of compassion in Metz's understanding would be a crucial and binding sensation of and an active memory for the others' suffering. According to Metz this notion of compassion can essentially contribute to a politics of recognition in the mode of the development of an asymmetric relation to the marginalized (ibid.: 170).

## 4. From Political Theology to Political Theory

So far I have tried to show how the question of suffering, together with its strong theological connotations, constitutes the nucleus of Metz's project. However, the role that Metz attributes to public suffering exceeds these limits and can be easily introduced into a political theoretical context. In fact, Metz himself declares this possibility when he asserts that *memoria passionis* as the memory of the others' suffering, that is, as compassion, bears its public relevance insofar as it can bear a legitimate universality, since the public memory of others' suffering may saturate with it the public use of reason's transformative strength. In other words, themes of *memoria passionis* and compassion are evidently related to a political theoretical perspective, thereby demonstrating the importance of the theme of public suffering for

this discipline. This relatedness becomes yet more evident in the light of the Metzean assertion according to which this programme roots the universalism pertaining to procedural rationalism in the universalism of the memory of suffering, and thereby the consensus-*a priori* of communicative rationality that renders discourse an ideal is reconnected to the universalism of the suffering-*a priori* of anamnestic rationality (Metz 2006: 218).

Therefore, it is evident that by introducing the concept of *compassion*, Metz furthers not merely the development of a theologically relevant project but, in a complementary way, a theory that is evidently related to the framework of the contemporary debates in political philosophy and political theory. His aim is not to destroy the framework of the political discourse within democratic societies, but to give a critical-corrective element to it. However, the fact that he roots the universalism pertaining to procedural rationalism in the universalism of the memory of the suffering implies much more than a moderate corrective element added to the present paradigm. The continuous development of his theses, both theologically and politically, concerning the importance of *memoria passionis*, results in a radically new stance in virtue of which he aims at revitalizing the moral sources of democratic political praxis. Besides or beyond discourse and deliberation, sensitivity to the suffering of the other is rendered a politically relevant component of the public space and of the net of inter-subjective relations constituted thereof. It is evident that by rendering the sensitivity to the suffering of the other a central political principle Metz radically steps beyond the scope of the general political theoretical paradigm. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that this model goes back to the specifically Christian idea of *memoria passionis*, which turns into a political form of thought in a complex way. This transformation is essentially attached to the above-mentioned Metzean conception of *the dignity of loss of identity* and the accompanying idea of solidarity. In other words, public suffering takes such a form in its Metzean version which, after all, refers discursive rationality back to the negative mystery of suffering that resists any attempt to explain it away or domesticate it. This is the point where the question of public suffering can clearly be introduced into the interpretative framework of the new political theology *as* political theory. It is evident that Metz credits a principal public role to suffering and, in fact, he makes it into a central *political* term. His account of the question of suffering requires a modification of the Asadian version, but even so, the very term public suffering can legitimately be applied in our study.

First of all, Metz's concern is not the question of martyrdom and the relation between the symbolic and agentive aspects of suffering, as represented in the above-mentioned study concerning ancient Christian practice. Nevertheless,

Metz evidently attributes an agentive role to suffering and this role carries decisive public-political connotations. On the one hand, as we have seen, he attaches an evident political meaning to the Passion of Jesus. On the other hand, drawing on the eschatological proviso, he formulates a political theoretical stance and demands that besides the competent participants of discursive-rational deliberative processes (Habermas) or the abstract right-holders of an abstract liberal political paradigm (Appiah) also the incompetent and those deprived of rights should be taken as *agents* in political terms.[4] What is more, he understands *memoria passionis* as the precondition or, at least, a vital complement of democratic political discourse and policy. Finally, in my interpretation, the Metzean invention of the category of *compassion* endowed with its previously revealed political theoretical relevance and role brings the problem of public suffering to its fullest form within the new political theology exactly with its essential political theoretical connotations. In order to illustrate the relevance of this gesture I would like to mention a final issue that combines the political theological and the political theoretical aspects of the Metzean new political theology, and that may deserve attention in its own right.

As I have mentioned above, the recent developments in Metz's new political theology brought about the introduction of the category of compassion that was characterized as sensitivity towards the suffering of the other. I argued that this concept can clearly be interpreted among the frameworks of public suffering. It was also made evident that this notion becomes contextualized within the larger context of *memoria passionis*. However, arguing that what occurs when we are encountering the others' suffering is but the interruption of that normality which is driven by forgetting, Metz explicitly speaks of *Ausnahmetzustand*, the state of exception which is not founded on general rules (ibid.: 222). In this argument we perceive an evident allusion to the Schmittean definition of the sovereign (*Souverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmenzustand entscheidet*'; Schmitt 2004: 13). It is clear that besides the political theoretically essential problem of authority, a question which he also referred to the context of *memoria passionis* (Metz 1997: 203), the issue of sovereignty is also addressed by the Metzean new political theology. We cannot overemphasize the significance of the fact that Metz takes over an otherwise *par excellence* Schmittean category that may open the way towards the Metzean reconsideration of the question of sovereignty in relation to the theme of the memory of the others' suffering.[5]

# Notes

## Introduction

1 This volume, p. 00.
2 This volume, p. 68.
3 This volume, p. 67.
4 This volume, p. 83.
5 This volume, p. 95.
6 This volume, p. 106.
7 This volume, p. 109.
8 This volume, p. 128.
9 This volume, p. 156.

## Chapter 1

1 Rawls' relation with religion is exposed by himself in the frank and sometimes touching paper 'On my religion' (2009). Among other things, Rawls mentions three events, two of them linked with his own military experience and the third being the Holocaust, which made his faith more problematic.
2 A significant debate on this topic is in Audi and Wolterstorff (1997). An interesting defence of Rawls' position from a Catholic point of view is in Griffin (1997).
3 A brilliant introduction to this debate can be found in Waldron (1993).
4 See the Introduction to Weithman (1997).
5 Not all religious arguments can be taken as 'unreasonable', see Spinner-Halev (2000: 99–100).

## Chaper 2

1 The argument draws on Gaus (1996), Scanlon (2003), Freeman (2007, ch. 8) ans Quong (2007).

2 The notion of the 'public political culture' employed by Rawls is narrower than the commonsense use of the term. It refers to 'the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary) as well as historic texts and documents' (Rawls 1993: 13–14).

## Chapter 3

1 For a debate on the role of religion in Rawls' political liberalism, see Waldron (1993), Weithman (1994), Quinn (1995), and Macedo (1995). See also the volume edited by Weithman (1997) for a wider perspective on the debate between liberalism and religion. A view particularly consonant to the position I defend here, although more in its premises rather than conclusions, can be found in Stout (2004).

2 Constitutional essentials consist of fundamental principles that specify (a) the general structure of government and the branches of political power, and (b) equal and basic rights and liberties of citizenship, which define democratic membership (Rawls 1993: 227–8).

## Chapter 8

1 For an introduction to Cantwell Smith's thinking in general, see: Kenneth Cracknell (ed.) (2001), *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, Oxford: Oneworld. For an extensive review of Smith's work on belief, see Donald Wiebe (1979), 'The role of "belief" in the study of religion: a response to W. C. Smith', in *Numen* 26 (December), pp. 234–49. I have elaborated further on this topic in my 'Faith, belief and the internal transformation of religion', in Xavier, M. L. L. O. (Coord.) (2008), *A Questão de Deus na História da Filosofia. Vol. II: A Questão de Deus. História e Crítica*, Sintra: Zéfiro, pp. 1287–94.

2 Examples of this reduction can be found in John Stuart Mill (1844: 21). Smith (1998a: 51) quotes him saying: 'What, by a convenient misapplication of an abstract term, we call a Truth, is simply a True Proposition . . .'

[3] This is also in accordance with what Talal Asad (1993: 126) writes: 'Monastic rites governed the economy of desire. Force (punishment), together with Christian rhetoric, guided the exercise of virtuous desire. The central principle on which these rites were based assumed that virtuous desire had first to be created before a virtuous choice could be made. It stands, therefore, in contrast to our modern assumption that choices are *sui generis* and self-justifying' (Talal Asad (1993), *Genealogies of Religion*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 126).

## Chapter 11

[1] Some elements of this chapter are drawn or developed from my unpublished presentation 'Christian realism and 21st-century conflict: the legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr' presented at the International Symposium 'Pluralism, Politics, and God: Rational Theism in the Public Square' held in Montreal at McGill University, 13 September 2007.

[2] For a discussion of the connection of democracy and the uprising of the middle classes see Reinhold Niebuhr (1944), *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, New York: Scribner's Sons, pp. 1–2.

[3] Quoted in Niebuhr from *The Nature and Destiny of Man* I:97, from *System of Nature*, Volume III.

[4] 'The time will come when the sun will shine only on free men who know no other master than their reason; when tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments, will exist only in works of history or on stage and when we shall think of them only to pity their victims and their dupes … to maintain ourselves in a state of vigilance by thinking on their excesses; and to learn how to recognize and so to destroy, by force of reason the first seeds of tyranny and superstition …' From the Marquis de Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* quoted in *The Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick, p. 26.

[5] 'It is not the bad body that causes the good soul to sin but the bad soul which causes the good body to sin'; quoted by Niebuhr in 'Augustine's political realism' in the anthology, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. R. M. Brown (1987), p. 125.

[6] *Porro malae uoluntatis initium quae potuit esse nisi superbia? Initium enim omnis peccati superbia est. Quid est autem superbia sed peruersae celsitudinis appetitus? Peruersa enim est celsitudo deserto eo, cui debet animus inhaerere, principio sibi quodam modo fiere atque esse principium*. Cf. De Civitate Dei XIV.13. The Latin text I used in this

article for reference is online at http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/civ14.shtml (as of March 2009).

The translation is quoted from Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, probably from the J. Healey translation (London, Temple Classics, 1942: 186). Note that the Temple Classics translation enumerates the chapters differently. Except where quoted in another text English passages are from Augustine, *City of God*; http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm (last accessed 27 February 2009).

7 For instance Niebuhr believed it was naïve to regard the sin of racism as primarily a sin of ignorance that better education and scientific understanding would overcome; its roots are rather in the disordered egotism by which social groups develop a stake in their self-image of superiority (Niebuhr 1940: 224–38).

8 *De Civitate Dei* I.1.

9 *De Civitate Dei* XIV.28.

10 *De Civitate Dei*. XIX.13.

11 *De Civitate Dei I*.1.

12 *… ciuitas ista aduersas se ipsam plerumque diuditur litigando, bellando atque pugnando et mortiferas aut certe mortalis uictorias requirendo*, De Civitate Dei, XV.4.

13 See *The Federalist* No. 51 at http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm (accessed 20 February 2009). A similar sobriety accounts for the more positive if somewhat utilitarian evaluation of religion among the more conservative American revolutionaries. Thus Alexander Hamilton, after denouncing the French Revolution for its 'effort to pervert a whole people to atheism', argues that religion so far from being the enemy of a free society is a necessary prerequisite for it, since if people will not be constrained by religion they will need to be constrained by an authoritarian state: 'The Politician who loves liberty … knows that morality overthrown (and morality *must* fall with religion), the terrors of despotism alone can curb the impetuous passions of man, and confine him within the bounds of social duty.' See *The Stand* No. III, April 1797 in Harold Syret (ed.) *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* available online at books.google.com (accessed 20 February 2009).

14 See 'Why the Christian Church is not pacifist' (Niebuhr 1940: 14).

15 *De Civitate Dei* XV.3.

16 See for example the famous speech of John Quincy Adams 'She [America] goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and

the benignant sympathy of her example. She knows that by once enlisting under banners other than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of Freedom'; speech of 4 July 1821; http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/jqadams.htm (accessed 23 February 2009).

17 The theme of a 'Kantian' or 'post-political' Europe has of course been explored by various intellectuals from Robert Kagan to Pierre Manent.

18 See for example Ali Shariati's *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*. Shariati is considered a key intellectual source of the Iranian revolution. At a time when Marxism exercised a broad appeal among third world intellectuals as an opponent of the 'imperialist West', Shariati argued that Marxism is really a manifestation of the fundamental materialism of the West and unlike Islam is unable to address the spiritual dimension of human existence.

19 Syed Qutb, *Milestone*, New York and Berlin: Globusz Publishing, online translation at http://www.globusz.com/ebooks/Milestone/00000010.htm (accessed 10/17/2009), VII.

20 'Islam … is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone, and that he is lord of all worlds. It is a challenge to all kinds and all forms of government that are based on the concept of the sovereignty of man; in other words where man has usurped the divine attribute' (*Milestone*, IV). Paul Berman, in his work *Terror and Liberalism* (W. W. Norton 2003), describes Qutb's view of the West as in the grip of a 'hideous schizophrenia' in compartmentalizing the spiritual and temporal. In this sense secularism might be thought of from a certain perspective as a kind of Christian heresy – Christianity having introduced the secular sphere into political and cultural life finds itself unable to master its own offspring. In my view Berman goes too far in linking Qutb's ideas directly to Western ideologies and downplaying indigenous sources. Qutb's perfectionism is perhaps distantly related to Marxism, through in this radical form of Islam the religious roots of the messianic impulse are not secularized or sublimated.

21 R. Khomeini (1981), *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Algar, Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, p. 55.

22 Qutb, *Milestone*, IV.

23 An interesting recent discussion of anti-Hellenism in Lutheran thought is found in S. J. McGrath (2006), *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 151ff. That anti-Hellenism is both secular and religious

was also a theme in Pope Benedict XVI's much publicized Regensburg address.

## Chapter 12

1 Consider his discussion of England and the Netherlands, 'in which the medieval institutions of liberty have organically developed into modern ones'. His analysis of the text of the national anthem of the Netherlands is especially telling (Bibó 1991b: 498–502).

2 See his letter from Tegel prison, written 8 July 1944: 'it is to be said that man is certainly a sinner, but is far from being mean or common on that account. To put it rather tritely, were Goethe and Napoleon sinners because they weren't always faithful husbands? It's not the sins of weakness but the sins of strength, which matter here. It's not in the least necessary to spy out things; the Bible never does so. (Sins of strength: in the genius, *hubris*; in the peasant, the breaking of the order of life – is the decalogue a peasant ethic? – ; in the bourgeois, fear of free responsibility. Is this correct?' (Bonhoeffer 1973: 345)

3 The very first collection of Bonhoeffer's texts in Hungarian was edited by József Poór, Marxist philosopher and participant in the so-called Marxist–Christian dialogue of 1984. In Poór's interpretation Bonhoeffer was presented as a model theologian for the Church that applies herself to the conditions of a 'world come of age', which requires a 'religionless Christianity' (Poór 1984).

## Chapter 13

1 For a useful treatment of the terminological and historical background of the 'politics and religion' theme see Meier 2007. It is important to emphasize that Metz's endeavour is hardly classifiable by means of this historical pattern and vocabulary.

2 According to Metz the '[s]hortest definition of religion [is] interruption [Unterbrechung]' (cf. Metz 1980a, p. 171), by which characterization he means that religion resists and disrupts the victorious solidity of existing and evolving things and situations and in the form of memory it renders solidarity possible.

3 One may argue that such an assertion concerning the *agentive* role (or whatever *role*) of suffering may risk executing an ontologizing gesture

with regard to event(s) of suffering. However, one may wonder whether Metz himself could avoid this danger. Since he makes suffering a key term via *memoria passionis* (and, recently, via compassion) he himself virtually generates these ontologizing threats. Since, as I will argue, his theory implies not merely theological but also direct political theoretical consequences, and develop the respective interpretation of relevant concepts like solidarity and authority, Metz himself destines the interpreter to attempt such a risk. Furthermore, entering the field of very concrete political debates such as the arguments surrounding the European Constitutional Treaty, Metz introduces his conceptual framework into such a context that almost make these ontologizing perils unavoidable.

[4] At the same time one may wonder whether Metz's respective theories could be brought into an interpretative synthesis with the study that Milbank outlines on the question of the 'sovereign victim' in his *Being Reconciled* (cf. Milbank 2003, chapters 4 and 5).

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# Index

American Islamic culture xvi
*Amor Mundi* 51
Arendt, Hannah 93; concept of private nature of religion 50–1; concept of publicness 48; concept of public religion xix–xx, 47; critique of modernity 51–2; opinion about refuting public religion 49
Asad, Talal 164–6, 172
atheism, and religion 102, 104, 112, 114, 128–30
Augustinian realism 139, 145, 151
Auschwitz, religion after 115–17

'background culture' 8, 9, 10, 13, 31
Bentham, Jeremy 87, 88, 89, 90, 96
'Berlin Salon' (Arendt) 48
*Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas) 16, 20
Bibó, István 154–9; comparison with Bonhoeffer 159–61
Bloom, Allan (*Closing of the American Mind*) 86
Boeve, Lieven xvi
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 154; comparison with Bibó 159–61
Brown, Wendy 134
Buddhism, religious reforms in 111

Catholicism 113, 120, 135, 141, 163
Catholic theology 162
Christian ethic, pacifism and relevance of 147–9
Christianity: contribution in emergence of modernity 118; religious reforms in 111; secularity and 114; spiritual unity 141
Christian moral philosophy, of duties and obligation 88
Christian realism, and present world situation 149–51
Christian theology 124
*City of God* (Augustine) 145, 148
civility, duty of 9, 36, 37
civil religion 69, 70, 109, 110
'clash of civilizations' thesis, by Samuel Huntington xv
closed religion 117–19, 120
*Closing of the American Mind* (Bloom) 86
Cohen, G. A. 27
communal psychology 156
communism, religious nature of 52
community, unity and 106–10
constitutional monarchy, liberal democracies with 69
*The Critique of Judgement* (Kant) 53, 54
*Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant) 39
*Critique of the Capacity of Judgement* 42
Csepregi, András xxiii
cultural deracination of Islam, phenomenon of 135
cultural relativism 86, 87

Dawkins, Richard 114

decision-making xx, 88
democracy: adaptation of religious traditions and xvii; challenge of accommodating different cultures 101; in Hungary 152; 'idolatry' of 147; as natural system of moral relativity 95; relation with religion 101; in thought of István Bibó and Dietrich Bonhoeffer 154–9
democratic culture xxv, 141
democratic equality 85–7
democratic politics xvii; in post-enlightenment 139
democratic society: of free and equal citizens 35; freedom of religion in 77; nature and purpose of 25; political adaptation of religious contributions in xvii; public political culture of 33; social unity in 23
deontological theory 90
*Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Spengler) 106
Dijn, Herman De xx
duty of civility 9, 36, 37

Einstein, Albert 114
elitist democracy 152, 153, 160
'embryo-politics' xvii
Enlightenment 91–9, 140, 142, 151; culture of 146; influence and consequences of 163
Enlightenment anthropology xxiii; and philosophy of history 141–4
'Enlightenment fundamentalism' 126
Enlightenment fundamentalists 134
equality *see* democratic equality
*Ersatzreligion,* phenomenon of 95
ethics of restraint 5
ethos of citizenship xxiv
European Islamic culture xvi

faculty of deliberation 39
*Formations of the Secular* (Asad) 164
freedom of religion 77, 127 *see also* religious intolerance; and how to tolerate intolerable 78–81; human right of 73, 83; and tolerance 73–4; ways to 154–9
free speech, right of 83

Gallup International Millennium Survey 114
genuine democracy 152, 154
Gorter, Herman 125–6

Habermas, Jürgen xviii, 28, 93; notion of 'public sphere' 6, 15
Habermas–Rawls exchange (HRE) 16–20
Habermas scholarship xv
Herck, Walter Van xxi
hereditary monarchy, institution of 69
Hinduism, religious reforms in 111
Höhn, Hans-Joachim xvi
*The Human Condition* (Arendt) 48, 50, 51, 52, 53
human rights 73, 83, 86
Huntington, Samuel xv

'The idea of public reason' (Rawls) 8
'The idea of public reason revisited' (Rawls) 8
*If This Is a Man?* (Levi) 78
inquiry, guidelines of 10
institutional morality: of citizens 7; of ideal meta-community 5
intellectuals, religion and 52–3
intolerance: causes of 79; and freedom of religion 78; and limits of tolerance 81–4
Islam: cultural deracination in Europe 135; and modern Western secular culture xvi; religious reforms 111
Islamic radicalism 150

Jonas, Hans (*The Notion of God after Auschwitz*) 119
Jonkers, Peter xx
*Journal of Philosophy* 16
Judaism, religious reforms in 111
judgement: based on practices 43; Kant-Rawls model of 41; Kant's conception of 39; models

and problem of disagreement 38–42; moral 94; practice-based model of 42–5; Rawlsian model of principled 42
Juergensmeyer, Mark xvi
justice: conflicts of political and moral nature on 11; constitutional essentials and fundamental matters of 8; liberal theory of 26; political conception of 25, 26, 27, 32; two-stage theory for political justification and pluralist convergence 24–7

Kantian model, of principled judgement 41
Khomeini, Ayatollah 150
Kollár, Eszter xviii
Koyré, Alexandre 117
Kuhn, Thomas 117

*Laughable Loves* (Kundera) 124
law, and morality 66–71
'legitimation,' principle of 11
*Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (King) 139
*Leviathan* (Hobbes) 109
liberal democracies: with constitutional monarchy 69; moral justification of 87–91
liberal-democratic community 14
liberal democratic society 63, 66
liberal ethics 5
liberalism: classical 7; in European tradition 7–8; Reinhold Niebuhr and crisis of 139; types of 8
liberal legitimacy 9; and idea of public reason 10; principle of 36
liberals: concept of politics and religion 5; and egalitarian political justice 6
Lindahl, Hans 134
*The Lonely Crowd* (Riesman) 49
Löwith, Karl 132

Madan, T. N. xvi
Madison, James 146
Maffettone, Sebastiano xviii
Marxism 148
mass society, apathy of 48–9
*Mein Kampf* 131
*Memoria Passionis – The Memory of Suffering* (Metz) 119, 166–71
Metz, Johann Baptist 119, 162; conception of dignity of loss of identity 172; mythologization in vocabulary 167; notion of public suffering 171; theological and political nucleus 166–71
Mezei, Balázs M. xxii
Milbank, John 169
monoreligious community 110
morality: of individuals 7; law and 66–71; non-religiously based 67
moral justification, of democracy 87–91
moral relativism: democracy as natural system of 95; equality and 85–7
multiculturalism 86, 87, 101, 134, 135; leftist-liberal politics of 133
'multireligiosity' 101
multi-religious society 102; in European culture xvi

Nandy, Ashis xvi
natural law tradition 85
Nazi ideology 115, 116, 144, 148
new religious pluralism xvi
*New York Times* 113
Niebuhr, Reinhold 139, 146; Augustinian conception of man and history 144–7
Nietzsche, F. 87
non-violence, practice of 166
*The Notion of God after Auschwitz* (Jonas) 119

obligation, concept of xxi
open religion 117, 118; concept of xxii; possibilities of 119–21
'order of freedom' 131, 132
*The Origins of Totalitarism* (Arendt) 52
overlapping consensus 33, 37, 45, 86

Pangle, Thomas L. 95
'participatory pluralism' xvi
*Partisan Review* 52
Party for Freedom (PVV) 131, 132, 133
*Perpetual Peace* (Kant) 143
*Philosophical Remarks* (Wittgenstein) 106
pluralism, within contemporary liberalism 6
'pluralist' democratic society 67
pluralist society 5
political decision-making xx, 67
political hysteria 155, 156, 158
political justice 34; principles of liberal and egalitarian 6; Rawls' exposition of model of 32; theory of 5; values of 36
political legitimacy 9, 65
political liberalism xviii, 20, 37; and its alleged paradox 22–4; comprehensive views and ignorance 33–4; and conception of justice 31; objection to feasibility of 38; political *vs.* comprehensive identity 34–5; religious commitments and impartiality 35–8; two-stage account of 32–3
*Political Liberalism* (Rawls) 6, 23, 31, 33
political philosophy 22, 49, 54, 93, 94, 156, 172
political stability 19, 23, 24; public justification for 28
political theology xxiii, xxiv; characterization of 164; in critical engagement with modernity 162–4; developments in Metz's 173; liberalism in form of 15; to political theory 171–3; practical orientation of 163
political theory xviii, 18; ethical and 7
political *vs.* comprehensive identity 34–5
politics: conceptions of 122–4; definition of 122; of dénouement 123; and identity 61–5; and opinions in religion 103; and political decisions 13; relation with religion 5; religious arguments in 13; of resolution 123, 124; ultra-conservative form of 133
*Politics* (Aristotle) 108
'post-secular age,' and religion 54
principle-based reasoning 45, 46
private–public dichotomy, priority of 47–8
public culture 9, 28, 29
public forums 9, 10
public justification 23; moral consideration for endorsing 29; moral *vs.* practical considerations 27–30
public reason 6; civic virtues of 44–5; concept of 32; constraints 10; fundamental requirement for 9; religious objections to overlapping consensus and 10–15
public religion xv, 49; Hannah Arendt's concept of xix–xx, 47; process of emergence of 47
public sphere 6, 10, 15; of freedom 88; Hannah Arendt theory of 47
public suffering 164; category of 165; concept of xxiv, 166

Qur'an (Holy Book of Muslims) 64, 103, 131, 135, 136

radical pluralism xvi
Ramadan, Tariq xvi
Rawls, John: approach on relation between politics and religion 5; background culture 8; common religious criticisms of 21; concept of 'freestanding' neutrality 16; concept of secular fundamentalism 12; concept of stability 11; construction of overlapping consensus in PL 17; exposition of model of political justice

32; justificatory strategy 27; model of principled judgement 42; moral justification of democracy 87–91; notion of 'public reason' 6; overlapping consensus 6; *Political Liberalism* 6, 23, 31, 33; political theory 18; principles of justice 9; priority of right 7; *Theory of Justice, A* 8, 33, 90
Rawlsian liberalism xviii, 16
Rawlsian political liberalism xviii, 19
Rawlsian public reason 8–10
reciprocity: criterion of 31; principle of 44
'Reflections on Little Rock' (Arendt) 48, 55
reflective judgement xix, 31, 32, 42, 43, 44, 45
religion: after Auschwitz 115–17; atheism and 128–30; change from closed to open religion 117–19; choices 105–6; in civil society 69; freedom of *see* freedom of religion; historical reforms of 111; individualism 103; and intellectuals 52–3; latest politics of dénouement and its stance towards 130–3; liberal's concept of 5; opinions 103–5; pluralism of 5; as possible source of violence 101; 'post-secular age' and 54; private nature of 50–1; relation with democracy 101; relation with politics 5; suitable 102–3; in terms of secularity 114–15; 'thick' and 'thin' interpretations of 56
religion–democracy relationship 20, 21
religious 'collateral commitments' 14
religious commitments, and impartiality 35–8
religious consciousness 163; political influence on xvii
religious convictions, role of 45–6
religious inheritances 128
religious intolerance 73, 74
religious nationalism xvi
religious renewal, varieties of 111–12
religious tolerance 7, 22, 77
*Rhetoric* (Aristotle) 102
Roman Catholicism 141
Rosenthal, Alexander xxiii

*Sanctorum Communio* 155
Santoro, Daniele xix
secularism, difference with secularity 112
secularity: difference with secularism 112; meanings of 113; religious dimensions of 114–15
secular–religious division xvii
*Social Contract, The* (Rousseau) 109
social development, of Europe 157
social justice, stages of 25
Spengler, H. (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*) 106
spiritual independence 128
*Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, The* (Habermas) 15
surrogate religion, phenomenon of 95

Taylor, Charles 112–14, xvi
teleological theory 90
*Theology and Social Theory* (Milbank) 169
*Theory of Justice, A* (Rawls) 8, 33, 90
tolerance xxv
Tutu, Desmond xvi

Volf, Miroslav xvii

Western democracies 139
'Westphalian exile,' in international relations xv
Williams, Bernard 93

*Zum Begriff der Neue Politische Theologie* (Metz) 166