

*The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* represents a rare opportunity to experience a diverse group of preeminent philosophers confronting one pervasive contemporary concern: what role does—or should—religion play in our public lives? Reflecting on her recent work concerning state violence in Israel-Palestine, **JUDITH BUTLER** explores the potential of religious perspectives for renewing cultural and political criticism, while **JÜRGEN HABERMAS**, best known for his seminal conception of the public sphere, thinks through the ambiguous legacy of the concept of “the political” in contemporary theory. **CHARLES TAYLOR** argues for radical redefinition of secularism, and **CORNEL WEST** defends civil disobedience and emancipatory theology. **EDUARDO MENDIETA** and **JONATHAN VANANTWERPEN** detail the immense contribution of these philosophers to contemporary social and political theory, and an afterword by **CRAIG CALHOUN** places these attempts to reconceive the significance of both religion and the secular in the context of contemporary national and international politics.

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cover art: Megan Craig, *Pit*, 2007.  
cover design: Alejandro Largo

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS | NEW YORK  
WWW.CUP.COLUMBIA.EDU

# THE POWER *of* RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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ISBN: 978-0-231-1



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*Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 101–127.

12. Ibid., pp. 120–121.

13. Ibid., p. 103.

14. See Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), chapter 6: “Prophetic Pragmatism: Cultural Criticism and Political Engagement”; see also *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), especially chapter 5: “Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity.”

15. See Mendieta, *Global Fragments*, chapter 9: “Which Pragmatism? Whose America? On Cornel West.”

16. West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 233.

17. Ibid.

18. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 161.

## “THE POLITICAL”

*The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology*

JÜRGEN HABERMAS

In the welfare state democracies of the latter half of the twentieth century, politics was still able to wield a steering influence on the diverging subsystems; it could still counterbalance tendencies toward social disintegration. Thus under the conditions of “embedded capitalism,” politics could succeed in this effort *within the framework of the nation state*. Today, under conditions of globalized capitalism, the political capacities for protecting social integration are becoming dangerously restricted. As economic globalization progresses, the picture that systems theory sketched of social modernization is acquiring ever sharper contours in reality.

According to this interpretation, politics as a means of democratic self-determination has become as impossible as it is superfluous. Autopoietic functional subsystems conform to logics of their own; they constitute environments for one another, and have long since become independent from the undercomplex networks of the various life-worlds of the population. “The political” has been transformed into the code of a self-maintaining administrative subsystem, so that democracy is in danger of becoming a mere facade, which the executive

agencies turn toward their helpless clients. Systems integration responds to functional imperatives and leaves *social* integration behind as a far too cumbersome mechanism. Because the latter still proceeds via the minds of actors, its operation would have to rely upon the normative structures of lifeworlds that are, however, more and more marginalized.

Under the constraint of economic imperatives that increasingly hold sway over private spheres of life, individuals, intimidated, withdraw more and more into the bubble of their private interests. Willingness to engage in collective action, the awareness that citizens can at all collectively shape the social conditions of their lives through solidaristic action, fades under the perceived force of systemic imperatives. More than anything else, the erosion of confidence in the power of collective action and the atrophy of normative sensibilities reinforce an already smoldering skepticism with regard to an enlightened self-understanding of modernity. Hence the imminent danger of democracy becoming an "obsolete model" (Lutz Wingert) is the challenge that lends the apparently antiquated concept of "the political" new topicality.

At least for some contemporary French and Italian philosophers, in the tradition of Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and Hannah Arendt, and for some students of Jacques Derrida, the classical concept of "the political" serves as an antidote against those depoliticizing tendencies of the age (let me only mention Ernesto Laclau, Giorgio Agamben, Claude Lefort, and Jean-Luc Nancy).<sup>1</sup> These colleagues extend their political reasoning to metaphysical and religious domains, which seem to transcend the trivial kind of administrative and power wrestling politics as we know it. Claude Lefort appeals to the difference between *le politique* (the political) and *la politique* (politics) in order to make us aware "that any society which forgets its religious basis is laboring under the illusion of pure self-immanence."<sup>2</sup>

I share Lefort's intention, but I think that the era when philosophy could elevate itself above the other disciplines belongs to the past. Today the social sciences lay claim to the political system as

their subject matter; they deal with "politics," that is, with the struggle for and the exercise of power, and also with "policies"—that is, the goals and strategies pursued by political actors in different political fields. Besides normative political theory, philosophers have long since lost their special competence for the "political system." "The political" no longer appears to constitute a serious philosophical topic alongside "politics" and "policies." Yet there is reason to doubt whether the Enlightenment traditions can still generate sufficient motivations and social movements for preserving the normative contents of modernity out of its own resources. It is this doubt that lead me to ask whether we can give a rational meaning to the ambivalent concept of "the political." Let me first check a purely descriptive use of the term: From an empirical point of view, "the political" at best designates that symbolic field in which the early civilizations first formed an image of themselves.

i. From a historical point of view, "the political" leads us back to the origins of state-organized societies, such as the ancient empires of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt, in which social integration had been partly transferred from kinship structure to the hierarchical form of royal bureaucracies. The emergent complex of law and political power gave rise to a new functional requirement—the legitimization of political authority. It is not a given that one person, or a handful of persons, can make decisions that are collectively binding on all.<sup>3</sup> They must be legitimated to do so. Only by establishing a convincing connection between law and political power with religious beliefs and practices could rulers be assured that the people followed their orders. While the legal system is stabilized by the sanctioning power of the state, political authority in turn depends on the legitimizing force of a law, which has a sacred origin. "Religion" owes its legitimizing force to the fact that it draws its power to convince from its own roots. It is rooted, *independently of politics*, in notions of salvation and calamity (*Heil und Unheil*) and in corresponding practices of coping with redemptive and menacing forces.<sup>4</sup>

Thus law and the monarch's judicial power owe their sacred aura to mythical narratives that connected ruling dynasties with the divine. At the same time, archaic ritual practices were transformed into state rituals—society as a whole represents itself in the figure of the ruler. And it is this symbolic dimension of the fusion of politics and religion for the description of which the concept of “the political” can properly be used. The collectivity sees itself mirrored in the ruler's self-representation as a political community that *intentionally*—i.e., consciously and deliberately—produces its social cohesion through the exercise of political power. Thus “the political” means the symbolic representation and collective self-understanding of a community that differs from tribal societies through a reflexive turn to a *conscious* rather than spontaneous form of social integration. In the self-understanding of this kind of polity the locus of control shifts toward collective action.<sup>5</sup> However, “the political” as such could not become a topic of discourse as long as mythic narratives remained the sole means of symbolic representation.

We owe the first discursively elaborated *conceptions of “the political”* to the nomos thinking (*Nomosdenken*) of Israel, China, and Greece and, more generally, to the cognitive advance of the Axial Age, that is, to the metaphysical and religious worldviews that were emerging at that time. These worldviews constructed perspectives that enabled the emerging intellectual elites made up of prophets, wise men, monks, and itinerant preachers to transcend events in the world, including political processes, and to adopt a detached stance toward them en bloc. From that time onward the political rulers were also open to criticism. The reference to a divinity outside the world or to the internal base of a cosmic law liberates the human mind from the grip of the narratively ordered flood of occurrences under the sway of mythical powers and makes an individual quest for salvation possible.

Once this transformation has taken place the political ruler can no longer be perceived as the manifestation of the divine but only as its human *representative*. From now on, he, as a human person, is

also *subordinated* to the *nomos* in terms of which all human action must be measured. Because the axial worldviews make both legitimization and the critique of political authority possible at the same time, “the political” in the ancient empires was marked by an ambivalent tension between religious and political powers. Though the religiously backed belief in legitimacy can well be manipulated, it is never totally at the disposition of the ruler.<sup>6</sup> The precarious balance can be studied deep into the European Middle Ages in the relationship between the emperor and the pope. This bold historical jump hints at the extensive time span during which talk of “the political” had a clear meaning, namely, the symbolic order of the collective self-representation of political communities in the mirror image of rulers whose authority is legitimated by some sacred power.

Under the completely changed conditions of the modern period, Western conceptions of “the political,” spelled out in Greek philosophy and Christian political theology, have lost their “setting in life” (*Sitz im Leben*), as it were. For Carl Schmitt, the unifying and integrating power of the political, as it had continued through the Holy Roman Empire, could survive only in the sovereign authority of Christian kings in the absolutist states of early modernity. In what follows I will first examine the thesis that “the political” assumed the shape of an absolutist regime à la Hobbes (2) and then briefly discuss the infamous conception through which Schmitt, from his perspective of an “era of statehood” drawing to a close, tried to renew the concept of the political under conditions of an authoritarian mass democracy (3).<sup>7</sup> Next I will use John Rawls's political liberalism as a counterexample (4) and finally explore whether we can still lend the religiously connotated concept of “the political” a rational meaning under the present conditions of a liberal democracy (5).

2. In the picture Carl Schmitt painted of the early modern state, political authority continues to draw its legitimization from belief in the authority of an all-powerful God; the rational features of the modern state apparatus even underline the conscious character of a form of social integration achieved by political intervention. From

this perspective, essential aspects of the traditional concept of "the political" once tailored to ancient empires now seem to be concentrated in the decision-making power of the modern sovereign. But, on closer historical inspection, this suggestive picture of continuity is misleading. In functional terms the formation of the early modern state can be understood as an answer to the explosive potential inherent in both the emerging capitalism and the confessional split. The modern state is tailored, on the one hand, to the economic imperatives of a system of economic exchange regulated by markets, hence operating independently from political structures, and, on the other, to the pacification of bloody religious wars.

Already at the beginning of the era, the new mode of production emerged as the driving force of a process of functional differentiation leading to a hierarchical reordering of society, while at the same time constraining the bureaucratic administration to the role of one social subsystem alongside others. This marked the gradual dissolution of mutual interpenetration of political and social structures, which had been typical of the old empires. The society that has become differentiated from the state has lost its "politomorphic" features. If we continue to understand "the political" as the symbolic medium of self-representation of a society that consciously influences the mechanisms of social integration, then the expansion of markets within territorial states involves, in fact, a certain degree of "depoliticization" of the society at large. But, contrary to Schmitt's diagnosis, a decisive step toward the neutralization of "the political" already occurred in *early* modernity within the framework of the sovereign state.

The citizens, having achieved economic independence, though at the cost of being forced into private domains, cannot be excluded indefinitely from civil rights and political participation. At the same time, the religious conflicts to which the Reformation gave rise, which could not be permanently suppressed through authoritarian toleration edicts from above, were, in the end, resolved through the recognition of religious freedom and free speech. During the early modern

period these two developments already prefigured the "neutralization" of "the political," whereas Carl Schmitt wants to lay the blame for that kind of depoliticization at the door of the liberal regimes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, the functional specification of the political administration already robs the early modern state of some of its power to permeate and structure society *as a whole*. Schmitt is mistaken in attributing the dissolution of the amalgamation of religion and politics that we associate with the political in its traditional form only to the time, when the constitutional revolutions of the late eighteenth century ratified the secularization of state authority.<sup>8</sup>

As to secularization, it is not only the challenge of the confessional split and the fact of pluralism that called for a secular state authority capable of treating the claims of all religious communities impartially; apart from that, democratic self-empowerment of citizens already strips the legitimization of political power of its metasocial character, in other words, of the reference to the warrant of a transcendent authority operating beyond society. This break with the traditional pattern of legitimization, in fact, raises the question of whether a justification of constitutional essentials in the secular terms of popular power and human rights closes off the dimension of "the political," thereby rendering the concept of "the political" with its religious connotations obsolete.<sup>9</sup> Or does the locus of "the political" merely shift from the level of the state to the democratic opinion- and will-formation of citizens within civil society? Against Carl Schmitt, we might ask: why shouldn't *the political* find an impersonal embodiment in the normative dimension of a democratic constitution? And what would this alternative mean for the relation between religion and politics in societies like ours?

In Carl Schmitt's view, liberalism is the force that robs politics of its significance for society as a whole—on the one hand, a functionally differentiated society is emancipated from the shaping force of politics and, on the other, the state is decoupled from a privatized religion that has lost its sting. Schmitt, therefore, develops a new and

provocative concept of “the political” that is superficially adapted to mass democracy but preserves the authoritarian kernel of a sovereign power with its legitimizing relation to sacred history.

3. In liberalism Carl Schmitt combats the enemy that destroys “the political” through *neutralization*. What he means by that term is not only the withdrawal of politics into a functionally specified subsystem but also the loss of the religious aura of politics and the dissolution of sovereign decision-making power into democratic will formation. Liberalism “wants to dissolve metaphysical truth in a discussion.”<sup>10</sup> Schmitt cherished clear sympathies for the political philosophy of counterrevolutionary thinkers such as de Maistre and de Bonald, but most of all for the militant thinker Donoso Cortes. This Spanish Catholic recognized that the era of Christian monarchy was over and, already in the mid nineteenth century, called for a “dictatorship of the sword” against the “deliberating class” of liberal citizens. Here the permanence of repression already reveals the intrinsically polemical nature of the political.

As a professor of constitutional and international law in the Weimar Republic, Carl Schmitt was, despite his own sympathies, well aware that the democratic idea of popular sovereignty was irrevocable. Yet for him two aspects of counterrevolutionary thought retained a more than merely nostalgic significance: the theological background of the “bloody decisive battle that has flared up today between Catholicism and atheist socialism” and,<sup>11</sup> on the other hand, the conviction that the “metaphysical kernel of the political” can only consist in the moment of “pure decision not based on reason and discussion and not justifying itself, that is . . . (in) an absolute decision created out of nothingness.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to provide some kind of justification for such an existentialist concept of “the political,” Schmitt constructs an identitarian conception of authoritarian mass democracy that is tailored to a homogeneous population and led by a charismatic leader.<sup>13</sup>

This *Fuehrer* is supposed to mobilize the nation against radical evil and weld its individual members together by exposing them to

the fate of sacrifice and death. For Schmitt the struggle against the power of the “Antichrist” reaches across the whole eon between the “appearance of the Lord in the time of the Roman Caesar Augustus and the Lord’s return at the end of time.”<sup>14</sup> Since the fateful revolution of 1789, the camps in the struggle against the Antichrist are clearly divided by their partisanship for revelation and against enlightenment, for authority and against anarchism, for obedience to God and against human self-empowerment and progressivism.

Of course, Carl Schmitt’s clericofascist conception of “the political” is a matter of the past, but it must serve as a warning to all those who want to revive political theology.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the motivation for such attempts continue to this day. John Rawls’s political liberalism has not yet silenced the objections of a critical, post-metaphysical political theology,<sup>16</sup> even if today there prevails a more inconspicuous impulse to save *some* public religious foundation for democracy and the rule of law.<sup>17</sup> In one way or the other, the diagnosis of a progressive “negation of the political” does not seem to have been refuted. The remaining worry can be put in a nutshell: How can respect for the *inviolability* of human dignity, and, more generally, a public awareness of the relevance of normative questions, be kept alive in the face of growing and disarming systemic strains on the social integration of our political communities?<sup>18</sup>

4. In contrast to the classical works of the social contract tradition, which had stripped the concept of “the political” of any serious references to religion, John Rawls recognizes that the problem of the political impact of the role of religion in civil society has not been solved by the secularization of political authority per se. The secularization of the state is not the same as the secularization of society. This explains the air of paradox that to this day has fed a subliminal resentment within religious circles concerning the justification of constitutional principles “from reason alone.”

Although a liberal constitution is designed in such a way as to guarantee all religious communities equal scope for freedom in civil society, it is, at the same time, supposed to shield the public bodies

responsible for making collectively binding decisions from all religious influences. Those same people who are expressly authorized to practice their religion and to lead a pious life in their role as citizens are supposed to participate in a democratic process whose results must be kept free of any religious “contamination.” Laicism pretends to resolve this paradox by privatizing religion entirely. But as long as religious communities play a vital role in civil society and the public sphere, deliberative politics is as much a product of the public use of reason on the part of *religious* citizens as on that of *nonreligious* citizens.

Certainly, the concept of “the political” remains a dubious heritage as long as political theology attempts to preserve metasocial connotations for whatever kind of state authority. In a liberal democracy, state power has lost its religious aura. And, in view of the fact of persisting pluralism, it is hard to see on which normative grounds the historical step toward the secularization of state power could ever be reversed. This in turn requires a justification of constitutional essentials and the outcomes of the democratic process in ways that are neutral toward the cognitive claims of competing worldviews. Democratic legitimacy is the only one available today. The idea of replacing it or complementing it by some presumably “deeper” grounding of the constitution in a generally binding way amounts to obscurantism. This is, however, not to deny the great insight of John Rawls: The liberal constitution itself must not ignore the contributions that religious groups can well make to the democratic process *within civil society*.

Therefore, even the collective identity of a liberal community cannot remain unaffected by the fact of the political interaction between religious and nonreligious parts of the population, provided they recognize each other as equal members of the same democratic community.<sup>19</sup> In this sense “the political,” which has migrated from the level of the state to civil society, retains a reference to religion. It is not the conception of an overlapping consensus between competing doctrines and worldviews that is primarily relevant here. Rawls

rather offers, with his idea of the “public use of reason,” a promising key for explaining how the proper role of religion in the public sphere contributes to a rational interpretation of what we still might call “the political” as distinct from politics and policies.

The only element transcending administrative politics and institutionalized power politics emerges from the anarchic use of communicative freedoms that keeps alive the spring tide of informal flows of public communication from below. Through these channels alone, vital and nonfundamentalist religious communities can become a transformative force in the center of a democratic civil society—all the more so when frictions between religious and secular voices provoke inspiring controversies on normative issues and thereby stimulate an awareness of their relevance.

5. Rawls has sparked a lively discussion with his proposal for the rather restricted role of religion in the public sphere: “Reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons . . . are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support.”<sup>20</sup> This Rawlsian “proviso” has been confronted with the empirical objection that many citizens *cannot* or *are not willing* to make the required separation between contributions expressed in religious terms and those expressed in secular language when they take political stances. Rawls furthermore faced the normative objection that a liberal constitution, which also exists to safeguard religious forms of life, must not inflict such an additional, and hence asymmetrical, burden on its religious citizens.<sup>21</sup> We can meet both objections with a different kind of implementing translation proviso.

According to this proposal, all citizens should be free to decide whether they want to use religious language in the public sphere. Were they to do so, they would, however, have to accept that the potential truth contents of religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language before they can find their way onto the agendas of parliaments, courts, or administrative bodies and influence

their decisions. Instead of subjecting all citizens to the imposition of cleansing their public comments and opinions of religious rhetoric, an institutional filter should be established between informal communication in the public arena and formal deliberations of political bodies that yield to collectively binding decisions. This proposal achieves the liberal goal of ensuring that all legally enforceable and publicly sanctioned decisions can be formulated *and justified* in a universally accessible language without having to restrict the polyphonic diversity of public voices at its very source. To be sure, the "monolingual" contributions of religious citizens then depend on the translational efforts of cooperative fellow citizens if they are not to fall on deaf ears.

But such a regulation would no longer distribute burdens asymmetrically. Religious citizens who regard themselves as loyal members of a constitutional democracy must accept the translation proviso as the price to be paid for the neutrality of the state authority toward competing worldviews. For secular citizens, the same ethics of citizenship entails a complementary burden. By the duty of reciprocal accountability toward all citizens, including religious ones, they are obliged not to publicly dismiss religious contributions to political opinion and will formation as mere noise, or even nonsense, from the start.<sup>22</sup> Secular and religious citizens must meet in their public use of reason at eye level. For a democratic process the contributions of one side are no less important than those of the other side.

Thus a quite demanding epistemic mind-set that cannot be legally imposed is assumed on *both sides*.<sup>23</sup> Whether the expectations associated with the ethics of citizenship will, in fact, be fulfilled depends on complementary learning processes. From the religious side, the public use of reason demands a reflexive consciousness that

- relates itself to competing religions in a reasonable way,
- leaves decisions concerning mundane knowledge to the institutionalized sciences, and

- makes the egalitarian premises of the morality of human rights compatible with its own articles of faith.

On the other hand, the discursive confrontation with religious citizens endowed with equal rights demands from the secular side a similar reflection on the limits of a secular or postmetaphysical kind of reasoning. The insight that vibrant world religions may be bearers of "truth contents," in the sense of suppressed or untapped moral intuitions, is by no means a given for the secular portion of the population. A genealogical awareness of the religious origins of the morality of equal respect for everybody is helpful in this context. The occidental development has been shaped by the fact that philosophy continuously appropriates semantic contents from the Judeo-Christian tradition; and it is an open question whether this centuries-long learning process can be continued or even remains unfinished.

Admittedly, everything feared by Carl Schmitt in fact happened: the sovereign power of the king has been dissolved, disembodied, and dispersed in the communication flows of civil society, and it has at the same time assumed the shape of procedures, be it for general elections or the numerous deliberations and decisions of various political bodies. Claude Lefort is right in maintaining that sovereignty left behind an "empty place." But in the course of its democratic transformation, "the political" has not completely lost its association with religion.

In democratic discourse secular and religious citizens stand in a complementary relation. Both are involved in an interaction that is constitutive for a democratic process springing from the soil of civil society and developing through the informal communication networks of the public sphere. As long as religious communities remain a vital force in civil society, their contribution to the legitimization process reflects an at least indirect reference to religion, which "the political" retains even within a secular state. Although religion can neither

be reduced to morality nor be assimilated to ethical value orientations, it nevertheless keeps alive an awareness of both elements. The public use of reason by religious and nonreligious citizens alike may well spur deliberative politics in a pluralist civil society and lead to the recovery of semantic potentials from religious traditions for the wider political culture.

Moreover, the eschatological impulse of a political theology revised in view of the democratic transformation of "the political" can also serve normative political theory as a reminder of the temporal dimension in which we raise normative claims.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to "ideal theories" of justice that draw the outlines of a just society beyond time and space, Johann Baptist Metz puts his finger on the difference between political justice in the Rawlsian sense and emancipatory justice in the biblical sense. He makes a case for the "sensitivity to time."<sup>25</sup> Only a dynamic understanding of any of our established liberal constitutions can sharpen our awareness of the fact that the democratic process is also a learning process, one often blocked by a deficient sense of what is lacking and what is still possible.<sup>26</sup> Any democratic constitution is and remains *a project*: Within the framework of the nation-state, it is oriented to the ever more thorough exhaustion of the normative substance of constitutional principles under changing historic conditions. And, at the global level, the universalistic meaning of human rights reminds us of the need to develop a constitutional frame for an emerging multicultural world society.

## NOTES

1. Oliver Marchart, *Die politische Differenz* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010); Thomas Bedorf and Kurt Röttgers, eds., *Das Politische und die Politik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010).

2. Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political," in Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), pp. 213–255, here p. 224.

3. On the conditions of the emergence of political power as a medium of social integration, see Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 137–144.

4. Here I am using the term *religion* in the extended sense that includes myth and magic, cf. Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, trans. S. Rendall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

5. Claude Lefort speaks in this context of *mise en forme* in the twofold sense of *mise en sens* and *mise en scène*: "We can say that the advent of a society capable of organizing social relations can come about only if it can institute the conditions of their intelligibility, and only if it can use a multiplicity of signs to arrive at a quasi-representation of itself." Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" p. 219.

6. Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation*, pp. 14, 17–18.

7. See the "Vorwort" to the new edition of Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1963 [1932]), pp. 9–19.

8. I trace this distorted historical perception back to the fact that Carl Schmitt neglects the origins of modernity in medieval thought. See the recent account of Ludger Honnefelder, *Woher kommen wir? Ursprünge der Moderne im Denken des Mittelalters* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2008). Oddly enough, although Schmitt's own concept of God is basically shaped by nominalism, he devotes no attention to the long-term effects of the so-called nominalist revolution of the thirteenth century on the prevailing intellectual movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the following four points, see also Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008):

- One path leads directly from the nominalist emphasis on divine omnipotence, from the contingency of human destinies at the mercy of God's unfathomable decrees, and from the constitutional weakness of a human understanding reliant upon empirical knowledge to the voluntarist conception of God and the Protestant doctrine of grace. By valorizing individual religious convictions, Protestantism taps into a spiritual source of individual autonomy that inspired both political indifference and resistance to the authority of the state.
- Another path leads from nominalism to modern science. By purging nature of divine ideas and advocating an ontology that attributes

existence only to individual entities, nominalism created preconditions for the emergence of empirical science in the present sense, which intensified the contrast between faith and knowledge and, in a pluralist society, promoted the public authority of mundane knowledge as a shared basis for universally accessible knowledge.

- More controversial is the influence of nominalism on Renaissance humanism, which fostered the anthropocentric turn in modern thought and the way in which the sciences contributed to the development of a rational alternative to the religious worldview.
- By contrast, the crucial influence of nominalism in undermining the foundations of Christian natural law is obvious. In addition, by striking a blow against the religious legitimization of power, it paved the way for those two discourses of the theory of knowledge and social contract theory that dominated seventeenth-century philosophy and provided a secular foundation for the legitimization of politics.

9. Thus Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the West* (New York: Knopf, 2007); for a critical response see Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology: An Introduction* (Darton, Longman and Hand, 2008).

10. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 63.

11. Ibid., p. 59.

12. Ibid., p. 66. On Carl Schmitt's political theology see Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction Between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*, trans. M. Brainard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

13. For an inconspicuous introduction of such a voluntaristic concept of "the political," Schmitt takes as his starting point the concept of state sovereignty in international law. No matter how much a democratic constitution may strangle sovereignty in the domestic sphere, nothing prevents nation-states from affirming their sovereignty in external relations as long as the *ius ad bellum* permits them to conduct wars of aggression as they wish. Adopting this perspective of warring nations, Schmitt begins his 1927 work *Constitutional Theory* with a non-normative concept of the constitution: "The state does not have a constitution. . . . The state exists in a certain constitution, in other words, in an actually present

condition, occupying a *status* of unity and order." Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, trans. and ed. J. Seitzer (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, p.60 (translation amended). Schmitt does not understand the constituent power of "the nation" as a legally constituted unity of autonomous citizens, but rather as a concrete and organic collectivity. National membership is determined by common race, belief, common destiny, and tradition—in other words, by ascriptive features (ibid., p. 258). Accordingly, Schmitt shares a collectivistic and plebiscitary conception of democracy that is directed against the egalitarian conception of individual human rights and against a deliberative conception of politics: "Democratic equality is a *substantial* equality. Because all state citizens participate in this substantive component, they can be treated as equals, having an equal right to vote in general elections, etc." (ibid., p. 259; translation amended). But the people can exercise its right of participation only via acclamation; they can "express their consent or disapproval by . . . celebrating a leader or a suggestion . . . or denying the acclamation by silence or complaining" (ibid., p. 272). These theoretical moves are the result of a first problematic decision. Schmitt dissects the liberal constitution—against its express intention to link popular sovereignty and human rights—into "political" and "constitutional" components. This enables Schmitt to slip an identitarian conception of democracy as a "basis" underneath the constitutional superstructure. The law, he stipulates, places only loose fetters on politics anyway. Any state of emergency reveals that the "rule of law" is at the disposal of politics, that is, of an actual self-assertion of the nation. Ultimately the leader and the nation, in the person of its leader, must decide on who is friend or foe. The meaning of "the political" does not reside in the fight itself but in the ability of the political leaders "to distinguish between friend and foe" and the willingness of the nation to take up combat for the assertion of its own way of life.

This existentialist version continues to share essential features with the traditional concept of "the political." Certainly, the collective identity of the people is no longer defined in the legal terms of a sovereign state, but in the ethnonational concepts of political romanticism instead. However, the shared features of descent, tradition, and language cannot ensure the social cohesion of the collective by their supposed organic nature alone. Rather, the political leadership must continually mobilize the nation against external or internal enemies. This concept of "the political" assumed an even more

authoritarian profile when it was accommodated, a few years after the publication of *Constitutional Theory*, to the Nazi movement.

14. Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, p. 86.

15. See the commentary on Schmitt in Jacob Taubes, ed., *Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1983).

16. Compare the impressive projects of a new political theology developed by Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann: Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980); Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1967).

17. Charles Taylor, "Die Bedeutung des Säkularismus," in Rainer Forst, Martin Hartmann, Martin Saar, and Rahel Jaeggi, eds., *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), pp. 672–696.

18. Lutz Wingert, "Was ist und was heißt 'unverfügbar'?" in Forst et al., *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik*, pp. 384–408.

19. See Taylor's phenomenologically convincing analysis in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), especially chapter 15, pp. 539ff.

20. Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (Summer 1997): 765–807, citation at 783.

21. For a résumé of these objections, see Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), pp. 114–147.

22. For an opposing view, see Cristina Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35 (2009): 127–150: "The corollary of allowing citizens of faith to use exclusively religious reasons for political advocacy in the informal public sphere is that secular citizens must exercise constraint concerning their 'secularist attitudes.' . . . In contradistinction to religious citizens, they should not make public use of their sincere beliefs, if these beliefs happen to be of a secularist type that contradict the possible truth of religious claims" (135). Quite apart from the fact that the "truth" of religious validity claims is not in question here, but rather the potentially translatable *truth content* of religious utterances, the exclusion of secularism from the public use of reason is, in fact, an implication of the ethics of citizenship that is accepted by citizens who are loyal to the constitution. A *public practice* of secularism would amount to secular citizens not taking their fellow citizens seriously as modern contemporaries because of their religious outlook. However, this stance would be no

more compatible with a reciprocity of recognition than it would be with a mutual perspective taking in discursive exchanges. The objection that the proposed expectation could tempt secular citizens into insincerity has no force for a discourse-theoretical understanding of the democratic process. Apart from the fact that motives for actual voting behavior are not, in any case, subject to any form of regulation, only public utterances, hence actual contributions to the formation of opinions and consensus building, and not mind-sets, are relevant for the legitimizing power of democratic discourses. See Jürgen Habermas, "Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4 (2008): 33–46.

23. That is the point of my argument in Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," pp. 135–147.

24. Thomas Polednitschek, Michael J. Rainer, and José A. Zamora, eds., *Theologisch-politische Vergewisserungen* (Münster: Lit, 2009).

25. Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis* (Freiburg: Herder, 2006).

26. Christian F. Rostboell, "Emancipation or Accommodation," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34, no. 7 (2008): 707–736.

## WHY WE NEED A RADICAL REDEFINITION OF SECULARISM

CHARLES TAYLOR

I

It is generally agreed that modern democracies have to be “secular.” There is perhaps a problem, a certain ethnocentricity, involved in this term. But even in the Western context the term is not limpид. What in fact does it mean? I believe that there are at least two models of what constitutes a secular regime.

Both involve some kind of separation of church and state. The state can't be officially linked to some religious confession; except in a vestigial and largely symbolic sense, as in England or Scandinavia. But secularism requires more than this. The pluralism of society requires that there be some kind of neutrality, or “principled distance,” to use Rajeev Bhargava's term.<sup>1</sup>

If we try to examine it further secularism involves in fact a complex requirement. There is more than one good sought here. We can single out three, which we can class in the three categories of the French Revolutionary trinity: liberty, equality, fraternity. 1. No one must be forced in the domain of religion or basic belief. This is what is often

defined as religious liberty, including of course, the freedom not to believe. This is what is also described as the “free exercise” of religion, in the terms of the U.S. First Amendment. 2. There must be equality between people of different faiths or basic belief; no religious outlook or (religious or areligious) Weltanschauung can enjoy a privileged status, let alone be adopted as the official view of the state. Then 3. all spiritual families must be heard, included in the ongoing process of determining what the society is about (its political identity), and how it is going to realize these goals (the exact regime of rights and privileges). This (stretching the point a little) is what corresponds to “fraternity.”

These goals can, of course, conflict; sometimes we have to balance the goods involved here. Moreover, I believe that we might add a fourth goal: that we try as much as possible to maintain relations of harmony and comity between the supporters of different religions and Weltanschauungen (maybe this is what really deserves to be called “fraternity,” but I am still attached to the neatness of this schema, with only the three traditional goods.)

Sometimes the claim seems to be made, on behalf of one or other definition of secularism, that it can resolve the question of how to realize these goals in the domain of timeless principle and that no further input, or negotiation is required to define them for our society now. The basis for these principles can be found in reason alone or in some outlook that is itself free from religion, purely *laïque*. Jacobins are on this wavelength, as was the first Rawls.

The problem with this is that a. there is no such set of timeless principles that can be determined, at least in the detail they must be for a given political system, by pure reason alone; and b. situations differ very much, and require different kinds of concrete realization of agreed general principles, so that some degree of working out is necessary in each situation. It follows that c. dictating the principles from some supposedly higher authority above the fray violates 3. It deprives certain spiritual families of a voice in this working out. And therefore d. this leaves us very often with difficult conflicts and dilemmas between our basic goals.

We have a good illustration of b in the way that the issues concerning secularism have evolved in different Western societies in recent decades, because the faiths represented in those societies have changed. We need to alter the way in which we proceed when the range of religions or basic philosophies expands: e.g., contemporary Europe or America with the arrival of substantive communities of Muslims.

In relation to c, we have the recent legislation in France against wearing the hijab in schools. Normally, this kind of thing needs to be negotiated. The host country is often forced to send a double message: i. you can't do that here (kill blaspheming authors, practice FGM) and ii. we invite you to be part of our consensus-building process. These tend to run against each other; i hinders and renders ii less plausible. All the more reason to avoid where possible the unilateral application of i. Of course, sometimes it is not possible. Certain basic laws have to be observed. But the general principle is that religious groups must be seen as much as interlocutors and as little as menace as the situation allows.

These groups also evolve if they're in a process of redefinition of this kind in a democratic, liberal context. José Casanova has pointed out how American Catholicism was originally targeted in the nineteenth century as inassimilable to democratic mores, in ways very analogous to the suspicions that nag people over Islam today. The subsequent history has shown how American Catholicism evolved and, in the process, changed world Catholicism in significant ways. There is no reason written into the essence of things why a similar evolution cannot take place in Muslim communities.<sup>2</sup> If this doesn't happen, it will in all likelihood be because of prejudice and bad management.

Now I believe that one of our basic difficulties in dealing with these problems is that we have the wrong model, which has a continuing hold on our minds. We think that secularism (or *laïcité*) has to do with the relation of the state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity. If we look at the three goals, they have in common that they are concerned with 1. protecting people in their belonging to and/or

practice of whatever outlook they choose or find themselves in; with 2. treating people equally whatever their choice; and 3. giving them all a hearing. There is no reason to single out religion, as against nonreligious, "secular" (in another widely used sense), or atheist viewpoints.

Indeed, the point of state neutrality is precisely to avoid favoring or disfavoring not just religious positions but any basic position, religious or nonreligious. We can't favor Christianity over Islam, but also religion over against nonbelief in religion or vice versa.

One of the ways of demonstrating the superiority of the three-principle model of secularism, over that which is fixated on religion, is that it would never allow one to misrecognize the regime founded by Atatürk as genuinely secular, making light as it does of the fundamental principles and even of the separation of state and religious institutions.

This also shows the value of the late-Rawlsian formulation for a secular state. This cleaves very strongly to certain political principles: human rights, equality, the rule of law, democracy. These are the very bases of the state, which must support them. But this political ethic can be and is shared by people of very different basic outlooks (what Rawls calls "comprehensive views of the good"). A Kantian will justify the rights to life and freedom by pointing to the dignity of rational agency; a utilitarian will speak of the necessity to treat beings who can experience joy and suffering in such a way as to maximize the first and minimize the second. A Christian will speak of humans as made in the image of God. They concur on the principles, but differ on the deeper reasons for holding to this ethic. The state must uphold the ethic, but must refrain from favoring any of the deeper reasons.

<sup>2</sup>

The idea that secularism makes a special case of religion arises from the history of its coming to be in the West (as does, indeed, the

name). To put it briefly, there are two important founding contexts for this kind of regime, the U.S. and France. In the U.S. case, the whole range of comprehensive views, or deeper reasons, were in the original case variants of (Protestant) Christianity, stretching to a smattering of Deists. Subsequent history has widened the palette of views beyond Christianity and then beyond religion. But, in the original case, the positions between which the state must be neutral were all religious. Hence the First Amendment: Congress shall pass no law establishing religion or impeding the free exercise thereof.

The word *secularism* didn't appear in the early decades of American public life. But this is a sign that a basic problem had not yet been faced. Because the First Amendment concerned the separation of church and state, it opened the possibility of giving a place to *religion* that no one would accept today. Thus, in the 1830s, a judge of the Supreme Court could argue that while the First Amendment forbade the identification of the federal government with any church, since all the churches were Christian (and in effect Protestant), one could invoke the principles of Christianity in interpreting the law.

For Judge Joseph Story, the goal of the first amendment was "to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects," but nevertheless "Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the state." Christianity was essential to the state because the belief in "a future state of rewards and punishments" is "indispensable to the administration of justice." What is more, "it is impossible for those who believe in the truth of Christianity, as a divine revelation, to doubt, that it is a special duty of government to foster, and encourage it among the citizens."<sup>3</sup>

This primacy of Christianity was upheld even later in the nineteenth century. As late as 1890, thirty-seven of the forty-two existing states recognized the authority of God in the preambles or in the text of their constitutions. A unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court of 1892 declared that if one wanted to describe "American life as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs and its society,

we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth . . . that this is a Christian nation."<sup>4</sup>

In the latter part of the century, resistance began to build to this conception, but a National Reform Association was founded in 1863 with the following goal:

The object of this Society shall be to maintain existing Christian features in the American government . . . to secure such an amendment to the Constitution of the United States as will declare the nation's allegiance to Jesus Christ and its acceptance of the moral laws of the Christian religion, and so as to indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all the Christian laws, institutions, and usages of our government on an undeniable legal basis in the fundamental law of the land.

After 1870, the battle was joined by the supporters of this narrow view, on one hand, and those who wanted a real opening to all other religions and also to nonreligion, on the other. These included not only Jews but also Catholics who (rightly) saw the "Christianity" of the NRA as excluding them. It was in this battle that the word *secular* first appears on the American scene as a key term, and very often in its polemical sense of non- or antireligious.<sup>5</sup>

In the French case, laïcité came about in a struggle *against* a powerful church. The strong temptation was for the state itself to stand on a moral basis independent from religion. Marcel Gauchet shows how Renouvier laid the grounds for the outlook of the Third Republic radicals in their battle against the church. The state has to be "moral et enseignant" (moral and a teaching agency). It has "charge d'âmes aussi bien que toute Église ou communauté, mais à titre plus universel" (charge of souls just as does the church or religious community, but on a more universal scale). Morality is the key criterion. In order not to be under the church, the state must have "une morale indépendante de toute religion" (a morality independent of all religion), and enjoy a "suprématie morale" (moral supremacy) in relation

to all religions. The basis of this morality is liberty. In order to hold its own before religion, the morality underlying the state has to be based on more than just utility or feeling; it needs a real “théologie rationnelle,” like that of Kant.<sup>6</sup> The wisdom of Jules Ferry, and later of Aristide Briand and Jean Juarès, saved France at the time of the Separation (1905) from such a lop-sided regime, but the notion stuck that laïcité was all about controlling and managing religion.

If we move, however, beyond such originating contexts, and look at the kinds of societies in which we are now living in the West, the first feature that strikes us is the wide diversity not only of religious views but also of those that involve no religion, not to speak of those that are unclassifiable in this dichotomy. Reasons 1, 2, and 3 require that we treat evenhandedly all of these.

## 3

This fixation on religion is complex, and it is bound up with two other features we often find in the debates on secularism: the first is the tendency to define secularism or laïcité in terms of some institutional arrangement, rather than starting from the goals that I propose. And so you hear mantra-type formulae like “the separation of church and state” or the necessity of removing religion from public space (“les espaces de la République,” as in the recent French debate). The second follows from the first, or may easily seem to. If the whole matter is defined by one institutional formula, then one must just determine which arrangement of things best meets this formula, and there is no need to think further. One cannot find oneself in a dilemma, as will easily happen if one is pursuing more than one goal, because here there is just one master formula.

Hence one often hears these mantras employed as argument stoppers, the ultimate decisive response that annuls all objections. In the U.S., people invoke the “Wall of Separation” as the ultimate criterion, and hyper-Republicans in France cite laïcité as the final word.

(Of course, if one consulted the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution one would find two goals mentioned, the rejection of establishment and the assurance of “free exercise.” It is not inconceivable that these could conflict.)

This kind of move amounts, from the standpoint I’m adopting here, to a fetishization of the favored institutional arrangements. Whereas one should start from the goals and derive the concrete arrangements from these. It is not that some separation of church and state, some mutual autonomy of governing and religious institutions, will not be an inescapable feature of any secularist regime. And the same goes for the neutrality of the public institutions. These are both indispensable. But what these requirements mean in practice ought to be determined by how we can maximize our three (or four) basic goals.

Take, for example, the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women in public schools, which has been a hot issue in a number of Western democracies. In France, pupils in public schools were famously forbidden the headscarf, seen as a “signe religieux ostentatoire” (ostentatious religious sign), according to the notorious Loi Stasi of 2004. In certain German Laender, pupils can wear it, but not teachers. In the UK and other countries, there is no general interdict, but the individual schools can decide.

What are the reasons for this variation? Plainly, in all these cases, legislators and administrators were trying to balance two goals. One was the maintenance of neutrality in public institutions seen (rightly) as an essential entailment of goal 2: equality between all basic beliefs. The other was goal 1, ensuring the maximum possible religious liberty or, in its most general form, liberty of conscience. Goal 1 seems to push us toward permitting the hijab anywhere. But various arguments were made to override this in the French and German cases. For the Germans, what was disturbing was that someone in authority in a public institution should be religiously marked, as it were. In the French case, an attempt was made to cast doubt on the proposition that wearing the hijab was a free act. There were dark suggestions

that the girls were being forced by their families or by their male peers to adopt this dress code. This was one argument, frequently used, however dubious it might appear in the light of the sociological research carried out among the pupils themselves, that the Stasi Commission largely ignored.

The other main argument was that wearing of the headscarf in school was less an act of piety than a statement of hostility against the republic and its essential institution of laïcité. This was the meaning behind the introduction of the concept of “signe ostentatoire.” A smaller, more discrete sign would be no problem, argued the Stasi Commission, but these attention-grabbing features of dress were meant to make a highly controversial statement. It was in vain that Muslim women protested that “le foulard n'est pas un signe” (the headscarf is not a sign).

So, on one level, we can see that these different national answers to the same question reflect different takes on how to balance the two main goals of a secular regime. But on another level, the dilemma and its resolution remain hidden under the illusion that there is only one principle here, say, laïcité and its corollary of the neutrality of public institutions or spaces (“les espaces de la République”). It’s just a matter of applying an essential feature of our republican regime; there is no need or place for choice or the weighing of different aims.

Perhaps the most pernicious feature of this fetishization is that it tends to hide from view the real dilemmas we encounter in this realm that leap into view once we recognize the plurality of principles at stake.

4

We should be aware that this fetishization reflects a deep feature of life in modern democracies. We can see why as soon as we ponder what is involved in self-government, what is implied in the basic

mode of legitimization of states, that they are founded on popular sovereignty. For the people to be sovereign, it needs to form an entity and have a personality.

The revolutions that ushered in regimes of popular sovereignty transferred the ruling power from a king onto a *nation* or a *people*. In the process, they invent a new kind of collective agency. These terms existed before, but the thing they now indicate, this new kind of agency, was something unprecedented, at least in the immediate context of early modern Europe. Thus the notion “people” could certainly be applied to the ensemble of subjects of the kingdom, or to the nonelite strata of society, but before the turnover it hadn’t indicated an entity that could decide and act together, to which one could attribute a *will*.

But for people to act together, in other words, to deliberate in order to form a common will on which they will act, requires a high degree of common commitment, a sense of common identification. A society of this kind presupposes trust, the basic trust that members and constituent groups have to have, the confidence that they are really part of the process, that they will be listened to and their views taken account of by the others. Without this mutual commitment, this trust will be fatally eroded.

And so we have in the modern age a new kind of collective agency. It is one with which its members identify, typically as the realization/bulwark of their freedom and/or the locus of their national/cultural expression (or most often, some combination of the two). Of course, in premodern societies, too, people often “identified” with the regime, with sacred kings or hierarchical orders. They were often willing subjects. But in the democratic age we identify as free agents. That is why the notion of “popular will” plays a crucial role in the legitimating idea.<sup>7</sup>

This means that the modern democratic state has generally accepted common purposes, or reference points, the features whereby it can lay claim to being the bulwark of freedom and locus of expression of its citizens. Whether or not these claims are actually

founded, the state must be so imagined by its citizens if it is to be legitimate.

So a question can arise for the modern state for which there is no analogue in most premodern forms: What, or whom, is this state for? Whose freedom? Whose expression? The question seems to make no sense applied to, say, the Austrian or Turkish Empires—unless one answered the “whom for?” question by referring to the Habsburg or Ottoman dynasties, and this would hardly give you their legitimating ideas.

This is the sense in which a modern state has what I want to call a political identity, defined as the generally accepted answer to the “what/whom for?” question. This is distinct from the identities of its members, namely, the reference points, many and varied, that, for each of these, defines what is important in their lives. There better be some overlap, of course, if these members are to feel strongly identified with the state; but the identities of individuals and constituent groups will generally be richer and more complex as well as being often quite different from each other.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, a modern democratic state demands a “people” with a strong collective identity. Democracy obliges us to show much more solidarity and much more commitment to one another in our joint political project than was demanded by the hierarchical and authoritarian societies of yesteryear. In the good old days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Polish peasant in Galicia could be altogether oblivious of the Hungarian country squire, the bourgeois of Prague, or the Viennese worker without this in the slightest threatening the stability of the state. On the contrary. This condition of things only becomes untenable when ideas about popular government start to circulate. This is the moment when subgroups, which will not, or cannot, be bound together, start to demand their own states. This is the era of nationalism, of the breakup of empires.

I have been discussing the political necessity of a strong common identity for modern democratic states in terms of the requirement of forming a people, a deliberative unit. But this is also evident in a

number of other ways. Thinkers in the civic humanist tradition, from Aristotle through to Arendt, have noted that free societies require a higher level of commitment and participation than despotic or authoritarian ones. Citizens have to do for themselves, as it were, what otherwise the rulers would do for them. But this will only happen if these citizens feel a strong bond of identification with their political community and hence with those who share with them in this.

From another angle, again, because these societies require strong commitment to do the common work, and because a situation in which some carried the burdens of participation and others just enjoyed the benefits would be intolerable, free societies require a high level of mutual trust. In other words, they are extremely vulnerable to mistrust on the part of some citizens in relation to others, that the latter are not really assuming their commitments—e.g., that others are not paying their taxes or are cheating on welfare or, as employers, are benefiting from a good labor market without assuming any of the social costs. This kind of mistrust creates extreme tension and threatens to unravel the whole skein of the mores of commitment that democratic societies need to operate. A continuing and constantly renewed mutual commitment is an essential basis for taking the measures needed to renew this trust.

The relation between nation and state is often considered from a unilateral point of view, as if it were always the nation that sought to provide itself with a state. But there is also the opposite process. In order to remain viable, states sometimes seek to create a feeling of common belonging. This is an important theme in the history of Canada, for example. To form a state, in the democratic era, a society is forced to undertake the difficult and never-to-be-completed task of defining its collective identity.

Thus what I have been calling political identity is extremely important in modern democratic states. And this identity is usually defined partly in terms of certain basic principles (democracy, human rights, equality), and partly in terms of their historic, or linguistic, or religious traditions. It is understandable that features of this identity

can take on a quasi-sacred status, for to alter or undermine them can seem to threaten the very basis of unity without which a democratic state cannot function.

It is in this context that certain historical institutional arrangements can appear to be untouchable. They may appear as an essential part of the basic principles of the regime, but they will also come to be seen as a key component of its historic identity. This is what one sees with *laïcité* as invoked by many French *républicains*. The irony is that, in the face of a modern politics of (multicultural) identity, they invoke this principle as a crucial feature of (French) identity. This is unfortunate but very understandable. It is one illustration of a general truth: that contemporary democracies, as they progressively diversify, will have to undergo redefinitions of their historical identities, which may be far-reaching and painful.

## 5

At this juncture I would like to discuss an interesting point that Habermas reminds us of in his paper “The Political”: originally political authority was defined and justified in cosmic-religious terms. It was defined within the terms of a “political theology.”<sup>9</sup> But Habermas seems to think that modern secular states might do altogether without some analogous concept, and this seems to me not quite right.

The crucial move that we see in the modern West from the seventeenth century, the move that takes us out of the cosmic religious conceptions of order, establishes a new “bottom-up” view of society, as existing for the protection and mutual benefit of its (equal) members. There is a strong normative view attached to this new conception, which I’ve called the “modern moral order.”<sup>10</sup> It enshrines basically three principles (on one possible enumeration): 1. the rights and liberties of the members, 2. the equality among them (which has of course been variously interpreted and has mutated toward more

radical conceptions over time), and 3. the principle that rule is based on consent (which has also been defended in more and less radical forms).

These basic norms have been worked out in a host of different philosophical anthropologies and according to very different concepts of human sociability. It very soon transcended the atomism that narrowed the vision of its early formulators, like Locke and Hobbes. But the basic norms remain and are more or less inseparable from modern liberal democracies.

The rejection of cosmic-religious embedding thus was accomplished by a new conception of “the political,” a new basic norm, which as Lefort suggests involved its own representation of political authority, but one in which the central spot remains paradoxically empty. If the notion of sovereignty is retained, no one person or group can be identified with it.

Democratic societies are organized not necessarily around a “civil religion,” as Rousseau claimed, but certainly around a strong “philosophy of civility,” enshrining the three norms, which in contemporary societies are often expressed as 1. human rights, 2. equality and nondiscrimination, and 3. democracy.

But, in certain cases, there can be a civil religion: a religious view incorporating and justifying the philosophy of civility. This was arguably so for the young American republic. It was adopting a form that was clearly part of God’s providential plan for mankind (“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that men were *created* equal . . .”). Or it can alternatively be part of a non- or even anti-religious ideology, as with the First French Republic. One can even argue that all-englobing views of this kind seem more “natural” to many of our contemporaries. After all, the principles of our civil philosophy seem to call for deeper grounding. If it’s very important that we agree on the principles, then surely things are much more stable if we also accept a common grounding. Or, so it may appear, and the centuries-long tradition of political life seems to testify for this idea.

For, indeed, the overlapping consensus between different founding views on a common philosophy of civility is something quite new in history and relatively untried. It is consequently hazardous. And, besides, we often suspect that those with different basic views can't really subscribe to these principles, not the way we do! (Because, as "we" know, "atheists can't have principles," or, as [another] "we" knows, "religions are all against liberty and /or equality.")

The problem is that a really diverse democracy can't revert to a civil religion, or antireligion, however comforting this might be, without betraying its own principles. We are condemned to live an overlapping consensus.

6

We have seen how this strongly motivated move to fetishize our historical arrangements can prevent our seeing our secular regime in a more fruitful light, which foregrounds the basic goals we are seeking and allows us to recognize and reason about the dilemmas which we face. But this connects to the other main cause of confusion I have already cited, our fixation on religion as the problem. In fact, we have moved in many Western countries from an original phase, in which secularism was a hard-won achievement warding off some form of religious domination, to a phase of such widespread diversity of basic beliefs, religious and areligious, that only clear focus on the need to balance freedom of conscience and equality of respect can allow us to take the measure of the situation. Otherwise we risk needlessly limiting the religious freedom of immigrant minorities, on the strength of our historic institutional arrangements, while sending a message to these same minorities that they by no means enjoy equal status with the long-established mainstream.

Think of the argument of the German Laender that forbade the headscarf for teachers. These are authority figures, surely; but is our idea that only unmarked people can be authority figures? That those

whose religious practices make them stand out in this context don't belong in positions of authority in this society? This is maybe the wrong message to inculcate in children in a rapidly diversifying society.

But the fixation on religion as the problem is not just a historical relic. Much of our thought, and some of our major thinkers, remain stuck in the old rut. They want to make a special thing of religion, but not always for very flattering reasons.

What are we to think of the idea, entertained by Rawls for a time, that one can legitimately ask of a religiously and philosophically diverse democracy that everyone deliberate in a language of reason alone, leaving their religious views in the vestibule of the public sphere? The tyrannical nature of this demand was rapidly appreciated by Rawls, to his credit. But we ought to ask why the proposition arose in the first place. Rawls's point in suggesting this restriction was that everyone should use a language with which they could reasonably expect their fellow citizens to agree. The idea seems to be something like this. Secular reason is a language that everyone speaks and can argue and be convinced in. Religious languages operate outside this discourse by introducing extraneous premises that only believers can accept. So let's all talk the common language.

What underpins this notion is something like an epistemic distinction. There is secular reason, which everyone can use and reach conclusions by, conclusions, that is, with which everyone can agree. Then there are special languages, which introduce extra assumptions that might even contradict those of ordinary secular reason. These are much more epistemically fragile; in fact, you won't be convinced by them unless you already hold them. So religious reason either comes to the same conclusions as secular reason, but then it is superfluous, or it comes to contrary conclusions, and then it is dangerous and disruptive. This is why it needs to be sidelined.

As for Habermas, he has always marked an epistemic break between secular reason and religious thought, with the advantage on

the side of the first. Secular reason suffices to arrive at the normative conclusions we need, such as establishing the legitimacy of the democratic state and defining our political ethic. Recently, his position on religious discourse has considerably evolved; to the point of recognizing that its “potential [to articulate more intuitions] makes religious speech into a serious vehicle for possible truth contents.” But the basic epistemic distinction still holds for him. Thus, when it comes to the official language of the state, religious references have to be expunged. “In parliament, for example, the rules of procedure must empower the house leader to strike religious positions or justifications from the official transcript.”<sup>11</sup>

Do these positions of Rawls and Habermas show that they have not yet understood the normative basis for the contemporary secular state? I believe that they are on to something, in that there are zones of a secular state in which the language used has to be neutral. But these do not include citizen deliberation, as Rawls at first thought, or even deliberation in the legislature, as Habermas seems to think from the aforementioned quote. This zone can be described as the official language of the state: the language in which legislation, administrative decrees, and court judgments must be couched. It is self-evident that a law before Parliament couldn’t contain a justifying clause of the type: “Whereas the Bible tells us that . . .” And the same goes, mutatis mutandis, for the justification of a judicial decision in the court’s verdict. But this has nothing to do with the specific nature of religious language. It would be equally improper to have a legislative clause: “Whereas Marx has shown that religion is the opium of the people” or “Whereas Kant has shown that the only thing good without qualification is a good will.” The grounds for both these kinds of exclusions is the neutrality of the state.

The state can be neither Christian nor Muslim nor Jewish, but, by the same token, it should also be neither Marxist, nor Kantian, nor utilitarian. Of course, the democratic state will end up voting laws that (in the best case) reflect the actual convictions of its citizens,

which will be either Christian or Muslim, etc, through the whole gamut of views held in a modern society. But the decisions can’t be framed in a way that gives special recognition to one of these views. This is not easy to do; the lines are hard to draw, and they must always be drawn anew. But such is the nature of the enterprise that is the modern secular state. And what better alternative is there for diverse democracies?<sup>12</sup>

Now the notion that state neutrality is basically a response to diversity has trouble making headway among “secular” people in the West, who remain oddly fixated on religion as something strange and perhaps even threatening. This stance is fed by all the conflicts, past and present, of liberal states with religion, but also by a specifically epistemic distinction: religiously informed thought is somehow less *rational* than purely “secular” reasoning. The attitude has a political ground (religion as threat), but also an epistemological one (religion as a faulty mode of reason).<sup>13</sup>

I believe we can see these two motifs in a popular contemporary book, Mark Lilla’s *The Stillborn God*. On one hand, Lilla wants to claim that there is a great gulf between thinking informed by political theology and “thinking and talking about politics exclusively in human terms.”<sup>14</sup> Moderns have effected “the liberation, isolation, and clarification of distinctively political questions, apart from speculations about the divine nexus. Politics became, intellectually speaking, its own realm deserving independent investigation and serving the limited aim of providing the peace and plenty necessary for human dignity. That was the Great Separation.”<sup>15</sup> Such metaphors of radical separation imply that human-centred political thought is a more reliable guide to answer the questions in its domain than theories informed by political theology.

So much for the epistemological ranking. But then, toward the end of his book, Lilla calls on us not to lose our nerve and allow the Great Separation to be reversed,<sup>16</sup> which seems to imply that there are dangers in doing so. The return of religion in this sense would be full of menace.<sup>17</sup>

This phenomenon deserves fuller examination. Ideally, we should look carefully at the double grounds for this stance of distrust, comment on these, and then say something about the possible negative political consequences of maintaining this stance. But in this chapter I shall only really have space to look at the roots of the epistemological ground.

I think this has its source in what one might call a myth of the Enlightenment. There certainly is a common view that sees the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung, Lumières*) as a passage from darkness to light, that is, as an absolute, unmitigated move from a realm of thought full of error and illusion to one where the truth is at last available. To this one must immediately add that a counterview defines “reactionary” thought: the Enlightenment would be an unqualified move into error, a massive forgetting of salutary and necessary truths about the human condition.

In the polemics around modernity, more nuanced understandings tend to get driven to the wall, and these two slug it out. Arnold’s phrase about “ignorant armies clashing by night” comes irresistibly to mind.

But what I want to do here, rather than bemoaning this fact, is to try to explain what underlies the understanding of Enlightenment as an absolute, unmitigated step forward. This is what I see as the “myth” of the Enlightenment. (One can’t resist this jab, because “myth” is often cited as what Enlightenment has saved us from.)

This is worth doing, I believe, because the myth is more widespread than one might think. Even sophisticated thinkers, who might repudiate it when it is presented as a general proposition, seem to be leaning on it in other contexts.

Thus there is a version of what Enlightenment represents that sees it as our stepping out of a realm in which Revelation, or religion in general, counted as a source of insight about human affairs into a

realm in which these are now understood in purely this-worldly or human terms. Of course, that some people have made this passage is not what is in dispute. What is questionable is the idea that this move involves the self-evident epistemic gain of our setting aside consideration of dubious truth and relevance and concentrating on matters we can settle that are obviously relevant. This is often represented as a move from Revelation to reason alone (Kant’s *blosse Vernunft*).

Clearer examples are found in contemporary political thinkers, for instance, Rawls and Habermas. For all their differences, they seem to reserve a special status for nonreligiously informed Reason (let’s call this “reason alone”), as though a. the latter were able to resolve certain moral-political issues in a way that can legitimately satisfy any honest, unconfused thinker and b. where religiously based conclusions will always be dubious and in the end only convincing to people who have already accepted the dogmas in question.

This surely is what lies behind the idea I mentioned earlier in section 6, entertained for a time in different form by both thinkers, that one can restrict the use of religious language in the sphere of public reason. We must mention again that this proposition has been largely dropped by both; but we can see that the proposition itself makes no sense, unless something like a+b is true. Rawls’s point in suggesting this restriction was that public reason must be couched in terms that could in principle be universally agreed upon. The notion was that the only terms meeting this standard were those of reason alone (a), while religious language by its very nature would fail to do so (b).

Before proceeding farther, I should just say that this distinction in rational credibility between religious and nonreligious discourse, supposed by a+b, seems to me utterly without foundation. It may turn out at the end of the day that religion is founded on an illusion, and hence that what is derived from it less credible. But, until we actually reach that place, there is no a priori reason for greater

suspicion being directed at it. The credibility of this distinction depends on the view that some quite “this-worldly” argument *suffices* to establish certain moral-political conclusions. I mean “satisfy” in the sense of a: it should legitimately be convincing to any honest, unconfused thinker. There are propositions of this kind, ranging from “ $2+2=4$ ” all the way to some of the better-founded deliverances of modern natural science. But the key beliefs we need, for instance, to establish our basic political morality are not among them. The two most widespread this-worldly philosophies in our contemporary world, utilitarianism and Kantianism, in their different versions, all have points at which they fail to convince honest and unconfused people. If we take key statements of our contemporary political morality, such as those attributing rights to human beings as such, say the right to life, I cannot see how the fact that we are desiring/enjoying/suffering beings, or the perception that we are rational agents, should be any surer basis for this right than the fact that we are made in the image of God. Of course, our being capable of suffering is one of those basic unchallengeable propositions, in the sense of a, as our being creatures of God is not, but what is less sure is what follows normatively from the first claim.

Of course, this distinction would be much more credible if one had a “secular” argument for rights that was watertight. And this probably accounts for the difference between me and Habermas on this score. He finds this secure foundation in a “discourse ethic,” which I unfortunately find quite unconvincing.

The a+b distinction, applied to the moral-political domain, is one of the fruits of the Enlightenment myth; or perhaps one should say it is one of the forms this myth takes. It would be interesting to trace the rise of this illusion, through a series of moves that are in part well-founded and in part themselves grounded on illusions. In another essay, I identified three, of which the first two are relatively well traced and the third requires more elaborate description.<sup>18</sup> I’ll briefly mention the first two here

First comes 1. foundationalism, which one sees most famously with Descartes. This combines a supposedly indubitable starting point (the particulate ideas in the mind) with an infallible method (that of clear and distinct ideas) and thus should yield conclusions that would live up to claim a. But this comes unstuck—and in two places. The indubitable starting points can be challenged by a determined skepticism, such as we find in Hume, and the method relies much too much on a priori argument and not enough on empirical input.

But even though his foundationalism and his a priori physics were rejected, Descartes left behind α. a belief in the importance of finding the correct method and β. the crucial account which underpins the notion of reason alone. He claimed to be prescinding from all external authority, whether emanating from society or tradition, whether inculcated by parents or teachers, and to rely only on what monological reason can verify as certain. The proper use of reason is sharply distinguished from what we receive from authority. In the Western tradition this supposedly external imposition comes to include, indeed to find its paradigm in, religious revelation. As the Marquis de Condorcet put it, in his account of the progress of the human mind:

Il fut enfin permis de proclamer hautement ce droit si longtemps méconnu de soumettre toutes les opinions à notre propre raison, c'est-à-dire d'employer, pour saisir la vérité, le seul instrument qui nous ait été donné pour la reconnaître. Chaque homme apprit, avec une sorte d'orgueil, que la nature ne l'avait pas absolument destiné à croire sur la parole d'autrui; et la superstition de l'Antiquité, l'abaissement de la raison devant le délice d'une foi surnaturelle disparurent de la société comme de la philosophie.<sup>19</sup>

[It was finally permitted to resolutely proclaim this right, so long unrecognized, to submit all opinions to our own reason, that is to say, to employ, for seizing on the truth, the sole instrument that we

have been given for recognition. Each man learned, with a certain pride, that his nature was not absolutely destined to believe in the words of others; the superstition of antiquity and the abasement of reason before the delirium of a supernatural faith disappeared from society as from philosophy.]

Our reasoning power is here defined as autonomous and self-sufficient. Proper reason takes nothing on “faith” in any sense of the word. We might call this the principle of “self-sufficient reason.” The story of its rise and its self-emancipation comes to be seen as a kind of coming of age of humanity. As Kant put it, not long after Condorcet wrote, Enlightenment is the emergence of human beings from a state of tutelage for which they were themselves responsible, a “selbstbeschuldigte Unmündigkeit” (a self-incurred nonage). The slogan of the age was *sapere aude!* Dare to know.<sup>20</sup>

The first crucial move is that to self-sufficient reason. The second was to point to natural science as a model for the science of society, the move we see in Hobbes, for instance. I shall not pursue this further here because reductive views of social science have less credibility today, although they are, alas, still present on the scene.

This whole matter deserves much further consideration, more than I can give it here. But I am convinced that this further examination would lend even more credibility to the revisionary polysemy I am proposing here, which amounts to this: What deserve to be called secularist regimes in contemporary democracy have to be conceived not primarily as bulwarks against religion but as good faith attempts to secure the three (or four) basic goals I have outlined in this chapter. And this means that they attempt to shape their institutional arrangements not to remain true to hallowed tradition but to maximize the basic goals of liberty and equality between basic beliefs.

## NOTES

1. Rajeev Bhargava, “What Is Secularism For?” in Rajeev Bargava, ed., *Secularism and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 586–552; see especially pp. 493–494 and 520 for “principled distance”; and “The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism” in T. N. Srinivasan, ed., *The Future of Secularism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 39–41.
2. José Casanova, “Nativism and the Politics of Gender in Catholicism and Islam,” in Hanna Herzog and Ann Braude, eds., *Gendered Modernities: Women, Religion, and Politics* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
3. Andrew Koppelman, personal correspondence.
4. Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States, 143 U.S. 457 at 471.
5. Christian Smith, *The Secular Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Tisa Wenger, “The God-in-the-Constitution Controversy: American Secularisms in Historical Perspective,” in Linell Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, eds., *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 87–106.
6. Marcel Gauchet, *La Religion dans la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), pp. 47–50.
7. Rousseau, who laid bare very early the logic of this idea, saw that a democratic sovereign couldn’t just be an “aggregation”; it has to be an “association,” that is, a strong collective agency, a “corps moral et collectif” (moral and collective body) with “son unité, son moi commun, sa vie et sa volonté” (its unity, its common self, its life and its will). This last term is the key one, because what gives this body its personality is a “volonté générale” (general will). *Du Contrat Social*, book 1, chapter 6.
8. I have discussed this relation in “Les Sources de l’identité moderne,” in Mikhaël Elbaz, Andrée Fortin, and Guy Laforest, eds., *Les Frontières de l’Identité: Modernité et postmodernisme au Québec* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1996), pp. 347–364.
9. “And it is this symbolic dimension of the fusion of politics and religion for the description of which the concept of ‘the political’ can properly be used.” Jürgen Habermas, “The Political,” in this volume, p. 18.
10. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
11. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 131. Of course, Habermas is right: official language in

diverse democracies must avoid certain religious references (although this shouldn't be stretched to include assembly debates), but this is not because they are specifically religious, but rather because they are not shared. It would be just as unacceptable for, say, legislation to be justified by a "whereas" clause referring to an atheist philosophy as by such a clause referring to the authority of the Bible.

12. I am not sure whether I am disagreeing with Habermas or whether the difference in formulation really amounts to a difference in practice. We both recognize contexts in which the language of the state has to respect a reserve of neutrality and others in which freedom of speech is unlimited. We differ perhaps more in our rationales than in the practice we recommend.

13. Sometimes the obligation of citizens to address their compatriots in the language of secular reason is grounded in an obligation to make one's position intelligible to them. "The self-understanding of the constitutional state has developed within the framework of a contractualist tradition that relies on "natural reason," in other words solely on public arguments to which all persons are supposed to have equal access." Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 5. But what reason is there to think that "natural reason" offered us a kind of ideological Esperanto? Were Martin Luther King's secular compatriots unable to understand what he was arguing for when he put the case for equality in biblical terms? Would more people have got the point had he invoked Kant? And besides, how does one distinguish religious from secular language? Is the Golden Rule clearly a move in either one or the other?

14. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Knopf, 2007), p. 5.

15. Ibid., p. 162.

16. Ibid., pp. 305–306.

17. Habermas is an exceptional figure; in many respects, of course, but here I want to point out that although he is a major thinker in the epistemological religion/reason distinction (for which I will criticize him), he most emphatically does *not* share the political mistrust of religion that often goes with this.

18. Charles Taylor, "Blosse Vernunft" (forthcoming).

19. Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988),

p. 225. I have learned a great deal from the interesting discussion in Vincent Descombes, *Le raisonnement de l'ours* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), pp. 163–178.

20. Immanuel Kant, "Was ist Aufklärung?" in *Kants Werke* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 13:33.

## DIALOGUE

*Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor*

CRAIG CALHOUN: Thank you both, Jürgen and Chuck, for really interesting, challenging discussions. They are similar and connected enough that I think we are discussing a common terrain, and there are enough differences that it ought to be possible to continue discussing it in fruitful ways.

I want to give Jürgen a chance to respond first, having just heard Charles. Let me pose a particular question, to start this.

Part of the burden of Charles's talk was to suggest that religion should not be considered a special case, either with regard to political discourse or with regard to reason and argumentation in general, but, rather, that religion is simply one instance of the more general challenge of diversity, including diversity in comprehensive views of the good, in Rawls's language. Therefore, analogous to the difference between utilitarians and Kantians, we may have the possibly declining difference between Episcopalians and Catholics these days.

Does this make sense to you? Would you buy this argument? If not, does it give you a chance to elaborate your position a little, to clarify why?

JÜRGEN HABERMAS: I think I understand the motivation, but I do not accept the reason that Chuck is here proposing to level a distinction which still seems to me very relevant in our context.

As to the motivation, I would immediately agree that it makes no sense to oppose one sort of reason, secular, against religious reasons on the assumption that religious reasons are coming out of a worldview which is inherently irrational. Reason is working in religious traditions, as well as in any other cultural enterprise, including science. So there is no difference on that broad cultural level of reasoning. At a general cognitive level, there is only one and the same human reason.

However, if it comes to lumping together Kantianism and utilitarianism, Hegelianism and so on with religious doctrines, then I would say there are differences in kind between reasons. One way to put it is that "secular" reasons can be expressed in a "public," or generally shared, language. This is the conventional sense that Chuck is trying to circumvent by introducing the term *official* language.

Anyhow, secular reasons in this sense belong to a context of assumptions—in this case to a philosophical approach, which is distinguished from any kind of religious tradition by the fact that it doesn't require membership in a community of believers. By using any kind of religious reasons, you are implicitly appealing to membership in a corresponding religious community. Only if one is a member and can speak in the first person from within a particular religious tradition does one share a specific kind of experience on which religious convictions and reasons depend.

To put it bluntly, the most important experience—and I'm not ranking it above or below anything else, please—arises from participation in cultic practices, in the actual performance of worshipping in which no Kantian or utilitarian has to participate in order to make a good Kantian or utilitarian argument. So it's a kind of experience that is blocked, so to say, or not taken into account, is abstracted from, once you move in the secular space of giving and taking reasons.

Secular reasons lack links to socialization in a community of one of the four or five great world religions which can be traced back to the historic person of a founder or, more generally, to historical origins. These are traditions that have been continued through the persistent interpretation of a specific doctrine. It depends on such a socialization whether one understands, for example, what it means to appeal to revealed truths. It is difficult to explain what “revelation” means without such a background. If you compare a discussion between Kantians and utilitarians with interreligious debates you face another important difference. Philosophical doctrines are not internally connected with a specific path to salvation. To follow a path to salvation means to follow, in the course of your life, an exemplary figure who draws his authority from ancient sources or testimonies.

A path to salvation is different from any kind of profane ethical life project that an individual person can attribute to herself.

Thus the evidence for religious reasons does not only depend on cognitive beliefs and their semantic nexus with other beliefs, but on existential beliefs that are rooted in the social dimension of membership, socialization, and prescribed practices.

**CHARLES TAYLOR:** A lot of very interesting points made there. I don't agree with all of them—I don't agree, particularly, about the distinction between ethics and religion. Thomas Aquinas talks about the three theological virtues, which give a different idea of what the good life is.

But anyway, let's leave that aside, because I think the really, really key issue is, what has all that got to do with discourse? If I say something like, “I'm for the rights of human beings because humans were made in the image of God”—that's something that comes out of Genesis—it's not entirely clear right off whether I'm a practicing Jew, a Catholic, a Protestant, or just somebody who thinks that this is a very meaningful thought that came out of Genesis.

I don't see how you can track this in different kinds of discourse—unless we are talking about other kinds of dialogue,

where I'm saying to you, “Well, I had this great experience, a vision of the Virgin or St. Therese” and so on. Of course, at that point, that discourse is directly related to this kind of experience. Certain kinds of discourse, if I were trying to describe to you a religious experience, would be directly related to that experience.

But the kind of discourse we're sharing—Martin Luther King had a certain discourse about the U.S. Constitution and its entailments which weren't being followed through. Then he had a very powerful Christian discourse, referring to Exodus, referring to liberation. Nobody had any trouble understanding this. They didn't have to imagine or be able to understand or conceive the deeper experiences that he might have had—the experience in the kitchen, for example, when he decided he had to go on.

How can you discriminate discourses on the basis of the deep psychological background?

I could make another story about the psychological background that Kantians have, and so on, and why they get excited by certain things which don't excite me. But what has that got to do with the discourse out there? Can people not understand it? Why discriminate on those grounds?

**HABERMAS:** The difference is that religious influences belong to a kind of family of discourse in which you do not just move within a worldview, or within a cognitive interpretation of a domain of human life, but you are speaking out, as I said, from an experience that is tied up with your membership in a community. Talk about being created in God's image is, in our tradition, easily translatable into secular propositions that others derive from the Kantian concept of autonomy or from a certain interpretation of being equipped with human rights.

But translating from one language into the other one does not mean to level the difference between types of reasons. Let me ask you whether I'm right in assuming that behind your strategy of

deflating that difference there is a defensive reaction. Do you suspect in the claim to subordinate religious reasons to public reasons in the political decision-making process the attitude of people who find that religious discourse is just not up-to-date, that it's something of the past?

This is not my attitude. What we are doing here, the two of us this afternoon, is that we both are moving in the same space of philosophical and historical or sociological reasoning. Our discourse needs no translation. However, religious speech in the political public sphere needs translation if its content should enter and affect the justification and formulation of binding political decisions that are enforceable by law. In parliaments, courts, or administrative bodies any reference to Genesis 1 should be explained, I think, in secular terms.

TAYLOR: The difference is that I'm saying you can't have translations for those kinds of references because they are the references that really touch on certain people's spiritual lives and not others'. But the same thing goes for the reference to Marx and the reference to Kant. So we are trying to look at not why we have to exclude those references for the purposes of fairness and universality but why these references had to be treated specially—and I still don't understand about the special treatment—because they belong to some kind of different domain.

I certainly agree that there are big, big differences between the reasoning of a deeply religious person about ethics and the reasoning of one who is not. There are certain conceptions of possible human transformation which are believed in by one and not by the other. That's for sure the case.

But there are analogues to this. I can have enough sympathy for the Kantian position, for instance, that I can understand the rhetoric of Kant about "the starry sky above and the moral law within" and "*Achtung für das Gesetz*," and so on. I can understand that. There's a certain experience behind that. I could imag-

ine somebody saying, "I don't understand what you're talking about. Awe and respect for the law? Are you crazy?" Some people just don't get it.

HABERMAS: I do want to save also the authentic character of religious speech in the public sphere, because I'm convinced that there might well be buried moral intuitions on the part of a secular public that can be uncovered by a moving religious speech. Listening to Martin Luther King, it does make no difference whether you are secular or not. You understand what he means.

This is not a matter on which we differ. Our difference is that, mentioned at least in the essay, there is a call for a "deeper grounding" of constitutional essentials, deeper than that in the secular terms of popular sovereignty and human rights or in "reason alone." This is our difference. There, I think, I cannot follow you because the neutral character of the "official language" you demand for formal political procedures, too, is based on a previous background consensus among citizens, however abstract and vague it may be. Without the presumption of such a consensus on constitutional essentials, citizens of a pluralist society couldn't go to the courts and appeal to specific rights or make arguments by reference to constitutional clauses in the expectation of getting a fair decision.

How can we settle this background consensus in the first place, if not within a space of neutral reasons—and "neutral" now in a peculiar sense. The reasons must be "secular" in a non-Christian sense of "secularization." Let me explain the adjective *non-Christian* in this context. In your book *A Secular Age* you have convincingly described what "secularization" once has meant from within the church. Secularization has had the meaning of tearing down the walls of the monasteries and spreading the radical commands of the Lord across the world without compromise.

But the term *secular* took on a different meaning at the very moment when subjects had to reach a political background

consensus across the boundaries of the Christian community—a background consensus in terms of which you can today appeal to a French or German court in order to solve headscarf cases. Those cases must be decided according to procedures and principles that are acceptable for Muslims and their Christian, Jewish, or secular fellow citizens alike. Since the religious legitimization of Christian kings has been substituted with a liberal one, the constitution now provides the source for reasons that are supposed to be shared not only by different religious communities but also by believers and nonbelievers alike. The constitution can provide this common platform only if it in turn can be justified in the light of such reasons that are “secular” in the modern sense. The term *secularization* no longer applies to the universalization of radical beliefs and practices across the Christian world, reaching out from the monastic centers to the profane spheres of everyday social life. Secular reasons do not expand the perspective of one’s own community, but push for mutual perspective taking so that different communities can develop a more inclusive perspective by transcending their own universe of discourse. I would like to stick to this usage of the term.

CALHOUN: Let me push back one last time. Then we’re going to be almost out of time here on this.

To accent the commonalities here, one of them seems to be that this is all about the capacity for sharing, in some sense, and, from each of you, in a setting where no one has recourse to extradiscursive power. So this is ruling out that set of issues which would involve one set of issues about religion.

It also sounds like, in fact, when Jürgen speaks of religious utterances in the public sphere, that it’s not all religious utterances that are at stake and it’s not religious motivations, but it’s specifically those justifications which are not amenable to being shared because they are based on either cultic experiences, from which many are excluded, or they are based on references to inherently nondiscursive authority, to something outside.

Am I so far fairly characterizing it? So it’s not all religious speech. In fact, religious sources for ethics and many other things come in.

But there are certain specific things, and they are problematic precisely if they produce an incapacity to share justifications.

I turn to Charles and ask, conversely, do you think that there is a similar incapacity to share and to discursively resolve the other kinds of differences that you would say are part of the same set with religious differences—cultural differences, ethnic differences, philosophical differences? The claim is going to be that there is the same sort of incapacity, in general, to find fully discursive resolutions or justifications.

TAYLOR: Yes. Think of the history of liberalism. There were attempts by very hard-bitten utilitarians to grab the language in the 1830s. This was what it was going to be all about. Also the people who weren’t necessarily religious thought, “This is a takeover. We don’t think in those ways.”

If you want an emphasis on negotiation, where we put together our charter of rights from different people, it can’t be in Benthamite language, it can’t be simply in Kantian language, it can’t be in Christian language.

What Jürgen calls “secular” I’ll call “neutral.” That’s how I see it. I see it as absolutely indispensable.

CALHOUN: But that doesn’t seem to be the heart of the difference. It seems to me that the stronger difference is that, in effect, you are saying that it is impossible to abstract from or prescind from the differences among deep commitments, comprehensive worldviews, etcetera, whether they are grounded religiously or otherwise. So the fundamental discursive issue is that you can’t abstract—enough to carry on the discourse and settle things discursively—from any of these kinds of deep constitutive commitments. So religion is not a special case.

I think, to confirm, Jürgen is saying that there are certain specific features that he sees in religious discourse which are more

completely excluded from discursive resolution, from sharing in the discursive arena. So, while there might be difficulties getting Kantians and Heideggerians to talk to each other or there might be difficulties getting people of different nationalities to talk to each other, in principle there could be a discursive resolution to the variety of problems that emerge there, but distinctively not for religious problems.

Is that right, Jürgen, or is that going too far?

HABERMAS: I'm, in the first place, maintaining that there are differences in kind between religious and secular reasons. Second, I'm maintaining that religion makes, in view of the historical transition to liberal constitutions, a difference because of the former fusion of religion with politics that had to be in view of the dissolved challenge of religious pluralism. This is the trivial part.

If it comes to a constitution-making discourse or to controversies about the interpretation of special clauses within the frame of an established constitution, I do not think that there are insurmountable obstacles. Religious members of a liberal community would know in advance that certain arguments do not count for those other believing or nonbelieving fellow citizens with whom they are trying to reach an agreement. So they have to be taken from the agenda. This is how I think about developing justice questions and differentiating them from existential, ethical, and religious ones.

CALHOUN: On that level, you're not going to be in strong disagreement, right?

TAYLOR: No, no.

CALHOUN: The disagreement is at another level.

TAYLOR: I just want to tell you one more thing. When we say "religion," we mustn't think of just Christianity. There are Buddhists, there are Hindus. A lot of the things you said don't apply to the other cases at all. That really should give us pause before we make general remarks about—

CALHOUN: Right. This is being argued from within the Western experience. There would need to be a bunch of different discussions within other historical trajectories.

TAYLOR: And they're all here now.

CALHOUN: Indeed they are. And they are us.