**At the Horizons of Modernity: Religion, Society, and Communication
in Jürgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action***

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Religion

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Abstract

      This thesis argues that a theory of religion can be constructed upon a close reading of Jürgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action.* While influential in many diverse fields of scholarly research, Habermas' thought has been relatively neglected in the area of religion, especially around the time of the above publication. I address this gap in research by (a) considering Habermas' main arguments in terms of rationality, society, and communication, (b) tying these to his engagements with the work of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, then (c) formulating a Habermasian theory of religion, before finally (d) offering both a critique and suggestions for future research.

I would like, first, to gratefully acknowledge the academic climate in the Department of Religion at the University of Manitoba. Course work with Laurence Broadhurst, Dr. Brenda Cantelo, Dr. Egil Grislis, and Dr. Johannes Wolfart encouraged my growth as a young scholar. My sincere appreciation for their encouragement and critique.

If not for the efforts of Dr. Kenneth MacKendrick and Dr. Dawne McCance, this project would never have been conceived, much less completed. Whatever promise may be found herein is due, in large part, to their efforts. Both have taught me not only how to think, but how to think again.

My gratitude, as well, to my friends who have reminded me, at times, of the pleasures beyond books and classrooms. To my housemates, B., and J., for examples of lives lived simply.

Of course, my most significant appreciation is reserved for my family. Without their love and support much less than anything here would have been even thinkable.

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Grace Towns.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>

By the title of this project, I make reference to an idea or framework readable in and through the work of German social theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1929-). In it, I wish to indicate the centrality of the concepts of society and solidarity to his work. From this social perspective, one can envision the twin horizons of religion and communication (or communicative action). The former can, I will argue, be understood as both a precursor and limiting factor to the latter, in much the same way as the disappearance of one horizon portends the appearance of another. They are neither discrete or unrelated, yet not entirely dependent upon one another. Society, in turn, can be structured by either religion or dialogue; each with its own associated benefits, costs, and risks. This is to say, in other words, that solidarity can result both through the sanctioning power and ritualized forms of self-representation found in religion, but also through the consensual, dialogical efforts of individuals. The complex relationship amongst religion, communication, and society is the overall theme developed herein.

Jürgen Habermas quite clearly stands as one of the most influential philosophers and social theorists of the twenty-first century. A member of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Habermas took up the challenge of an explanatory critique of modern-day capitalism, extending and radically reformulating the thought and intent of Max

Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In offering a defence of modernity and reason, Habermas has situated himself against the work of both post-modernists and neo-conservative thinkers.[1] His thought is sprawling, complex, and thoroughly engaged with both classic sociological concerns and contemporary political events. The range of Habermas' research interests is incredibly vast; a partial list would have to include, at the least, analytic philosophy, sociology, pragmatism, Marxism, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, democracy, science, law, and, of course, language and communication.

Given the breadth of Habermas' engagements, it is no surprise to find his work engaged with by scholars working in many diverse fields. Yet, it is only relatively recently that Habermas' thought has been investigated from the context of religion. While theologians led the initial forays, those working within the academic study of religion have, of late, taken increasing interest in Habermas. No doubt it is difficult, at best, to identify a signature work from a many-decades career. Even so, Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987) warrants careful consideration. In it, he developed the communicative framework from out of which came many of his theoretical and political engagements. For the most part, however, there has been relatively scant attention paid to place of religion in these two volumes. My intent in this project is to address, to whatever degree possible, this deficit of scholarship.

To reconstruct a theory of religion from *The Theory of Communicative Action* (TCA) requires significant preparatory effort. Habermas' style of thought and presentation, his engagements with the work of dozens of influential thinkers, and the

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1   In fact, Habermas often groups the two together, arguing that postmodernism is a thinly veiled form of conservatism.

overall complexity of his theorization all mitigate against the utility (or even possibility) of a simplistic treatment. With this in mind, I have four interrelated and interdependent goals. First, I will begin with a review of the more important themes and arguments from *TCA*. I aim to highlight Habermas' understanding of modernity and reason, while also making clear his critical perspective. My approach will be to situate Habermas' thought from the perspective of both the lifeworld and system. This will occupy the first chapter. In the second, I will begin to articulate Habermas' readings of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. Both are generally considered classical, even canonical figures in the history of sociology. In both, too, are detailed examinations of religion and society; these examinations in turn provide much of the reflection on religion in *TCA*. Having thus drawn up a sketch of modernity, reason, and communication in the first chapter, and explicated Habermas' relevant source material in the second, it will be possible to initiate a reconstruction of a Habermasian theory of religion in the third. My goal is to understand not only how Habermas theorizes religion, but to also delineate what contemporary role(s) he accords it. Once this has been completed, I will press his theory of religion, hoping to identify both its strengths and weaknesses. Such a critical analysis will quite naturally suggest further research directions issuing from the work here.

Before proceeding directly into *TCA*, it may prove helpful to begin with a very short biographical sketch of Habermas' life and thought.[2] The purpose is both to place his work into a concrete historical context and to argue, even implicitly, for the ongoing vitality of his thought.

2 The majority of biographical detail, which is available in some form in nearly all secondary literature on Habermas, comes from Matthew G. Specter's *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (2010), Martin Beck Matuštík's *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile* (2001), and Andrew Edgar's *The Philosophy of Habermas* (2005).

Habermas was born in the small German town of Gummersbach, near Dusseldorf, in 1929. His early education and upbringing were largely provincial in character. As one might expect, the events of the Second World War, and the revelations reverberating from it, had a profound influence on Habermas' thought. As a young man, he was a part of the Hitler Youth Movement. This group, comprised of males ages 14-18, was designed to inculcate the values of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazis, into the generation at that time coming of age. With the end of the war, Habermas became increasingly aware of the distorted and violent nature of the ideology into which he had been sociated. This, as he has remarked more than once, had the effect of turning his thought towards matters of political and ideological concern.

In 1954 Habermas completed his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Bonn, with a thesis translated as "The Absolute and History: On the Schism in Schelling's Thought." By this point, however, he had already garnered substantial academic and political attention. In 1953, Habermas reviewed Martin Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. For several years, preceding this publication, Habermas was a self-avowed Heideggerian thinker.[3] Yet, Heidegger's reproduction, unedited, of his infamous Marburg Address was of significant concern for Habermas. To Habermas, it was emblematic of a post-war Germany's inability to acknowledge and process the horrors of the Holocaust. Furthermore, it instilled in him the conviction that one's philosophy was never entirely distinct from one's political commitments.

In 1956, Habermas became a research assistant to Theodor Adorno at the Johann

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3   Matuštík, Martin Beck. *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littleman Publishers, 2001), 13.

Wolfgang Goethe University. He served in this capacity for three years. Although Habermas worked with both Adorno, Horkheimer, as well as Herbert Marcuse, he opted to complete his habilitation, in Marburg, with Wolfgang Abendroth. The translated title of this piece is "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere." From 1961 on, Habermas has been employed full-time at a variety of universities, both in Germany and the United States. With the publication of *TCA*, a reconfiguration of Habermas' thought was complete. While not entirely foregoing psychoanalytical concepts and terminology (and certainly not Marxian social theory and critique), Habermas did move his work much more fully into the area of language and communication. Since that time, he has engaged in a wide variety of political and academic discussions, all connected to, and issuing from, in some way, the framework developed in *TCA*.

While Habermas' thought has consistently been open to revision, his defence of the Enlightenment and reason has remained steadfast. Some of Habermas' more famous debates or dialogues with renowned intellectual figures include Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Rawls, and Pope Benedict XVI (as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger at the time). These debates, while occasionally heated, were also marked by a great deal of mutual respect, even in the cases of ostensibly irreconcilable theoretical positions. Additionally, Habermas continues to involve himself in the political sphere, both at the level of national German issues, as well as on a global stage. His interests continue to focus not only on the classical, but also the (very) contemporary; he has published books and articles on, among other topics, genetic engineering, fundamentalism, and terrorism.

With an abbreviated sketch of Habermas' life and work complete, it is possible to make initial forays into the difficult yet rewarding arguments of *TCA*.

<u>Chapter I</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

The vast quantity of themes, arguments, and critical engagement with the works of thinkers, both canonical and contemporary, marks Jürgen Habermas' two-volume *The Theory of Communicative Action* as an impressive yet intimidating intellectual project. One of Habermas' primary intentions, which underlies the myriad encounters and excursuses throughout the work, is the attempt to provide a systematic narrative of Western modernity developed around an account of the differentiation of substantive reason.[4] In line with the goals of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, such an account aims at both explanation and critique. While Habermas is largely sympathetic to the Enlightenment and to rationality, he does not not discount the social and systemic pathologies that have come with a capitalist rationalization of Western societies. In other words, Habermas holds that rationalization *per se* does not inevitably result in the conditions for a just and equitable life.

While it may be almost a truism to note, the interplay of modernity and religion is

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4   By substantive reason, I mean to indicate a (hypothetical) image of reason prior to dissolution into differing modalities (instrumental, strategic, communicative, and so on).

complex – at times this interaction is mutually supportive, while at others it is clearly antagonistic. Clearly, modernizing forces have often destroyed traditional ways of life, an effect from which religion has not been entirely sheltered. At the same time, religious protests, whether violent or intellectual, have called the Enlightenment to task, often on the values it set itself. For all his systematicity, Habermas provides no clear, satisfying account of religion anywhere within *TCA*. Rather, religion appears sporadically, though most powerfully in his encounters with Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920). If a reconstruction of the theory of religion underlying *TCA* is possible, then it must proceed by way not only of Durkheim and Weber, but also within the context of Habermas' larger philosophical project. This requires sketching the main arguments and conceptual developments of *TCA* insofar as they are relevant to religion. Of course, this approach raises the spectre of two potential risks. On the one hand, the efforts here could easily be overwhelmed in attempting to account for the enormous range of Habermas' thought. On the other hand, any attempt to distill theoretical materials comes up against the possibility of incomprehensibility or insufficiency by way of what is neglected or forgotten. Fortuitously Habermas retrospectively marked out the four key motifs to *TCA*: a theory of rationality, a theory communicative action, an account of processes of social rationalization, and an analysis of the connections between system and action theory.[5] In many ways, these will be the guiding signposts for this project.

　　　Classical social theory understands its task, in part, as the elaboration of those conditions which allow for the constitution, maintenance, and reproduction of society.

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5   Jürgen Habermas, "The Dialectics of Rationalization," in *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas,* ed. Peter Dews. (New York: Verso, 1986), 105.

Habermas' approach is in many ways commensurate, and with the considerations of scope noted above in mind, it makes sense to begin a sketch of *TCA* at this point. Two readily apparent theoretical perspectives come to mind when analyzing society in terms of its three functional requirements. One vantage surveys society vis-à-vis the actions of its constitutive agents. The other, a systems approach, understands societies as networks of interlocking and self-regulating functions which operate opaquely, in many ways, to members. A consistent trait in Habermas' theorizing evident here is the attempt to reconcile ostensibly incommensurate orientations.[6]

In understanding the development of Western modernity, especially as in comparison to other historical and geographical epochs, influential theorists from Marx to Weber to Adorno have focused upon the underlying role of rationality. For these thinkers, as well as for Habermas, rationality and modernity are inextricably intertwined. In some cases reason is valorized to such an extent that all increases in knowledge and productive capacities are considered progressive. Science becomes the expression *par excellence* of all knowledge. On the other hand, conservative philosophies of society tend to view the destruction of traditional life-forms in the course of rationalization as impossible to reconcile with whatever gains may also result. Both the lifeworld and system perspectives can be understood by way of rationalization.

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6 While perhaps dramatic, it would not be entirely inapt to compare Habermas' attempt to combine system and lifeworld theories with the ongoing efforts in theoretical physics to unify quantum mechanics with the theory of relativity. In both cases, each of the two perspectives is useful in various contexts; the difficulty is that they appear mutually incompatible.

<u>Society: Lifeworld Perspective</u>

Modern society, as composed of many autonomous agents, each with their own particular needs and goals, faces an especially difficult action-coordinating task.[7] For any collective to function effectively, there must be ways of negotiating competing interests and thus of avoiding potentially destructive conflict. In developing the concept of communicative rationality (and thus enlarging the possibilities of what is understood as rational), Habermas provides a way of understanding action and action coordination. This, by itself, is not unique (see, for example, Durkheim[8]), but what differentiates Habermas is the way he effects a change in paradigm, from a focus on the monological action of the isolated agent to the collaborative, dialogical efforts of many individuals. Habermas sees in society an ongoing process mediated by the communicative activity of its members, and not simply the ego-centric instrumental calculations of the strategically-oriented actor.[9]

Rationality, for Habermas, is tied to the production and expression of knowledge. People, expressions, and actions can all be more or less rational to the degree they they count as the embodiment of knowledge that is, in principle, open to critique. This critique has the purpose of linking up phenomena with underlying reasons.

Action, as understood by Habermas, is meaningful activity. This is in

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7 Chapter I here focuses more squarely on modernity ahistorically – that is, without considering the changes which have occurred over time. Chapter II, with its theme more closely related to religion, will examine Habermas' account of the rationalization processes which have lead to modernity.

8 I will investigate the nature of action coordination and solidarity in Habermas' understanding of Durkheim's thought in detail in chapter II.

9 Jürgen Habermas, "Truth and Society," in *On The Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Barbara Fultner. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 85.

contradistinction to biological instinct, which may be understood from an external and retrospective view, but is not immediately meaningful to the actor. What gives action meaning is that all forms are inherently teleological, rather than instinctual or arbitrary.[10] The various ways of achieving action goals are dependent upon differing rational modalities. To begin with, Habermas divides action into two types: non-social and social.[11] The former is the more intuitively accessible. Non-social action involves the activity of an individual actor, oriented toward specific goals, in the absence of any action coordination with other agents. It typically takes the form of a causal intervention in the objective world, where a particular goal-state is brought into being. By way of example, a carpenter building a table can proceed under an objectivating attitude, without coordinating his or her actions amongst other actors. The measure of his or her success is also objective – either the problem is or is not resolved successfully. The table is built and adequately fulfils its function, or it does not. The telos of this form of action can be measured either by the success of the intervention, or by the efficiency of the means selected in light of relevant ends.

Action cannot, of course, be entirely subsumed under the model of purposive-instrumental engagement in the objective world by autonomous agents. In many cases, and increasingly so as societies become more complex and their subsystems interdependent, individuals must take into account the actions and likely reactions of others. Here Habermas makes another important distinction. Agents can adopt two

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10 To clarify: a biological perspective may hold that instinct is teleological. This is only true for the observer or from a macro-genetic point of view. Instinct is not *immediately* recognizable as meaningful and teleological to the actor, but only in retrospection.

11 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I): Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 285.

fundamental attitudes toward social action coordination. In one case, they can treat other participants as means and seek to strategically steer the interaction in order to achieve individual goals. Interaction of this form is demarcated by a success-oriented attitude on the part of the agents. Habermas clarifies that the determination of attitude is not a psychological task in nature, but depends on the formal characteristics of communication. In the other case, agents attempt to collaboratively harmonize their action plans by way of building consensual understanding rather than through strategic manipulation.

Strategic action can proceed via linguistic or delinguistified means. In the latter case, particular media supplant linguistic utterances in order to shape action situation definitions. The two media of power and money are emblematic in this regard – much more will be said of both below. The basic idea is that these media encode and simplify much of the communicative load normally established and transmitted through dialogue. Linguistically-articulated strategic action operationalizes language such that individuals do not pursue the harmonization of situation definitions, but rather attempt to overtly or covertly steer the other participants in interaction. The strategic employment of deception offers a useful explanatory model. Here one agent deliberately misleads another as to his or her goals or intentions, such that the ostensibly shared situation definition is malformed. Where deception on the part of the speaker is unintentional (and, as such, is also self-deception) Habermas speaks of systematically distorted communication.[12]

Communicative, as opposed to strategic, action is a distinctly Habermasian contribution to social theory and pragmatically-oriented linguistic analysis. At heart, it is characterized by the communicative efforts of two or more participants to construct

12 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 333.

mutual understanding and consensual action plans. Communicative action is, in a sense more complicated and also more risky than strategic action. Coordination of action by more than one individual obviously requires greater interpretive and communicative efforts on the parts of agents. A distinguishing feature of communicative action is that all agents pursue the goal of coordination without conscious or unconscious strategic reservation. To unpack this action complex requires an introduction to several clarifying analytical concepts.

Habermas' analysis of language – in terms of how agents can come to share situation definitions – is pragmatic in orientation. It is not focused so much on reconstructing the meaning of isolated sentences, but rather in understanding how language is used in everyday communication. A significant conceptual tool Habermas refines in light of this pursuit is speech act theory.

Speech act theory was originally developed by John Austin (1911-1960) and further refined in the work of John Searle (1932-). The guiding intuition is that in speaking, individuals are doing something in the world. That is, speech (or communication, more generally) is a form of action rather than one solely of representation. In some cases speech acts are institutionally bound. We can say that, in this case, they have a normatively-pregiven and institutionally-secured basis and follow certain well-rehearsed patterns. Examples of these forms of speech acts include, but are not limited to, marrying, divorcing, and baptizing. All find backing in legal and religious/cultural codes. Other speech acts take place without the warrant drawn from institutional security, such as agreeing, promising, threatening, and so on.

Drawing on Searle's work, Habermas clarifies components that structure speech acts: the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary elements. The locutionary aspect of speech reflects its representative function: the speaker says something about the world.[13] The illocutionary component, by contrast, establishes the modality of the speech act, typically captured in verbs such as "threatens", "promises", "intends", and so on.[14] It is, in other words, the action character. Finally, through the perlocutionary element a speaker "produces an effect on the hearer."[15] All speech acts produce *some* effect on a hearer. In many cases these effects are incidental to the conversation; in others, perlocutionary effects are put in play as part of strategic communication. A speaker may, for example, make an ostensibly constative statement with the perlocutionary intent of obliquely proffering a warning.

Crucial for Habermas is that all speech acts can be accepted or rejected by participants in dialogue. Part of Habermas' formal pragmatics is identifying the bases upon which rejection may take place. The converse – the acceptance of speech acts – is clearly the normal case in communication. Here two or more agents provisionally agree (most often implicitly) that they understand a situation in a basically commensurate way. That is, nothing strikes any of the individuals as being sufficiently problematic that dialogue cannot immediately continue. If, on the other hand, the rejection of speech acts was the general case, then dialogue would be marked by far more rupture and the corresponding need to repair (and thus continue) the discussion would, at a point, overburden the communicative competencies and energies of individuals.

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13 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 288.
14 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 289.
15 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 289.

In rejection, one or more aspects of a speech act are sufficiently problematic that explication, revision, or withdrawal of the contested statement becomes necessary before communication can continue. In this way, communicative challenges represent learning opportunities, insofar as learning is the disruption of familiar experience and the opportunity to revise existing interpretations and positions. Habermas identifies four structual ways for speech acts to fail. The first and the most immediately recognizable is when a linguistic utterance violates the particular grammatical structure of its language of expression. Such a failure can come about accidentally, when for example a speaker is not paying sufficient attention to his or her speech, or in a more pathological manifestation, such as when an individual utilizes language in a privatized or idiosyncratic manner. Such is often the case, for example, when an individual experiences a psychotic episode. In all of these cases the utterance is unintelligible to hearers. The remedy for this type of speech failure is a rephrasing of the original expression or its withdrawal. A commensurate breakdown occurs when the speech act presupposes knowledge on the part of a recipient that he or she does not, in fact, possess. Here an expression remains opaque until additional supporting details are volunteered.

A second and less trivially amendable form of communicative breakdown occurs when the objective truth of an element of a speech act is contested. A constative speech act, such as "there is an apple on the table" fails when agents disagree that the objective world is being accurately represented in the speech act (for example, if the tabletop appears empty or one agent misrecognizes an object). Because participants in communication do not understand their situations in the same way, it is not possible to

negotiate plans of action in concert. Before this can happen, the dialogue needs to be repaired. In the example above, redress might take the form of withdrawal (where the speaker admits that he/she made a mistake) or clarification (such as when the speaker redirects a hearer's attention to another table). Habermas calls argumentative attempts to clarify the truth content of speech acts, as exemplified in constative expressions, theoretical discourse. Discourse is an important concept in Habermas' thought. At the minimum, it refers to the hypothetical suspension and argumentative consideration of a validity claim. Knowledge that is successfully expressed in constative speech is culturally-transmitted as technologies, strategies and theories and are often understood as part of the domain of the sciences.[16]

The third and penultimate way that speech acts can fail is when one or more of the participants violates an existing normative context in the course of dialogue. There are clearly types of speech (such as orders and commands) that are appropriate only within particular contexts. We might imagine the case where a new worker issues a direct command to a supervisor. In many cases, vocational and social culture would dictate that the authority to direct flows downwards and, as such, the worker is contravening an established normative standard. Discourse then focuses on either elucidating the contravened normative standard (for the benefit of the new worker, in this case), or in defending or critiquing the legitimacy of the standard to guide action in the particular situation. Unless this normative standard is itself reified to such an extent that the speaker views it as inviolable and beyond the reach of debate, dialogue may be repaired through what Habermas calls practical discourse. The outcomes of practical discourse

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16 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 334.

are stored and transmitted through legal and moral representations.[17] Normatively-regulated speech acts refer to the intersubjective world of agents – in distinction to constative expressions, which link up with the objective world.[18]

The final aspect of a speech act which is immediately contestable occurs when a hearer doubts the sincerity of a speaker's claim. This claim is different from truth: here the focus is not on whether an expression aligns with the objective world (truth), but rather whether the speech act is consonant with the speaker's *intentions*. For example, a speaker may promise to fulfil a particular task, even while being cognisant that this task is for him or her impossible. In many cases, this amounts to strategic action. Sincerity means that the speaker's interior subjective state, to which he or she alone has privileged access, runs parallel to the manifest intent of the speech act. Unlike the previous aspects, sincerity has no immediate, external verifying referent. Instead, sincerity can only be checked against the consistency of a speaking subject's actions in light of expressed preferences or plans. Sincerity is exemplified in art and art criticism, especially when art is not intended to reproduce reality, but to express one's particular reaction or interpretation.

Habermas has devoted significant attention to discourse, culminating in a discursive moral theory.[19] Discourse characterizes certain forms of argumentation where problematic validity claims are provisionally withdrawn and considered in a hypothetical light. Because discourse is rationally communicative in nature, its resolution comes

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17 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 334.
18 The concept of a world, for Habermas, is of analytical rather than empirical significance.
19 See, for example, Habermas' *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990), *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (1994), and *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1998).

about from the force of the better argument. Power differentials are ideally neutralized in respect to an ideal speech situation, as consensus comes about from the acceptance of all affected (or potentially affected) by the claim under consideration. Due to its atemporal index (in that those potentially affected must include future potential participants), consensus reached through discourse is always provisional.

The ideal speech situation is the counterfactual image against which actual, real-world discourse can be measured.[20] At heart, the concept revolves around the constraints and strictures of consensual agreement. Clearly, a legitimate *consensus* cannot come about as the result of threats or sanctions. Such a case demonstrates the dynamics of force or power, not of consensually-achieved agreement. Habermas argues, too, that communication contexts and possibilities can be malformed so as to render any consensus suspect, such as one finds in the case of systematically distorted communication.[21] Moreover, consensus implies that all participants have the right to equal participation in the discourse. The ideal speech situation is characterized by symmetric rights for all parties. Participants in communication are allowed to question any assertion whatsoever, but are also expected to provide reasons for their own positions. It is the rationally-motivating force of the better argument which ultimately serves as arbiter, rather than, as noted, power or prestige.

Habermas' analysis highlights the fact that all speech acts can be contested in four dimensions: in relation to intelligibility, truth, normative rightness, and sincerity. This viewpoint is strengthened by the fact that it is comprehensible from the exterior

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20 Alternative and later formulations by Habermas positions the ideal speech situation as anticipatory: it is the context towards which communicative action strives, even as real-world dialogue often falls short.
21 Habermas, "Truth and Society," 97.

perspective of the social scientist while at the same time being at least implicitly familiar to the actor in the course of his or her daily communicative experience. No doubt all sociated individuals can recall instances where communication was threatened by lapses in at least one of the identified aspects of speech acts. More than this, though, Habermas makes the significant claims that all speech acts simultaneously fulfil, or rely on the expectation of fulfilment, of each of the four aspects mentioned above. Before turning to an explication of this bold claim, it is necessary to further comment on the aspect of speech acts – or validity claims – which play, for Habermas' communicative action, a significant role.

To the degree that an agent is initiating or continuing dialogue with the purpose of reaching understanding, he or she is unavoidably raising simultaneous validity claims, to intelligibility, truth, normative rightness and sincerity with his or her speech act.[22] In communication orientated to reaching understanding, agents not only raises these claims, but operate under the at least implicit expectation that others do as well. The overall result gives this type of communication a rational, cognitive basis. This rational substrate is the result of the criticizability of each of the validity claims. Due to the reciprocity of the assumption of validity claims made under speech oriented to mutual understanding, Habermas considers validity claims to have a binding force.

To anyone familiar with and sensitive to the critique of modern social scientific theory's tendency to overstep its bounds, an immediate objection to Habermas' position becomes evident. At heart, knowledge becomes the product of communicatively-

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22 Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society,*
    trans. Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Polity Press, 1991), 2.

achieved consensus. Understanding means understanding in the same way. Difference

then becomes a problem to be resolved. Elements of Habermas' ideas on consensus

formation are procedurally similar to the moral theories of both Immanuel Kant and John

Rawls. For Kant, moral theory relied upon the monological imagination of other agents'

needs and desires. With Rawls there are other agents – but they have become identical as

all factors that distinguish their individuality have been effaced. Habermas, on the other

hand, uses the lifeworld precisely to account for the productive tensions of difference.[23]

The production of knowledge – insofar as knowledge is the irruption of experience – is

possible directly in relation to the differing pre-understanding of agents bumping up

against each other.

The position that speech acts oriented to mutual understanding inherently

establish all four validity claims is not necessarily obvious. In normal cases of

communicative breakdown, one particular element of the speech act is thematized and

defused in a corresponding form of argumentation. Starting from a relatively simple

constative speech act, it will be possible to demonstrate the implication of all four

validity claims. Consider the earlier statement that "there is an apple on the table." The

truth claim has already been considered but needs to be clarified in one respect: in non-

constative speech, Habermas argues, there are inescapable ontological presuppositions

which admit of truth or falsity. In the case of private or otherwise idiosyncratic and thus

unintelligible language an individual might call an apple by another name; clearly

communication will falter until some sort of linguistic reconciliation is made. Less clear

are the involvement of normative and expressive elements. In regard to the former, we

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23 Or, as I argue in the third chapter, the productive tension of *some* differences.

might consider how the statement is only appropriate in certain contexts: it is trivial to construct examples where any symbolic expression would either be contextually opaque (say, yelling an assertion in a movie theatre) or would transgress a normative context (as a response in a court-of-law, for example). The expressive element is more clearly visible when considering cases of strategic action. A speaker may make the above constative claim in order to distract a hearer's attention, or to get them to notice something in the periphery. In this case the manifest (locutionary) aim does not run parallel to the covert (perlocutionary) purpose. Whereas instrumental reason is thematized along the lines of a singular validity claim (truth or efficiency), communicative reason is characterized by a more comprehensive validity basis.

Habermas' understanding of the lifeworld of communicative agents is an important consolidating concept. In its structure it is more strongly reminiscent of Gadamer's hermeneutic horizon[24] than it is of Husserl's monologically-constituted version of the same. One way of understanding Habermas' communicative action is as the continued affirmation or revision (that is, rationalization) of the diffuse contents of the lifeworld. Underlying all communication is a network of unquestioned and sustaining beliefs and expectations. In a sense, these are the non-objectivated contexts of speech or the "culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns."[25] Successful speech acts reinforce interpretive patterns and help to reproduce the lifeworld, even as they rely on the resources it provides. The overall structure is akin to a feedback loop. This helps make clear Habermas' characterization of the lifeworld as symbolically

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24 The concept of a 'horizon' is developed at length in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, a work with which Habermas was quite familiar, as is evident in the debates between the two thinkers.

25 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II): Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 124.

structured and reproduced.

When communication breaks down, an element of the lifeworld becomes thematized within the appropriate discourse.[26] As elements of the lifeworld are gradually taken up in discourse, they become revised on the basis of reasons and are thus rationalized. It is the reflexive characteristic of the lifeworld, in that individuals both 'feed' the lifeworld and draw their communicative competencies from it, that makes it an important element in social integration. As more and more of the lifeworld is taken up in discourse and held against the standards of truth, rightness, and sincerity, it becomes correspondingly rationalized. The historical-theoretical process of rationalization is inextricably tied to contributions from religious/metaphysical worldviews, according to Habermas, and will be examined in detail in the proceeding chapter.

Framing the generation and maintenance of society within the context of strategic and communicative forms of action has a number of advantages. It provides an explanatory framework that is comprehensible to the social scientist, while at the same time is at least intuitively familiar from within. Moreover, it highlights the need for a more widely-encompassing understanding of rationality which cannot be subsumed under purposive intervention in the objective world. Yet, what it does not adequately account for are those areas of society which appear to function without the communicative guidance of individuals. These areas appear, from the perspective of sociated actors, as largely autonomous and even inscrutable. It is Habermas' engagement with systems

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26 Habermas sides against the sceptical position of the lifeworld become problematized in its entirety. This is not simply an issue of the immense enormity of the lifeworld. Instead, it is primarily because a segment of the lifeworld can *only* become problematized within a language. This requires a sceptical position to (implicitly) accept at least some portion of the lifeworld if he or she is to articulate a critical claim. The thorough-going sceptic can only relinquish the lifeworld's claim by lapsing into utter silence and giving up the possibility of all symbolic expression.

theory which not only helps to round out the explanatory thrust of his project, but provides much of the material for his critical analysis of modernity, especially in terms of the increasingly one-sided relationship between system and lifeworld.

Society: Systems Perspective

As mentioned above, one of the advantages of Habermas' account of society as communicatively generated, structured, and reproduced is that it is intuitively recognizable to socialized individuals living therein. In negotiating daily life, we often operate communicatively, without consciously adopting such a perspective. This sheds light on the degree to which language, communication, and socialization are intertwined. What are not captured, however, are the various ways that society functions in a largely opaque fashion. Significant functional segments of modern collectives can appear to operate autonomously from the perspective of actors, divorced from their communicative action and normative orientations. Whereas communicative theory focuses on the action orientations adopted by participants, systems theory largely disregards individuals as such, focusing instead on a macro-perspective of society and actors, bypassing or ignoring their motives and moving directly into action consequences.

A systems-theoretical approach offers Habermas the necessary tools to complement his communicative social theory. This approach derives from Habermas' encounter with and reaction to the work of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998). The basic idea of systems theory is to conceive of society as a

bounded system, a self-maintaining unity with abstract rules serving particular functional needs. These needs are categorized under the AGIL schema, and are comprised of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. These will be explicated more fully below.

The general nature of systems theory can be demonstrated in a relatively straightforward fashion by way of an imaginative comparison of early and modern societies. In small, relatively technologically-naive social groups, one expects to find a low degree of social differentiation, coupled with a correspondingly high degree of social integration. Populations tends to be extremely limited in size. Such societies are typically organized around the kinship system.[27] Individuals come to find their place in society, and to understand society as meaningful - in other words, undergo processes of socialization - through family ties and by way of marriage.[28] Marriage (and gift exchange) tend to be the typical method by which these small-scale societies grow. Members of these limited collectives most often know each other and have a high degree of common experience of the world. They rely on each other in very obvious and very direct fashion. For these reasons, individuals tend to interact communicatively[29] rather than adopting more directly objectifying, strategic orientations.[30] Since there is not yet the differentiation of value spheres and vocational and knowledge -based specialization, there tends to be a restricted variety of roles for community members to fulfil. Families serve integrative, educational, organizational, and economic roles within the group vis-à-

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27 Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 18.
28 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 157.
29 Habermas makes this claim, but it may make more sense to call the interaction proto-communicative, since, on his account, actors are not yet capable of making the basic conceptual differentiations necessary for true communicative action.
30 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 157.

vis the kinship system. What differentiation does exists comes about through kinship, and is secured by way of age, sex, and family line.[31]

The advantages of this type of social formation and organization are numerous. Commonly shared mythic (and later, religious) interpretations ensure a high degree of social integration and an environment rich in meaning. Narratives, carried through orally or in written form, provide compelling responses to existential questions. Stability is high and there is a low potential for anomie. As societies grower larger and more complex, however, the range of problems to which they must respond successfully also grows larger and more complex. A brief discussion of the AGIL schema mentioned above will help illustrate the general sorts of problems societies encounter. One basic, guiding intuition of systems theory is that societies evolve in two interdependent ways: through growth and differentiation. Growth can refer to changes in population size, territorial control, and technological utilization of resources. Differentiation generally points toward the increasingly specialized functional specification of system units, whether individual or institutional.

Habermas, following his reading of Parsons, understands societies as systems operating within an environment. This boundary exerts pressure on the system in a multitude of ways, and the system must find ways of maintaining its integrity against the environment.[32] Examples of external pressure may include, but are not exhausted by, limited resource availability, climate changes, aggression from neighbouring social groups, and natural disasters. Pressures also result from internal conditions. Here we

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31 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 159.
32 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 238.

might consider anomie or social disintegration, pollution and environmental degradation, loss of traditions securing individual or collective identity, and so on. In both cases, institutions and practices arises within society to channel and release these pressures, or face the threat of crisis or system breakdown. According to Habermas, system crises can take economic, political, or socio-cultural forms.[33] The AGIL schema defines the various roles that systems must perform if they are to head off these crisis tendencies. Adaptation refers to the ability (or inability) of a system to respond to its environment and correspondingly adjust its internal goal states. Goal states are dependent upon resources available from the environment and usually refer to a degree of system equilibrium or stability. Goal attainment, like adaptation, is an external concern for systems, insofar as it marks the relationship between the system and its external environment. Goal attainment is also related to adaptation in that it refers to the assessment and setting of particular goal values or states for the system. Of course, a system has not only an external environment, but an internal one as well. Integration is understood as the system necessity for solidarity among actors. This solidarity is anchored through social norms and ensures the capacity of the system to function in a more-or-less unified way. Finally, latency (or pattern maintenance) refers to the reproduction and retention of integration. Both latency and integration are anchored through socializing institutions, such as religious interpretations, schools, family systems, and tradition. It is interesting to note that these roles are specified in a very abstract manner. They simply mark out the particulate needs of a (social) system as such, without specifying in advance how they will be met. Form, in this presentation, takes precedence over content. This abstraction

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33 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 45-50.

allows the systems model to be applied to widely varying historical periods and societies.

Societies can grow more complex through population expansion and by way of greater resource utilization. Crises too can serve as adaptation and learning opportunities writ at the level of society. As these processes occur, functional social subgroups develop in order to fulfil particular, newly-necessary roles and to meet the needs detailed in the AGIL schema. Vocational roles are particularly familiar in this context, in terms of increasing material production, goal attainment, and heightened system complexity. In order for these subgroups to not only form, but to function in a stable, self-maintaining fashion, another differentiation, along the lines of authority or power must occur and to a degree not adequately satisfied by the stratification present in kinship relations. Authority becomes the locus for effective direction and organization of labour. The source of power in early stratified systems is, according to Habermas, prestige, which is linked to particular lines of familial descent, but is concretely tied to particular individuals.[34] In order for this prestige to have the power to motivate action, say in organizing a hunt or undertaking a construction project, Habermas identifies an underlying and necessary normative principle. When subordinate agents are able to recognize their needs and interests as expressed in a general will contained within directives, they can be rationally motivated to act. This is in contradistinction to the naked exercise of power sanctioned by repression or threats. While such an approach can clearly steer action, it is not as stable as coordination based upon the recognition of shared interests.

Corresponding to differentials in power and authority, cognitive structures too

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34 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 162.

become increasingly differentiated. Specialization of labour processes is predicated on the ability to make basic distinctions among forms of knowledge and to direct action accordingly. The ties between these processes and religion and myth are important for Habermas' theorizing, and will be examined in detail in the following chapter. For the time being, it suffices to note that myth consolidates the now basic separation of the true, the good, and the beautiful. As perhaps the most important background element in socialization processes, it ensures a high degree of mechanical solidarity, which is secured through values and norms.[35] As myth is translated into religion and then into an increasingly decentered and secularized understanding of the world, the nature of social solidarity begins to change. It now becomes secured by way of the interdependence of subsystems and vocational roles.

Leaving aside for the moment the specific processes that lead to the differentiation of basic value spheres, we can note that each of these values, truth, normative rightness, and the sincere expression of subjective experience, becomes instantiated in corresponding institutions. These institutions help to ensure system stability by performing the functions enumerated under the AGIL headings above. Habermas combines systems theory with the analysis of the work of Max Weber and others to chart the transition from early societies to modernity. While the exact mechanisms are only of interest here insofar as they elucidate Habermas' overall project and contribute to a reconstruction of his underlying theory of religion, it is worthwhile to note their basic trajectory. As various differentiations in vocation, authority, forms of knowledge, and system components are made, increasingly complex problem solutions

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35 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 116.

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become available, as does larger-scale social organization. Social and technological

problem solutions act in a feedback loop, providing not only new avenues for efficiency

and organization, but also posing problems of their own, which in turn need to be

addressed.

In order for systems, especially modern forms of sociality, to function efficiently,

particularly as they grow large enough that constitutive members can no longer assume

ongoing interpersonal relationships with each other, communicative action becomes

increasingly resource-intensive. Authority (legitimate or otherwise), which can partially

bypass mutually-achieved consensus, assumes some of the load. Overall, however,

communicatively-achieved consensus becomes a growth and efficiency-limiting problem.

In effect, it overloads the capacity of the system to fulfil its maintenance and growth

functions. Communicative action, as discussed, involves the establishment of

relationships and the negotiation of interest positions vis-à-vis speech acts and value

spheres. While this does point to a normative communicative core, it is also extremely

taxing on system and personal resources and energies, while also posing the continual

risk of dissensus.   Additionally, the rise of specialized knowledge increases the

communicative burden, as translation processes must occur among specialists and also to

the public. What becomes increasingly efficacious is the 'mediatization' of

communicative practice. The necessity of mediatization comes about due to the growing

rationalization of the lifeworld. The lifeworld secures consensus in advance, by way of

common understandings of situation definitions and values. As the non-consensual

sources of lifeworld reproduction (tradition, religion, encompassing worldviews) dry up,

and validity claims becomes differentiated, the contents of the lifeworld becomes increasingly subjected to processes of rationalization. What this means, in the end, is that communication requires a higher and higher degree of communicatively-achieved, rather than traditionally-presupposed, consensus. This, in turns, feeds back into overloading system capacities.

Referring back to authority anchored by prestige, as mentioned above, we have an early example of mediatization. In this context, the term refers to the tendency for some (or all) of the burden of consensus formation to be shifted from the symbolically-constituted lifeworld to delinguistified contexts. In the case of prestige, the work of coming to an understanding - increasingly difficult as the number of individuals who might participate in consensus formation rises, while the degree of homogeneous experiences is dampened - is somewhat lessened by the proclivity of participants in interaction to accord prestigious individuals a 'pre-communicative' advance.

As societies undergo more thorough differentiation and adjust to more complex forms of social arrangement, they also become organized along increasingly political, rather than strictly familial, lines. To some degree, this means the transfer of prestige from specific individuals to abstract positions. In general, media take two forms for Habermas: money and power.[36] Money and power are system-steering media by virtue of the fact that they flow through the system and guide interactions within it. They are dependent on the rationalization of the lifeworld not only by way of necessity, but also because rationalization leads to the generalization of values. As values become

36 Habermas also briefly discusses reputation and trust, which often result from professional or vocational experience and knowledge. Given that these remain tied to lifeworld contexts, unlike money and power, they are not as functionally efficient for non-communicative purposes. For this reason, Habermas' critique largely ignores them.

generalized, that is not covered in advance by tradition and tied to specific contexts, space opens up for areas of legitimate strategic action. That is, areas become marked out for 'coverage' by normative standards, and others are held only to the benchmark of positive law, which does not dictate what is correct or right, but simply what is *not* allowed. It does not take much imagination to see how this encourages a strategic approach in these domains. A hypothetical example, centred around the money media, can help make sense of Habermas' thought in this direction.

Consider the purchase of some specific market good. Most of the communicative interaction that goes on within the context of the purchase is both automatic and, from a strictly functional perspective, unnecessary. Individuals need not justify their purchases, nor are the producers of goods required to justify the sale of particular items. Prices and supply are dictated more often by the large-scale action (or inaction), instead of through dialogue. Rather than communicatively-achieved situation definitions, we have instead the simple transfer of media (which encodes something *like* a linguistically-achieved consensus) which both initiates and completes the interaction. Both buyer and seller have intrinsic motivation to approach the interaction context strategically: buyers want the lowest possible price, while sellers want the maximum realizable return. More importantly, from a systems perspective, is that money (or the transfer of money) helps to steer the system as a whole, as it defines what goods the society needs to produce, and which goods may be ignored. Money is the exemplary steering media for Habermas, more so than power. Power, which is based on the legitimate exercise of authority (or at least the presumption that, given the chance, said exercise *could* be justified) is not nearly

so calculable as money. Money can be quantified and calculated and is capable of rational investment, which more strongly ties it to conditions of strategic action. The important aspect of this view of society, though, is that it operates in a way largely divorced from both consensus-formation and also from normative standards.

One of Habermas' greatest strengths, in evidence in the dual account of systems and lifeworld perspectives, is his pragmatic realism. While communicative action has a normative core, Habermas concedes that there are significant, even necessary, benefits to be reaped from the legitimate exercise of norm-free functioning found at the systems levels. It is fairly clear to see that if the lifeworld is marked by communicative rationality, then a systems perspective is largely tied to instrumental forms of rationality. Habermas' concern is the balance between system and lifeworld. If the above has largely served the descriptive purpose of understanding his dual view of the development of Western societies and rationality, it has generally ignored his equally-important critique. Habermas' critiques have taken numerous forms; here I will focus on two: systematically-distorted communication and the colonization of the lifeworld. Both will be important in framing his understanding of religion and also in filling in his account of modernity.

Two Critical Perspectives

Earlier discussions of systematically distorted communication are largely presumed in *TCA,* yet the concept does provide an accessible and illuminating example of how communicative analysis can aid in critical social theory. We have already examined

examples of the disordering of the external organization of speech. For example, deception, ignorance, incompetence, inappropriate levels of intelligibility, and strategic obfuscation all indicate ways in which the conditions of communicative action can fail to be met, intentionally or otherwise. None of these, however, are symptomatic of systematically disorder communication (SDC), according to Habermas.[37] Instead, SDC comes about through a mismatch or pathological confusion between the internal and external organization and validity bases of speech. In other words, SDC occurs when participants in dialogue operate under the belief that the precepts of communicative action are met, when in fact one or more of the underlying validity claims is being violated.

Habermas gives the example of two partners in a dysfunctional relationship.[38] No doubt one or both partners frequently remains within a problematic relationship for pragmatic or strategic reasons, even while they recognize the lack of authenticity. What makes such a case an example from systematically distorted communication is when the partners themselves deceive not only each other, but *themselves* about the nature of their feelings. They may lack the ability or resources to form and reflect on such a realization. Their interactions (expressions of love and relationship-affirming action), then, only appear to belong to the class of communicative action, when in fact insincerity (at the least) disqualifies their relationship from this perspective.[39] Further complicating the

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37 Jürgen Habermas, "Reflections on Communicative Pathology," in *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action,* trans. Barbara Fultner. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 150.
38 Habermas, "Reflections on Communicative Pathology," 152.
39 Habermas makes the interesting point that systematically distorted communication cannot apply to the validity claim of objective truth. This is so because SDC requires actors to operate under the belief that they are engaged in legitimate communicative action. If the claim to truth is broken, that is because either the deception is strategic and thus intentional or due to a mistake. In the latter case, the

situation is that participants are unable, or at least exceedingly unlikely, to raise

potentially clarifying validity claims, given that they are operating under an assumed or

pseudo-consensus. Because SDC does not so much block dialogue as distort it, it is also

very difficult to locate and thematize.

Systematically distorted communication is not important strictly within the

confines of family situations. There are several ways in which SDC is important for a

theory of society. Habermas notes that the precise causes of SDC are difficult to

diagnose, but that research suggest dysfunctional families, in which a high degree of

power differential obtains (with correlative inability to express and satisfy individual

needs), demonstrate symptoms akin to SDC.[40] Given that families are extremely

important socializing institutions, their role in the development of SDC points towards

the difficulty of affected adult actors engaging in true communicative action later in life.

No doubt this has repercussions at levels much wider than individual functioning. If

power inequalities within families can lead to the expression of SDC characteristics, then

it is reasonable to expect that the same sort of inequity in larger social life may as well.

That is, the system itself can fail to provide socialized actors with the symbolic

expressions and cognitive perspectives to recognize the ways in which pseudo-consensus

actively replaces communicatively-achieved consensus. This is, of course, an especially

significant concern in modern democratic states. In fact, systems may evolve in such a

way to encourage the curtailment of symbolic resources, given that pseudo-consensuses

often have the function of negating the expression of resource redistribution and the

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realization of a genuine mistake is an opportunity for learning, precisely what is incapable under the
conditions of SDC.

40 Habermas, "Reflections on Communicative Pathology," 161-162.

promotion of equality. In other words, pseudo-consensus can, at a high individual cost, promote a certain kind of system stability.

Where discussions of systematically distorted communication had somewhat fallen by the wayside in *TCA*, they are augmented with concerns over the uncoupling of lifeworld and system, which ultimately leads to the colonization of the the former by the latter. In early societies, especially those organized on kinship lines, lifeworld and system were largely integrated, particularly within the family. Habermas' argument is that the relationship amongst lifeworld and system has come to express increasingly pathological effects. His colonization thesis is linked to the two delinguistified media of money and power. In the interest of brevity, I will focus on only the former. Nevertheless, it should not be difficult, having reviewed Habermas' argument on money, to understand how he links power to colonization.

The central idea of Habermas' colonization thesis is not particularly difficult to articulate. What does pose a degree of obstinacy is managing the myriad details and arguments he provides in support thereof. The development of Western modernity has had to overcome massive organizational and system-limiting challenges. One of the most effective way of accomplishing this has been to supplant selective areas of communicative action with delinguistified media, such as money. Habermas' critique is that the money (and power) medium, by virtue of its efficiency, has come to have deleterious effects on social subsystems that can only be coordinated and integrated communicatively – that is, within lifeworld contexts. We might recall that money requires neither justification or legitimation, except in the most trivial sense. This entails

that, as media, it is essentially free from normative constraints. As a method of organizing and integrating system imperatives, such a status is not inherently problematic. The concern comes from the increasing independence of subsystems (for example, families, markets, educational institutions, the military, the political establishment, and so on). As they become separated out and specialized, the connections between them, important for overall social stability and integrative functions, becomes increasingly tenuous. What comes to guide these connections, rather than communicative action, are delinguistified media.

We can see the interdependence of subsystems and the market in many cases. The modern state is legitimated through democratic procedures. Positive, enacted law, characteristic of modern statehood, legislates only what is not allowed. In this way, the market is able to operate apart from normative consideration: strategic action which does not violate legal codes is entirely permissible. In certain cases, it is even (tacitly) encouraged. Strategic action, we may recall, is premised upon efficiency and efficacy. The welfare state which attempts to ameliorate a degree of inequality through social programs, however, becomes increasingly reliant upon market mechanisms, in the form of corporate and individual taxes.[41] It further serves system goals in terms of placating class antagonisms through programs and welfare incentives, all the while leaving the root economic inequalities in place – and increasingly beyond the scope of public consideration and dialogue.[42] From the perspective of the state, individuals cannot easily be related to and treated communicatively; instead it is far more efficient to consider

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41 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 171.
42 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 347.

them under the guise of a cost/benefit schema. Labor, as the concrete, embodied action of individuals properly belongs to the lifeworld and communicative action. Under systems constraints, however, it becomes a saleable commodity like any other.[43]

The education system provides a further example of the colonization of the lifeworld. It should be readily obvious that education, perhaps more so than almost any other form of institutional socialization, ought to have a communicative core. This core could help to ensure social integration and active citizenship. Instead, the educational subsystem is increasingly under attack from system imperatives, namely money. Decisions on curricula, supplies, and training are not made primarily in consideration of student needs, but rather on system resources. This does not mean simply what is possible (that is, maximizing student learning to the limit of resource availability), but what is efficient, in terms of system imperatives. The curriculum itself becomes formulated to produce students to fill particular system (economic) needs. Family socialization processes can also be viewed in much the same way. Learning and individuation come to be shaped less by consensus and dialogue and more by way of underlying standards of performance and competition.[44]

No doubt further examples (healthcare, scientific research programmes, and so on) could be elucidated in support of the general thesis that lifeworld contexts are, in modernity, often subjected to system constraints and interests. Social interaction, integration, and reproduction have become demonstrably assimilated, though partially, to economic needs and interests and strategic action, divorced from norms and values.[45]

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43 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 306.
44 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 325.
45 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 154.

Actors become not individuals, but clients of the state, dependent upon the market, and with correspondingly altered self images and conceptions of life possibilities. The consistent theme in all of this is that the lifeworld becomes no longer the animating background of social existence, but a separated and desiccated subsystem. The consequence of this, as we can see in the above examples, is the uncoupling of interaction from language (and lifeworld contexts), where purposive-rational action comes to define interaction. In *Legitimation Crisis,* as well as *TCA*, Habermas refers to crises revolving around the loss of meaning. Meaning is lost to the degree that everyday interaction is uncoupled from lifeworld contexts; it requires less and less mutual understanding and contributes less and less back to the lifeworld. Insofar as we interact strategically, under the purview of market mechanisms, we need not understand each other any more than is required for manipulation.

Despite the harsh critiques levelled by Habermas (and we have ignored many of them here), he is not a thorough-going pessimist. He recognizes the substantial gains that have come about through processes of modernization and the rationalization of the lifeworld. For him, the project of modernity is worth a continued, if careful, pursuit. Habermas holds that there is a normative core at the heart of a rationality not restricted to its purposive manifestations, expressed in language competence and employment. While it is not necessary for our purposes to map out the challenges Habermas addresses to critical social theory, some of them are implicit in the presentation here developed. Theory must become cognisant of the differing modalities of rationality and the pathologies that result from selective processes of uptake and rationalization. If tradition

and religion can no longer ensure social integration, then it is up to a protected, (re-)vitalized but still rational lifeworld to safeguard the individual. Perhaps the single most important outcome of the differentiation of value spheres and processes of rationalization is the ability to reflectively question both tradition and the contemporary state from a perspective founded on and attentive to reasons, and open to critique and dialogue.

The place of religion in terms of socialization, integration, and the lifeworld is largely absent in the brief summary of Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* developed above. This is not to say, however, that he is entirely unaware of religion, or that he accords it only the most minimal place. Rather, the focus here has been on providing a framework in which to make a reconstruction of Habermas' theorization of religion – which occurs only implicitly in *TCA* – manifest and intelligible. In the following chapter I will begin by reviewing the basic understanding of religion evident in Habermas' source material, primarily through Weber and Durkheim, before proceeding to reconstruct an account of Habermas' understanding of religion and its place, function, meaning, and potential in Western modernity.

<u>Chapter II</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

Having surveyed Habermas' account of the interaction of the lifeworld and system through the lens of communicative action, we can now begin tracing our way into his understanding of religion. In the present chapter, I have two central tasks. In order to work up a theory of religion *qua* Habermas, I will begin by surveying his most significant and relevant engagements in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. While there are scattered references to myth and religion throughout, Habermas mostly focuses, in this vein, on the work of Max Weber (1864-1920) and Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). With this in mind, I will explore his discussions of both thinkers, focusing on the most pertinent themes in each. In Weber, this will involve an examination of the twin roles of differing responses to the problem posed by theodicy and the Protestant Ethic. For Durkheim, the focus will be on how solidarity is constituted and secured in connection with religious conceptions. This will leave me well-positioned to consolidate Habermas' various reflections on religion into a more-or-less cohesive theoretical position in the third chapter, as well as providing the opportunity for a critical appraisal of Habermas' project vis-à-vis religion.

<u>Max Weber</u>

Max Weber, born in 1864 in Erfurt, Prussia (now part of Germany), was an extremely influential thinker in the work of Habermas and many others. His main research interests revolved around explanatory accounts for the development of Occidental rationalism and modernity. Weber is most often associated with the field of sociology, though his interests were diverse. I have three interrelated goals in examining Habermas' understanding of religion by way of his engagement with Weber. First, I will review his initial point of departure: the initiating yet only partial rationalization of worldviews as expressed in differing approaches to the problem of theodicy. This, in effect, lays the framework for subsequent rationalization, often expressed here as the progressive eradication of magical elements from thought. Then I will very briefly note Habermas' critique of Weber on this point, which will connect with the ideas developed in the preceding chapter. Finally, I will examine the role Habermas and Weber accord to the Protestant Ethic in terms of anchoring a disciplined, purposive-rational orientation to conduct in all areas of life, while noting the significance this had for the development of Occidental modernity.

Theodicy

Overly broad, hasty generalizations of any form of human behaviour or action are, it would seem, almost always risky. Important differences or distinctions can be effaced

in the rush to draw general rules. This is not to say, of course, that it is impossible to note overarching tendencies – indeed, Habermas' project is premised on such a possibility. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to make the claim that traditions recognized as 'religious' nearly universally share some degree of concern with the problem of evil and inequality. By this term I mean to indicate the very human response to the all too manifest injustice of the world. Material goods and resources are not distributed in any fashion that even vaguely approximates equality. Rather, the degree of inequality has historically been so stark as to pose challenge to any notion of a just underlying order to human existence. Ideal goods, such as happiness, security, love, friendship, and especially health follow much the same pattern of uneven, apparently undeserved distribution. Of course, the converse is true: suffering, often experienced as privation or the lack of material and ideal goods, is also disproportionately allocated.

There are both psychological and social/system reason to offers explanatory account for inequality. At the level of the individual, the universe and existence can, in the worst of moments, come to appear not simply unjust, but meaningless. The risk this poses to psychological stability and functioning cannot help but be considerable. From the perspective of society, inequality poses a problem for stabilization. If the few have the most and the most have the least, the potential for explosive conflict can be expected to, at best, smoulder below the surface. This is especially so as societies come to be marked by vertical differentiations of power and influence, usually expressed in a class-based system. In both cases, there is a need to ameliorate some of the effects of unequal opportunity, often by way of an apologetic, ideologically-motivated explanation. In

reviewing Weber's account of how this need is met, Habermas makes an important (especially for us) distinction, which we will return to throughout this chapter.

Early peoples, especially those in tribal societies, organized what we might call their philosophical or experiential responses to the world by way of myth, rather than religion. I understand mythic experience here as the thoroughly penetrating, collectively-held belief that mysterious or otherwise magical forces control the universe. These forces exist immanently within everyday objects, be they living or inorganic.[46] The abstraction between a concrete force and transcendent spirit has not yet been made, nor between separate spiritual and material worlds. Both are bundled together in encompassing explanatory images and narratives. Mythic understanding of suffering links up with these immanent forces by way of public or private guilt.[47] Tragedy and suffering become the result of transgressing mythical powers in a variety of ways. In many cases, the origin of the transgression is not clear, and so is ascribed to the collective, or to the hidden trespasses of the deceitful individual. In this manner, the senselessness of injustice never becomes problematized, but is instead mitigated by way of wrathful, possessing gods or spirits and motivates the search for expiatory scapegoats.

Religion is demarcated from myth, at least in part, when those spiritual forces, gods, and demons, come to transcend concrete objects, to exist not in them, but, in a sense, behind or beyond them.[48] As nature becomes thusly 'de-magicalized', the array of options for engaging with the physical world becomes correspondingly more diverse and abstract. It becomes increasingly possible to appeal to gods with extensive domains of

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46 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 196.
47 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 201.
48 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 196.

power, or to quasi-universal principles, rather than local, restricted spirits. In this way, thought becomes more and more de-centralized and increasingly universal. This is not to say yet that it is rational; rather the scope or possibilities have been widened, if not yet fully exploited. Of course, the counterbalancing load of this shift is the possibility of increased problematization and the necessity for explanation. As gods or God is ascribed more power, there is more responsibility, and the explanatory burden becomes larger. The result of rationalization in the long run, however, is that much of this burden is shifted to the domain of science, largely or even completely devoid of religious or mythical ideas and beliefs. In such an account, even one which is admittedly simplified, theodicy is first impossible, then inevitable and necessary, and finally irrelevant.

Without the all-encompassing strictures of mythic experience, suffering can now be experienced as unjust, rather than deserved, even if the nature of this deserving is not readily apparent. A drought, for example, *can* be explained otherwise than as the result of an angry spirit responding to individual or collective transgression. The transition from myth to religion represents learning processes which are, in turn, the response to internal and external challenges. Weber views this transition as a form of rationalization. While Habermas has reservations about Weber's narrow focus on ethical rationalization (in its general exclusion of rationalization in knowledge/science, or expression/art), he largely follows the latter's narrative of the process.

Weber held that rationalization was a theme common to all world religions, though it reached its apex only in Occidental traditions.[49] [50] What spurred the

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49 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 198.
50 Weber's approach to the study of religion was comparative in nature, which is one way his work can be contrasted with that of our next thinker, Émile Durkheim.

development of religion out of myth was not simply the gradual and fateful accumulation of suffering over time. Instead, it was the clash of traditional norms, which could and had withstood the vicissitudes of natural disasters and suffering, with the fractious realities of newly stratified class societies.[51] Myth was simply too concrete and not dynamic enough to provide existentially-satisfying responses.

Responses to theodicy typically blend ontic, normative, and expressive elements in their understanding and interpretations. Weber developed various ways of schematizing the novel religious (versus mythic) responses to this problem. In the Occident, for example, there is, in a variety of tradition-specific forms, a transcendent, personal God, in comparison to the Oriental conception of an "impersonal, uncreated cosmos."[52] Given the possibility of communication with or beseeching a personal God, individuals in the former are called to be active instruments of the divine, rather than passive vessels. Related to this, the Occidental valuation of the world is essentially negative in character. The personal God may have created the world, but it remains only a pale imitation of the divine realm standing behind or beyond it. In this way, the actually-existing world can be objectified in consideration of the qualities of the perfect, sacred world.

According to Weber, rationalization occurs through disenchantment, or the eradication of magical thinking, as well as through the organization and dogmatization of knowledge. Individuals come to understand the world through more-or-less rational cognitive frameworks, amenable to objective testing and revision. Magical practices,

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51 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 201.
52 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 202.

rooted in subjective (in the sense of the individual or clan) understanding and interaction, begin to wither. An objectivated world better meets the demands of the former rationalization process, as does an individual actively searching for ways to communicate or propitiate a communicative God. Moreover, both combine to foster an attitude of mastery over the world, rather than the mystical flight from it.[53] Combining these factors results in an emphasis on active mastery of the world, rather than detached, passive contemplation.   The net effect, overall, is that the unity of thought expressed in mythical understanding begins to break up. More and more of the objective world opens up to the engaged, practical involvement of proto-scientific practice. The realm of norms finds additional breadth, too, as received patterns begin to require discursive processing. As the world becomes distilled out as a realm of moral testing and communication, so does language begin to take on increasingly differentiated roles. This, however, represents only the beginning of the role religion plays in Occidental rationalization. Next we will consider Weber's account, and Habermas' reception of, the Protestant Ethic.

The Protestant Ethic

Theodicy is one way Habermas encounters religion vis-à-vis Weber. The other is through Weber's account of the society-restructuring role of the Protestant Ethic. While Weber was not the first to develop a thesis connecting the rise of capitalism to Protestantism, his was one of the earliest and most systematic attempts to examine the nature of this connection between religion and economics.[54] In a sense, the cognitive and

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53 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 205.
54 Kippenberg, Hans G. *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* trans. Barbara Harshav. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157.

linguistic possibilities opened up by the learning challenges posed in theodicy lay the

groundwork for the rationalization effected by the Protestant Ethic. Of course, this

involves a significant temporal and cultural leap from the world of tribal, kinship-based

societies who organize their experience by way of mythic consciousness. Habermas'

point, however, is to identify those factors in social organization and interaction which

open up the possibility of new forms of response to internal and external challenges. It is

curious to note, too, that while Habermas evinces significant sympathy for the

confirmation of theory by empirical data, a degree of his early work on religion is based

on untestable, hypothetical reconstructions.[55] I consider this in greater detail in the third

chapter.

One of the central problems facing Weber (and thus Habermas) is to account not

only for the genesis of capitalism and its far-reaching effects on Western modernity, but

also the consideration of how such an economic system stabilizes itself. For Weber,

modern culture is, in part, the concrete distillations of religious histories.[56] The latter

point, on stabilization, is not trivial, given the stark differences between economics driven

through face-to-face interaction by owners of the means of production, and the

impersonal and increasingly autonomous movements of market capitalism. One way of

approaching this problem is through the interplay of interests and ideas. For new forms

of organization to both persevere and have the power to motivate, they must meet, in

some way, the material and ideal interests of individuals. At the same time, these

innovative responses must be carried forth in ideas. The Protestant Ethic represents a

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55 Whatever the validity of certain parts of Habermas' imaginative reconstructions, his later work, on
    applications of communicative rationality, is most definitely relevant and testable.
56 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, 155.

nexus of both that was, for Weber, decisive.

One of the primary existential needs met by theodicy is the translation of seemingly inscrutable injustice into meaningful experience. Injustice does not happen only externally: we are also its authors in myriad ways. If guilt is the price, then we can expect – and do – find a wealth of human responses to ameliorate or discharge this guilt. From a religious perspective, the question revolves around ascertaining one's place in this world or the next, vis-à-vis gods' or God's will. Karmic system are one method, whereby the present is retrospectively justified by way of the past. The present, in turn, defines one's station not later in the same life, but in future rebirths. The cycle of sin, atonement, and release recognizable from Catholic traditions is another theological response. The innovation of the Protestant Ethic, from the perspective of capitalism, is in linking one's moral standing with economic factors.

An omnipotent, omniscient God would, one might suppose, understand the moral trajectory of a human life, even before it has been fully lived. If this is so, then perhaps the purchase of posterior redemptory grace is limited, if not impossible. In such a case, one's salvation or eternal damnation is decided prior to any action or thought by the individual. While Calvinism, a form of Protestant Christianity, is not the only example of this understanding, it is a historically-significant manifestation, especially in the context of the Occidental world.

Predestinary belief systems also come with an intrinsic cost. If one cannot pay the moral recompense of inevitable human failing, then one is left with a degree of unending and fraught uncertainty as to one's moral standing. From the perspective of the believer,

we can expect this to be a more-or-less weighty psychological concern. It also poses problems at the level of society. The Protestant Ethic responds to this tension by linking one's economic situation, or vocational success, to one's state of divine grace. This does not mean that as one becomes more secure or prosperous one attains a greater degree of moral reconciliation. Instead, it *indicates* the degree of pre-given grace accorded the believer. The field of vocational activity thus becomes an arena for the testing of God's will and one's metaphysical future.

In attending to fundamental attitudes characteristic of various responses to the problems raised by theodicy, and in highlighting the increasingly differentiated nature of modern Occidental personality and cultural systems, Habermas is attempting to explain a pair of related concerns. On one hand, he is identifying evidence for various processes of rationalization. We will see how he continues this effort, as well, in consideration of Durkheim. On the other hand, Habermas is arguing for the efficacy and mechanism of particular causes of this rationalization. Both concerns are continued at the level of the development of the Protestant Ethic.

Even if one were able to demonstrate how particular attitudes apparent in the conduct of individuals were characteristic of growing rationality, the problem of how this attitude becomes widespread remains. Unless attitudes attain a level of general expression, as well as institutional grounding, it is difficult to say how they might have structure-forming effects at the level of culture and in political and economic domains. Habermas quite evidently holds that attitudes characteristic of purposive-rational action orientations have taken root in these diverse areas. To explain this anchoring, Habermas

adopts Weber's discussion of the Protestant Ethic, thought with a somewhat unsurprising reservation. Habermas clearly states that he considers the Protestant Ethic to be only a partial explanation for Occidental rationalization. Furthermore, he makes repeated reference to the fact that these rationalizing processes did not begin with the *widespread* anchoring of purposive-rational action orientations. Instead, he argues that rationalization could already be found within monastic and academic circles. In other words, it was largely confined to specialist boundaries. The important effect of the Protestant Ethic was to, in a sense, democratize the previously locked-up rationalization. Weber's source material, Puritan Protestant devotional texts and pastoral manuals, dating from the seventeenth century, give evidence of the movement of these attitudes and orientations beyond narrow circles to the lay public.[57]

As discussed above, Protestantism (and especially in its Calvinist forms) imposes a certain existential-psychological burden on members of the faith community. In return for increased freedom in matters of doctrinal and theological interpretation, there is the cost of the renunciation of human-mediated grace and the efficacy of individual good works. If God's grace cannot be directly earned, then at best it might be ascertained through success in profane areas of life, particularly in one's vocation.

By the phrase Protestant Ethic, Weber (and Habermas) mean to indicate a "principled, systematic and unbroken unity of an innerworldly vocational ethic with the assurance of religious salvation."[58] Adherents are called neither to ascetic poverty nor to hedonistic indulgence, but instead to the methodical conduct of life, in all areas, in search

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57 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* 160.
58 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 173.

of evidence of divine grace. Of course, a purposive-rational attitude is not the only

orientation an individual can adopt, but it does convey definite benefits to the individual

seeking assurance through economic success. Hand-in-hand with a purposive-rational

orientation is the complementary drive to systematize everyday practice.[59]   In light of the

increasingly tenuous nature of one's salvation, the desire to mitigate chance and

randomness takes on additional significance. The obvious corollaries to the two

identified features characteristic of purposive-action orientations are calculability and

predictability. Methodical, systematic conduct increases the potential for both.

This entire complex of intellectual, motivational, and psychological factors is

important for capitalism in another respect. Money is no longer inherently evil and so

asceticism loses some of its earlier attraction. At the same time, the extravagant

expenditure of resources on hedonistic goods still retains something of a prohibited

status. In other words, the acquisition and maintenance of material takes precedence over

its consumption.[60] The obvious option for surplus capital, then, becomes investment,

which is itself instrumental for the continuous economic growth upon which capitalism is

itself predicated.

There are, according to Habermas, three necessary factors for the broad

institutionalization of attitudes.[61] If these factors are present, then the attitudes can

become effectively anchored into processes of social integration, thereby ensuring their

reproduction, in the absence of other limiting factors or challenges. The three factors are

a systematizing ethic, a social subsystem or subsystems to reproduce the attitude, and

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59 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 224.
60 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* 160.
61 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 219.

finally, a matrix of compulsory protective norms to ward off both direct and indirect challenges. These three factors are mutually supportive and stabilizing. Since we have already discussed the first factor in the Protestant Ethic, I will briefly consider the other two.

An attitude cannot obtain substantial and ongoing effects if it cannot be reliably transmitted among both contemporary individuals and across subsequent generations. As purposive-rational action orientations took root and spread from vocational and entrepreneurial domains, it seems inevitable that the same attitude would come to affect the family unit. In this way, grace becomes not solely the concern of the isolated individual, but is extended among kinship relations. The success of one's children became a further sign of favour. With workers separated from the means of their employment, greater numbers of parents are forced to work outside of the home. Training also becomes specialized and requires specific credentials such that vocational skills can no longer be simply handed down to the next generation. Increasingly formal and specialized forms of schooling thus fill a supporting role. Invested surplus funds reduce economic uncertainty in the case of bequeathment. Overall, one can see how the family comes to be shaped to greater and greater degrees from concerns issuing from purposive-rational attitudes and orientations. The extension of the anchoring of the Protestant Ethic to include not only the individual but also the family unit as well was still too narrow to guarantee its widespread adoption. Religious communities, in the forms of congregations and churches, while hardly new phenomena, took on increasing relevance. Drawn not on kinship or narrow cultural lines, religious communities united

disparate individuals in the pursuit of redemption. Initially, at least, this community of common fellowship could be expected to ward off some of the deleterious social effects issuing from purposive-rational action orientations, and the alienating effects of capitalist wage labour.

Habermas, following Weber, has identified the capitalist market and legal system as exemplary expressions of modern structures of consciousness.[62] If the former provides the profane context for the disclosure of God's grace, then the latter marks the progressively secularized enshrinement of legal protection for the pursuit of the same. Contract law and formal property rights are but two examples of these buttressing functions. In turn, the modern state functions to legitimate the legal system, as the at-least ostensible expression of general will. What identifies these three institutions as rational, in part, is the way that they obligate actors to operate in a purposive-rational manner.[63]

In a very succinct passage, Weber identified the central theme of this obligation to pursue purposive-rational action, as highlighted by the increasingly narrow concentration of means.[64] This concentration better enables centralized, vertical decision-making, which in turn promotes calculability and predictability. We can see the separation of ownership, work, and means in a variety of contexts. Wage workers are dependent upon owners, soldiers upon commanders, civil servants upon governments, academics upon administrations, and so on. In each case, the means of production, whether that be equipment, arms, or decision-making processes, are separated from workers and

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62 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 217.
63 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I),* 217.
64 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I),* 218.

concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of individuals. Their labour

becomes then infinitely easier to calculate, predict, and invest. This has the beneficial

system-level effects of greater efficiency and specialization. Of course, this labour need

have nothing to do with the worker's interests or even be meaningful in itself. As labour

is broken into more and more specialized sub-tasks, the degree of boredom, malaise, and

alienation on the part of workers increases. More thorough analyses of the negative

consequences abound, though Marx and present-day labour-critique movements are

certainly exemplary in this respect.

While Weber identified the ways in which the Protestant Ethic fulfilled the initial,

necessary conditions for modernity, he was also suspicious of its long-term viability. His

basic intuition was that the value or norm-rational basis of the Protestant Ethic eventually

comes into conflict with progressively rationalized, secular attitudes. Science, religion,

and art not only separate from each other, but come to antagonistic relations. Where

initially the Protestant Ethic was normatively sustained by its connection to religious

values, this basis was eventually eroded as workers and owners took increasingly

instrumental-utilitarian attitudes to each other and to their work.[65] Individuals, too, begin

in general to relate to each other as mere means either assisting with or interfering in the

attainment of goals. This attitude erodes the environment of fellowship that at least

ostensibly obtained in the religious communities that gave birth to the Protestant Ethic.

Finally, it would be remiss to not mention Habermas' central objection to Weber,

before moving on to Durkheim. Weber set his task, at least in part, as an investigation of

modernity by way of the Protestant Ethic. His basic mistake, according to Habermas,

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65 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 241.

was in too narrowly identifying expressions of rationality. Weber too naively accepted

his present-day conditions as being synonymous with a portrait of a fully worked out

Occidental rationality and thus rationality. What he did not do, then, was to grasp the

counterfactual possibilities of rationality in modes other than the purposive-rational.

While Habermas charts several consequences of this aporia, one is of particular note here.

Weber thought the ethical system highlighted by the Protestant Ethic – but moreover, any

ethical system – to be incompatible with thorough rationalization, especially insofar as

this is characterized by the loss of religious values and meaning. Habermas is able to

maintain guarded optimism toward rationality and modernity in, among other ways, the

development of a thoroughly secularized moral theory constructed on the model of

communicative action.[66]

Émile Durkheim

Consideration of, and attention to, the work of Max Weber runs through much of

The Theory of Communicative Action. While Habermas' focus on Émile Durkheim is

somewhat more restricted, it does not occupy a correlatively marginal place in his

thought. This is hardly surprising, given the shared thematic interests of the two. Both

pay significant attention to human interaction and society in their work. Both, too, are

interested in transitions and changes in social-cultural development. Yet, given that

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66 Such an approach is hinted at in many places throughout Habermas' early work, but comes to full
   expression in his *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983).

Durkheim's thought does not pervade *TCA* to the same degree as Weber, a very brief thematic overview of selected ideas may prove helpful.[67] I will confine my discussion to three central points: Durkheim's general approach to the study of religion, his understanding of the relationship amongst individuals, society, and religion, and finally, his central concepts of the domains of the sacred and the profane.

Durkheim was born in 1858, in the town of Épinal, France, making him a chronological contemporary of Weber. Like the latter, his primary research field was sociology. Religion was one of his significant, ongoing interests, though he also produced works of sociological analysis on topics as diverse as suicide and labour. Durkheim spent much of his later working life as an academic in French academies and universities. His theorization of religion remains of interest to the present day.

The diversity of approaches to the academic study of religion can make entrance into the field a rather intimidating prospect. The vast quantity of data poses another issue, though perhaps a beneficial one, when one wishes to construct any sort of explanatory theory. If one is attempting to use empirical data to explain the origin[68] and continuing significance of religion, then the choice is either to work from the present backwards, or in the opposite direction. Moving from the present backwards presents the advantage of plentiful research phenomena, but runs the risk of incorrectly inferring logical, causative, or developmental correspondences over large temporal and cultural distances. Durkheim chose the opposite route; he sought to identify the earliest form of

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67 In addition to Habermas, I am here relying primarily on J. Samuel Preus' *Explaining Religion*, and Daniel L. Pals' *Seven Theories of Religion*.
68 Origin is is itself a potentially dubious focus. Not only is it an open question in terms of what light an origin may shine on subsequent developments, but the very concept of an originary religion may itself be illusory.

religion to assist in understanding modern instantiations and expressions. Here he took

an interesting research path: he chose to work with field reports gathered from modern-

day, but primitive[69] Australian religions characterized by totemic worship.[70] For

Durkheim, earlier societies evinced a more transparent and closer relationship between

motive and action.[71] This distance becomes larger and more opaque with greater social

and system complexity, and makes the discovery of basic cognitive categories and

experiential responses more difficult to understand and theorize than is possible when

studying early peoples. Durkheim argued that a thorough understanding of a particular

culture, in this case Australian religious cults, marked out a better approach than what he

considered to be the more superficial nature of comparative studies.[72] At any rate,

Durkheim was convinced that Australian totemic practice, centred around notions of the

sacred and the profane, offered insights into the enduring importance and function of

contemporary religion. Before turning to this dualizing demarcation, I will briefly

consider the nature of society, from the perspective of Durkheim.

When we consider the ways in which society may be constituted, two obvious

theoretical frameworks come to mind. In one, society is the aggregate of human

interaction. Society becomes the intersection of cooperation, competition, striving,

actions, and institutions. In this way, we can say that humans produce society. No doubt

there are advantages to such an account, and not only that it is the more intuitively

obvious perspective. Durkheim, generally considered a foundational figure of modern

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69 Here I will follow Durkheim's language (and Habermas' adoption thereof), even while I find the term "primitive" problematic, especially as applied to existing traditions and peoples.
70 Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105.
71 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* 149.
72 Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion,* 113.

sociology, reversed this formulation. In his understanding, society always precedes individuals. Infants are born into families, communities, religions, and cultures. It are these social parameters that shape personality in complex, often unrecognizable ways, which makes the notion of an individual meaningful. In other words, an individual can only attain distinctiveness when considered against the culture, values, and beliefs into which he or she is socialized. Understanding individuals thus becomes predicated upon the study of society. In this way, Durkheim argued for the foundational status of sociological research.

Durkheim's notion of the sacred and the profane has probably entered popular consciousness more than any other theoretical understanding of religion, with the possible exception of certain statements by Marx and basic Freudian concepts.[73] The basic idea is that those people we identify as religious understand the diverse phenomena of the world as being either sacred or profane in nature. The former is marked by, and produces or inspires, a sense of reverence, superiority, respect, and even fear. The profane, on the other hand, are all those things which make up ordinary, daily life. Most often they are either unnoticed, or so commonplace as to not occasion comment. Things which are sacred are to be kept apart, even at considerable cost, from the profane. They are almost universally forbidden, except in highly specific, ritual contexts. The essential character of the sacred is understood as transferable; ritually-enforced separation ensures the purity of each. The function of the sacred, in general, is to unite individuals into a community (or a church) through the ritualized affirmation of commonality.[74] I will

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73 Personal experience with these discussions suggests an erroneous moral connotation to Durkheim's conceptual language: that the sacred is good, the profane evil. What Durkheim intends is evidently something quite different.

74 Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 99.

explore this point further below.

Totems are generally represented as animals (or at least in animal form). They are chosen specifically by the clan (or, in some interpretations, the totem chooses them). The totem animal is considered sacred, and extended the protection of the clan, especially by way of prohibitions against hunting, killing, and eating. The key point of the totem has rather little to do with the actual living, breathing animal. What Durkheim argues is that the totem, in effect, represents the collective. In other words, the totem is the particular society rendered visible and symbolic. It is sacred in the sense that it is larger than the individual, it commands respect and imposes obligations. In calling people to responsibilities both outside of, and larger than the individual, the sacred inspires a sense of deep ambivalence rooted in the tension between the needs and desires of the group and the person. In the course of ritual observations dedicated to the totem animal, what individuals are really doing is, according to Durkheim, reaffirming their commitment to the community. More than this, too, they are (re-)creating that same community with each act. Group ceremonies help to establish and cement bonds between individuals and clans. Bound up in this sacred, totemic symbol of the collective, and its associated rites, are those values and beliefs which characterize the community in general. In the following sections, we will examine these claims in greater detail.

The Binding Force of the Sacred

Habermas utilizes Durkheim's work in two prominent ways. While reservations

can be made about both, critique will largely be suspended until the following chapter so as to focus here on explication. Habermas' first significant point of encounter with Durkheim is the former's understanding of how "even nonregulative speech acts are invested with an illocutionary force independent of normative contexts."[75] By this, I understand Habermas to mean how even those speech acts which do not directly thematize normative concerns retain the power to motivate actors and bind them to mutual cooperation. Investigating this claim will initially take us far from Durkheim, though Habermas neatly reconnects his thought with the former.

In propositionally-differentiated communicative action, we have already encountered the binding force of speech acts. In general, this force accrues to speech acts through the ability of hearer(s) to reject or otherwise require revision of underlying communicative components. Hearers can contest the truth of an assertion, the normative rightness of an illocution, or the sincerity of an expression. Accepting a speech act, at least under the strictures of communicative action, means that hearers have implicitly recognized these three components. In doing so they obligate themselves to the continuation of communication, until some utterance is sufficiently problematic so as to require communicative repair in discourse. To do otherwise would indicate goals other than mutual understanding, such as strategic manipulation. The binding effect is further strengthened when one considers that post-traditional moral consciousness is characterized by the fact that norms are held to be always open to critique and contestation; accepting a speech act (and its concomitant normative content) means at the same time reproducing and renewing the social validity of that norm.

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75 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 72.

Habermas begins his discussion by recalling the three structural components of speech acts: the propositional, the illocutionary, and the expressive. Each is highlighted in the expression of related sentences: the assertoric, performative, or expressive. He emphasizes, albeit incompletely, that each is independent of the others in consideration of underlying constitutive properties. Assertoric sentences can be criticized as true or false in purview of their relation to the objective world. Performative sentences, on the other hand, function as complementary to commands and express sustaining normative content. That is, while they cannot be true or false, they can be right or wrong – worthy of assent or rejection. For their part, expressive sentences can not be directly contested, given that they are connected only to the subjective world to which the speaker alone has privileged access. Challenges can typically come about only when a hearer notices subsequent discrepancies between expressed intent and later action.

The independence of the three components of speech acts can be further demonstrated by the nature of the relations holding amongst them.[76] Performative and expressive sentences can be transformed, without loss of semantic content, into assertions. In other words, "everything that can be said can be said in assertoric form."[77] A performative sentence can be translated into assertoric form by a change of pronoun form (for example, from "I promise to be at the cafe by noon" to "He/she promises to be at the cafe by noon"). The same holds for the mutability of expressive content into assertoric form.[78]

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76 Habermas' phrasing in this section is at times unclear. While he demonstrates structural and formal peculiarities for each component, the effect is often more strongly to show the interdependence of these modulations, rather than their exclusive independence.

77 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 66.

78 Habermas makes two interesting claims in this section. The first is that we can see the possibility of conversion of performative and expressive content directly in the way that we learn expressive and

Expressive sentences, in which the speaker gives expression to their subjective world always, according to Habermas, allow the inference of underlying beliefs (propositions) or obligations (norms). It is this connection which allow us to demarcate more clearly between the inner and outer world of a speaker. For example, the expressive sentence "I am sorry for hitting you" gives expression to an inner feeling of guilt, but at one and the same time, also a sense of obligation to a norm around the rightness/wrongness of hitting another person. Habermas holds that from an expressive speech act we can infer what the speaker might utter in a non-expressive mode. Yet, one cannot work from the opposite direction: expressive content cannot be inferred from propositional or performative content.

All of this seems rather far afield from Habermas' intention of identifying the roots of the bonding/motivating force of all speech acts prior to their propositionally-differentiated form. With his discussion of the signature properties of illocutionary speech he reconnects this excursus with the earlier concern. In some ways, the performative component of speech acts is most important to Habermas. This is not only because it involves normative (and thus motivating) content, but also because they are the most directly intersubjective insofar as they rely upon a shared social world. In expressing an illocutionary sentence (or thematizing the illocutionary component of a speech act), the speaker is forced simultaneously to take on both first and third person roles. For Durkheim, the ought of communication is to be found only in the aspect of its normative validity.[79] In communicative action, Habermas is arguing that the force of the

illocutionary communication in both first and third-person forms. The second point, important for the role Habermas accords communicative action in the reproduction of the lifeworld, is that transforming illocutionary and expressive into assertoric form marks a form of cultural knowledge production.

79 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 69.

ought is extended also to claims to truth or sincerity.

If we want to understand the roots of the ought found in validity claims and communicative action, Habermas argues that we can follow Durkheim's analysis of the binding power of a normative expression. This power is in turn rooted in the context of the demarcation of the world into sacred and profane realms. Habermas poses the hypothetical situation of a pre-linguistic (again, in the sense of propositionally-differentiated language) act, specifically that of marriage. This action could, in fact, exist prior to symbolically-mediated language, and be constituted in non-verbal form through expressive gesture. What allows the act to authorize and constitute the social function of marrying two people is that it fulfils particular culturally-specific conditions, which are themselves rooted in notions of the sacred.[80] The connection of social acts (such as marrying) to the realm of the sacred is further evident, holds Habermas, in light of their ceremonial nature, and in the fact that the ceremony itself is only held to be legitimate when it fulfils a valid norm.

For Durkheim, we might recall, the sacred is by nature the projection of the ideal of a collective. This ideal serves the function of stabilizing group identity, all the while the concrete facts of reality feedback in the specific form the projected ideal itself takes. That is, ideals mediate between reality and goals/images.

Durkheim gives primacy to normative rather than propositional content, arguing that truth derives from the idea of the good.[81] The good, drawing as it does from collective wishes and idealized self-representations in the sacred, surpasses the

80 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 69.
81 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 72.

individual. Habermas, however, revises Durkheim's formulation. He accepts that truth, as expressed in propositional content, has links to the idea of the good. The link, though, is only the idea forming the core of the normative and thus the sacred: the idea of a "supratemporal...idealized agreement."[82] Truth and the sacred extend beyond any current geographical, cultural, and temporal index. Furthermore, they surpass the individual and highlight the ongoing participation of community. What is not captured in basing truth on a model of the sacred or the good is the way it not only motivates and calls for the agreement on the part of all possible discourse participants, but also the manner in which it accords with the objectivity of experience. Whereas the sacred is in a continual, if metaphorical, battle with objective reality, truth can runs only in parallel.

 We are now in a position to more clearly state the results of Habermas' long and involved discussion. All speech act components can, as we have seen, be expressed in propositional form. Where propositions may have once been immunized from truth-critical discourse because they drew a pseudo-consensus from the realm of the sacred, they now retain only faint traces, rooted as they are in the profane. These traces show themselves in the way that the true exerts a motivating force, based on the notion of an idealized community of communication partners. It is difficult to say just what effect this very frayed tethering to religious understandings of the world may have, but Habermas is clear that rationalization involves the secularization of truth and its opening up to contestation. Of course, as a modernist looking at the past and tradition with a degree of scepticism, Habermas is keen to differentiate the reconstructed possibility of consensus and the binding power of communication in the sacred from a contemporary, secular

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82 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 72.

perspective. Religion has the power to promote action coordination in several ways. There is, of course, the binding proto-communicative power of ritual and ceremony. More than this, though, religious communities have historically held an immense degree of power and latitude to sanction (from penance to excommunication to capital punishment). Religion's power, came in part, from these features, as well as from an inner-worldly source coupling with a sense of necessity (understood as shame, guilt, and so forth) rooted in the sacred. For Habermas, it is now the ever-present possibility of rejecting a speech act and the search for mutual consensus now that ensures action motivation. Normative validity becomes differentiated to the degree that it denounces its connection to the realm of the sacred and becomes amenable to critical recognition.

The Linguistification of the Sacred

The second way that Habermas engages with Durkheim is by way of the concept of the linguistification of the sacred. The sacred foundation of the binding power of speech acts leads directly to this second concern. By the linguistification of the sacred, Habermas means something along the lines of the transference of basic lifeworld functions (including cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization) rooted in the domain of the sacred over to communicative action, premised on mutual understanding and consensus developed in language.[83]

One of Durkheim's central research interests was the various ways societies can

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83 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 107.

function as more-or-less unified wholes.[84] A distinction, which he thought critical to demarcating modern from basically primitive societies, was that between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity, characteristic of earlier social formations, is essentially an enforced unity. Societies function as unities because of the threat of external sanctions, often rooted in religious or mythical concepts of guilt and necessity.[85] Furthermore, the individual derives his or her personality directly from shared collective identities.[86] That is, the degree of difference among individuals tends to be smaller, given that there are fewer differentiating resources to draw upon, and correspondingly less latitude for individuation. With more modern societies comes a form of organic solidarity anchored, in part, through differentiated labour spheres.[87] As society becomes more complex, a greater number of increasingly specialized functions are required. In turn, individuals come to rely upon the collective efforts of many others in order for their own security and functioning. There is also a greater range of sources from which to build personal identity. This, in effect, amounts to an organic form of solidarity, secured through the intermeshing of ideas, interest, and labour roles. Habermas, taking a slightly different focus, is more interested in the solidarity-ensuring effects of communicative action. Yet, following Durkheim, he inquires after the mechanisms or processes by which the socially-integrative functions supplied by religion pass over to communicative action.[88] In other words, Habermas claims that the ritually-secured domain of the sacred gradually becomes replaced by the secularized realm of normative agreement arrived at

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84 Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 94.
85 As we have already observed, Habermas is very much in agreement with Durkheim that societies can exhibit solidarity in many ways not primarily based on the threat of sanction or punishment.
86 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 83.
87 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* 141.
88 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 77.

through forms of argumentation premised on reasons.[89]

Like Weber, both Durkheim and Habermas consider modern law to be a conspicuous example of processes of modernization. Ancient law was secured by its religious roots. Transgressions against norms ran the risk of violating taboos and engendering the wrath of the sacred. All violations had the nature of an offence or crime against the gods and were punished accordingly.[90] Ancient reparations for violations of law might take the form of re-signifying the separation of sacred and profane and thus of placating the gods by way of ritual action. Moreover, ancient law was neither easily challenged nor did it particularly allow for acceptance in a non-naive, reflective manner. Modern law, on one hand, is not entirely divorced from its religious antecedent. That this is so can be seen in the "conspicuous formalism with which [legal] contracts are concluded, [and] the ceremonies with which they are sealed" - all "reminders of the religious, noncontractual bases of the contract."[91] [92] On the other hand, modern law has clearly shed much of its religious character, the use of sacred texts to ground the honesty of disputants notwithstanding. If disenchantment has lessened or entirely obliterated the binding terror of the holy, asks Habermas, then what replaces it to obligate legal parties to a contract? A standard response to this question is that modern law is at least as coercive as ancient law, and achieves this effect primarily through the force of legal sanction. Not surprisingly Habermas disagrees with this position, as does Durkheim.

If the sacred is the projection of an idealized group self-image, then this image

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89 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 77.
90 Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* 140.
91 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 80.
92 Habermas, following Durkheim, considers contract law to be emblematic of modern law. Given that neither are legal scholars, this position will have to be taken at face value. In the following, contract law stands for modern law more generally.

reflects something of the group's hopes, wishes, norms, and so on. From that sacred

source comes the variety of prohibitions, taboos, and ritual laws relevant to the particular

group. Since the sacred is, in a sense, the group, then we can understand the laws issuing

from it, says Habermas, as expressions of collective interest.[93] It is this tie to generalized

interest positions that replaces the sacred core for both Durkheim and Habermas. For the

former, the motivating power of the sacred is replaced by a depersonalized morality. For

Habermas, on the other hand, sacrality is rationalized into communicative practice where

"moral agreement...expresses in rational form what was always intended in the

symbolism of the holy: the generality of underlying interest."[94] This generality is ideally

assured through the communicative participation of all affected parties. That is, laws are

followed because in them we recognize something worthy of assent and acceptance: we

see our own needs and desires being expressed in collective form.

With this move, we can now better understand Habermas' idea of the

linguistification of the sacred. Religion, which once secured solidarity by way of a pre-

linguistic consensus rooted in ritual practice, undergoes dissolution as consensus becomes

not a pre-given reality, but an actually achieved phenomenon. This is especially so given

that, in democratic nations, laws and contracts are the concrete distillations of the

communicative political-legal will formation of legal persons. What is more, Habermas

defends this process as one of rationalization, by way of an interesting thought

experiment.

Habermas asks us to imagine a totally integrated society early in the history of

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93 This position appears to assume that the definition, clarification, enactment, if not the actual policing, of
   sacral laws comes about in an at least quasi-democratic fashion. Historically, it would seem far more
   likely that these laws serve, if only covertly, the interests positions of highly particularized groups.
94 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II),* 81.

human development. In such a world, the possibility of dissent is minimal. Language has not yet been sufficiently differentiated for individuals to take up critical positions due to the fusion of speech components.[95] Religion plays a conservative function, in the way it serves the purpose of interpreting collective and individual experience in light of already-existing ritual practice. The domain of experience is bifurcated into realms of the sacred and profane. Religion effects the integration of society by determining family and labour practices. Transgressions against religious codes take the form of injury to the sacred; thus all transgression has the character of sacrilege and is dealt with accordingly.

Since religion serves the function of providing pre-given interpretive schemes, experiences which conform to such schemes have the tendency to buttress the underlying religious belief system. As societies become increasingly complex, the need for increased differentiation builds a tension between the relative fixity of the religious interpretative patterns and the dynamic flow of experiential data coming from the realm of the profane. Religion can only ignore those ideas and facts with which it does not accord at its own peril. The result is that language more and more becomes responsible for processing disconsonant experiences, even as it surrenders the unity of its underlying structural components. This in turn devalues received tradition as the source of understanding and solidarity. Communicatively-achieved consensus takes over the solidarizing load traditionally handled by the sacred. As this happens, though, more and more of experience tends to open up to new communicative interpretation. Since all of these interpretative accomplishments are built upon criticizable validity claims, which in

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95 Habermas does not make the specific point here , but it appears he considers rational critique (that is, based on reasons), to require the ability to differentiate between the objective, subjective, and intersubjective worlds, and the ability to modulate one's speech acts accordingly.

turns are contingent upon reasons, we can see why Habermas considers these to be examples of processes of (communicative) rationalization. This is, in effect, part of the rationalization of the lifeworld discussed earlier.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed Habermas' understanding of religion by investigating those aspects of Max Weber's and Émile Durkheim's thought employed in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In the former, we found Weber's account of the Protestant Ethic's role in anchoring motivational structures instrumental for the growth of capitalism. Furthermore, we saw how Habermas understands this as a form of rationalization. The Protestant Ethic, however, was in turn partially reliant upon responses to the problem of theodicy which gave evidence of differing basic attitudes to, and valuations of, the world. Looking to Durkheim, Habermas locates the origin of the binding force of communicative action in pre-linguistic religious consensus rooted in notions of the sacred. Finally, we examined how Habermas narrates the transition from religious to communicative consensus as, once again, a process of rationalization. In the following chapter, I will use these discussions to reconstruct a theory of religion underlying Habermas' thought, built largely upon his readings of Weber and Durkheim. To supplement this I will also consider the additional scattered comments on religion found in *TCA,* along with remarks made in other chronologically contemporary works.

Following this, I will conclude the third chapter with a set of critical commentaries on

what I think are the weaknesses and under-theorizations of religion in Habermas' thought,

and make suggestion for new, productive discussions and investigations.

Introduction

Having canvassed Habermas' theory of communicative rationality and then proceeded to his engagement with Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, we are now in a position to attempt to construct a theory of religion underlying *The Theory of Communicative Action*. While there are numerous diverse strands that remain to be attended to, two overarching concerns will guide this final chapter. One, as noted, will be to present a coherent and plausible Habermasian theory of religion. The other will be to probe this construction, to find those areas with structural or conceptual deficiencies, and to identify those areas left otherwise unattended. I will also briefly consider some of Habermas' comments upon religion found in more contemporary publications. This latter effort will pave the way for discussions of possible research opportunities issuing from this project.

In order to assemble a theory of religion consonant with *TCA*, it will be necessary to engage with Habermas' relevant discussions of Durkheim and Weber, but also the other relatively unsystematic, but no less suggestive, references to religion. Having thus developed a mid-career Habermasian theory of religion, I will proceed to examine

several weaknesses therein. The three main critical avenues I will pursue are Habermas'

insufficient attention paid to the problem of defining religion, his overly constrictive

understanding of how religion ought to operate in the public/political sphere, and

concerns regarding his over-estimation of reconstructive theory. I will also sound a note

of caution regarding his use of source material. Supplementing this analysis will be

commentary on what I see as Habermas' overall attitude to religion, and how it impacts

his treatment thereof. Finally, I will provide a brief discussion of what limitations

Habermas himself has identified in his earlier understanding of religion, from the

perspective of a post-*TCA* career.

Habermas has never positioned himself as a scholar of religion or theology.

Indeed, he has explained his general reluctance to move within these circles as resulting

from a lack of familiarity.[96] This fact may raise the concern of how appropriate it is to

reconstruct a theory of religion out of Habermas' thought. I would like to offer several

brief remarks to mitigate this concern before proceeding. At the most obvious level,

Habermas engages with religion in his work. By his own standards of critical

scholarship, this engagement should be open to contestation and appraisal. Furthermore,

Eduardo Mendieta has argued that religion was an ongoing concern for Habermas'

predecessors in the Frankfurt School of critical theorists, and we can expect the latter's

thought to be shaped by – if only in rejection or reformation of – the topic.[97] Finally, and

perhaps most importantly, Habermas understands his own work as a critical-explanatory

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96 Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," in *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity,* ed. Eduardo Mendieta. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 67.
97 See, for example, Mendieta's introduction to Habermas' *Religion and Rationality,* or his introduction to the collection of essays on religion issuing from the Frankfurt School entitled *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers.*

account of Western modernity. In uncountable ways, religion reverberates through modern life, from the heady issues of international politics, human rights, and global conflict, to the more easily-accessible areas of popular culture, literature, and everyday dialogue. If the *TCA* is to stand, then it must be capable of providing insight into these present-day issues.

A Habermasian Theory of Religion

I will begin my reconstruction with Habermas' reading of Weber. While the latter turns up repeatedly and influentially throughout *TCA*, he is arguably the foremost intellectual figure in the first volume. One of my central claims is that Habermas views the history of the human species as having progressed through broad stages of development, from myth, to religion, to science. Each is characterized both by particular challenges, internally or externally generated, as well as distinctive cognitive and philosophical responses and outlooks. In each is found the solution to problems which represent a progressively more refined learning capability developed at the level of society. This claim can be developed when considering Habermas' engagement with both Weber and Durkheim.

The preceding discussion, in chapter II, of Weber centred around the related topics of theodicy and the Protestant Ethic. Theodicy is a near-universal concern; in it, we might suppose, we can read the changing cognitive frameworks of diverse peoples. Basic categories and fundamental intellectual orientations are here accessible, according to

Habermas. Societies exhibiting mythical experiences of the world clearly constitute the beginning stages of social-historical evolution for Habermas. This is due to the concrete nature of their cognitive and linguistic expressions. They are not yet able to make those abstractions between word and object, between reality and ideal, and so forth, which allow for dealing with the world in an objectivating fashion. Without these, a critical or scientific understanding is not yet possible.

With the transition to religion, suffering, a main concern of theodicy, is now no longer solely the sign of individual or collective transgression of sacred edicts or norms, but comes to pose a challenge in its distinctive senselessness.[98] This calls for more sophisticated explanatory responses. Some of these responses were translated into worldviews which devalued the world and called for its active mastery. Others prioritized mystic or contemplative paths. It is the differences among these approaches that explain for Habermas, in part, the varying forms rationalization took. With religion, and especially in the Occident, came increasing possibilities for abstract thought. The will of God, universal and transcendent, was represented in principles applicable irrespective of context. The ability to separate ideas from symbols and concrete representations was a move, however partial, in the direction of a scientific understanding of the world.

With the expression of the Protestant Ethic as found in Calvinist Protestantism, we get as far as is possible, we might imagine given Habermas' presentation, from within a religious framework. Whereas the beginnings of religion point to the way(s) of

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98 Habermas is not entirely clear on whether theodicy helps prompt the development of religion, or whether religion developed separately from this concern, even as it responds.

interacting with the world in a rational manner, the Protestant Ethic, in a sense, required it. Knowledge increasingly came into order, control, systematization, and dogmatization. Magical modes of interaction with the world, inefficient at best, were progressively purged in favour of a differentiated understanding based on reasons and discursive testing. The relationship obtaining between believer and God was less and less marked by ritual and intermediaries, and more through communicative efforts – namely prayer and congregation. Basic divisions between concepts of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and the corresponding communicative modes of expressing and clarifying these, were necessitated by the drive to assure oneself of salvation. The unity of mythic thought was neither sufficiently efficient or efficacious in early modernity to retain vitality. Two institutional complexes emblematic of modernity, law and the capitalist market, were premised on the abilities of individuals to adopt these now basic distinctions.

While Durkheim's focus was somewhat different than Weber's, and his conception of religion markedly so, there are parallels in Habermas' approach and reading. In both we find an attention to evolving stages of human expression and experience, though here the changing forms of solidarity take focus.

Durkheim starts not from myth, but from religion, which he locates as originating in totemic practice. It is interesting to note that Habermas does not comment in particular depth on what, if any, cognitive significance might be identified in the ability to differentiate the world into realms of the sacred and the profane. Are these differentiations made on the basis of reasons, however private or ill-formed, or are they

wholly arbitrary? Even more interesting is the ability of community members to share

and reproduce elements of the two realms. Habermas, following Durkheim, identifies the

nature of this reproduction as being tied to repetition in ritual actions and contexts. Since

this is not yet based upon reasons or open to challenge, it is, for Habermas,

developmentally prior to modern forms of thought. Yet, the way the totem anchors

divisions amongst the sacred and the profane, while at the same time helping bind

community members together in solidarity, points to an interesting pre-linguistic mode of

action coordination.

  Religion, according to Durkheim, is a community's self-understanding made

concrete. In it are the norms, values, ideals, and wishes of the collective. Because they

do not, in the end, rely on publicly-expressible reasons which might be convincing to an

ideal, atemporalized communicative group, religion – in this form – does not allow for

communicative action. The basic logic here is that the underlying religious content of the

society is private or otherwise inaccessible to an outside observer. It relies, in the final

analysis, on belief: in the community, its goals, norms, and so forth. These beliefs, in

turn, are not understood as based on reasons held in common and developed through

argumentation, but are framed as the absolute, unquestionable dictates of gods or spiritual

beings. In other words, they do not require mutual understanding so much as obedience.

  As mentioned, an uneasy tension obtains between the realms of the sacred and the

profane. The sacred is eternal, timeless, and surpasses the authority of the individual.

What then happens when events, experiences, ideas, and so forth, from the profane world

contradict understandings rooted in the sacred? For example, flooding might be

traditionally understood as punishment for insufficient propitiation or the contradiction of a taboo. Yet, other, perhaps more compelling, explanations exist. As these explanations, which rely more and more upon reasons and evidence arise, they pose an increasingly forceful challenge to sacred explanations which rely for their ability to convince not upon better arguments, but upon force. What we have then, is the translation of these claims, rooted in the authority of the sacred, into those differentiated reasons underlying linguistic expressions characteristic of communicative action. What this seems to mean, for Habermas, is the progressive erosion of religion in favour of communication. Religion's power, rooted as it is in tradition, comes to disempowerment through the continual force of argumentation and discourse.

Throughout *TCA* and Habermas' other, roughly contemporaneous works are occasional, scattered references to and comments on religion.[99] These are particularly interesting when one is pursuing Habermas' thoughts on religion, given that they are not as tightly bound to discussions of Weber and Durkheim. Two rough grouping tendencies to these thoughts are their relation to the evolution from myth to religion to science, and to ideas focused on the possibilities of communication and validity claims.

Religion has quite clearly not been vanquished in the torrent of secularism that has at least ostensibly characterized Western modernity. Even those areas from which it has been progressively effaced bear subtle traces of religion. What indelibly characterizes the transition from religion to science (or, in some places, philosophy) for Habermas' account, is the problematization of validity claims and the increasing need for

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99 Strangely, perhaps, 'religion' is not indexed in either volume of *TCA*, or in the other roughly contemporary works by Habermas I have cited in this paper.

their discursive redemption.[100]

Norms become especially contested in post-mythic, post-religious contexts.[101] The fusion of ontic and normative elements in religious beliefs claims for traditional norms the very strong status of not only being right, but of being true as well. As language comes to be differentiated and speech acts open to challenge in terms of truth, rightness, and sincerity, so does the ability of norms to integrate individuals and collectives become imperilled. The unassailable validity of norms certified in the sacred and by the force of tradition opens into norms that are either valid by *de facto* recognition, or in the ideal validity of those deserving to be recognized.[102] What helps to insulate religious interpretations and worldviews from rational critiques is, in part, their stubborn resistance to decomposition into modally-focused validity claims open to challenge.[103] This is of course not merely a historical concern, but is a matter of debate and concern even in contemporary political and ethical discussions. In this respect, these discussions seems to focus less on the truth claim of religion, than on its pragmatic necessity. Habermas holds strongly to the idea that norms can be redeemed not only through the pseudo-consensus of religion and accustomed tradition, but through (highly-idealized) procedures of inclusive, consensual discourse based upon reasons and formed through argumentation.

Even if we are prepared to provisionally accept Habermas' depiction of a stage-

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100 Jürgen Habermas, "Objectivist and Subjectivist Approaches to Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," in *On The Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Barbara Fultner. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 11.

101 By this I mean to indicate the way in which modern law, at least in the Western world, is not explicitly premised on religious precepts or injunctions, but has been formulated and executed in secular language.

102 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 73.

103 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 193.

wise evolution of cognitive and communicative structures, we can expect to find some

analysis of religion's resistance to secularization. Habermas identifies, for example, the

contemplation of auratic art in the early modern period as straddling the line between

religion and secularity.[104] More than that, though, were the 'efforts' by religion to adapt to

those conditions imposed by a particularistic modernity. Habermas identified these in the

way that religious beliefs became increasingly shaped by argumentation, which inevitably

crystallized into renewed forms of dogmatization.[105] He suggests further that while the

basic motifs of religion became at least partially rationalized (and this process is evident

today in, for example, the Catholic Church), their basic concepts still lay at level

inaccessible to expression by differentiated validity claims.[106] For Habermas, this augers

a very dim future for religion. The survival of religion, then, perhaps consist in those

areas and norms still held generally valid for which capitalist society is unable to certify

of its own resources, but which are instead fed (self-destructively) from the remains of

tradition.[107]

Perhaps, then, we have finally arrived at a place where a tentative formulation of a

theoretical understanding of religion might be amassed upon this reading of Habermas. It

is tentative not in the sense that Habermas himself evinces an particular uncertainty or

even caution with religion, but rather because it is erected not from a straight-forward

reading, but instead from those pieces found here and there in his grand, critical-

explanatory narrative. Habermas has, so far as I can discern, no discrete definition of

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104 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 353.
105 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 189.
106 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 189.
107 Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics," 76.

religion nor reference to contemporary theorists thereof.[108] Habermas' focus is insistently upon those advantages accruing at critical historical points from the development of religion, and the ways it later becomes a hindrance to further forms of rationalization – especially of the communicative variety.

Religion for Habermas is both a solution and a problem. In breaking up the totalizing power of myth, it pointed the way to those forms of abstraction which eventually characterized the potentialities of modern thought. This is evident at a very early stage in the demarcation of the world into realms of the sacred and profane. Such a division demonstrates the ability to think past the concrete appearances of phenomena and to then build a form of life centred around supporting (and eventually universal) principles. With the advent of the Protestant Ethic – and we cannot be oblivious to the highly selective nature of Habermas' exemplars – we see the expression of attitudes corresponding to now well-anchored orientations (if to success more than mutual understanding) come to the fore. What religion does, then, is to provide an avenue of expression for responses to societal challenges which is both encompassing and motivating. Consider, for example, how threatening the prospect of capitalist organization might have appeared to those being torn from traditional life-patterns in early modernity. Religion, in a sense, blunts the trauma of new forms of labour and social organization (or more generally, experience), by tying these arrangements to answers for basic existential questions, such as one's salvation.

What provides religion with its distinctive power is also what points the way to its eventual extinction, at least from Habermas' perspective. Religious beliefs and

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108 There is, as I shall discuss below, one partial exception to this statement.

interpretations are powerful for at least two reasons. On one hand, they are undifferentiated, premised in their basic, underlying concepts on ideas of God and salvation, which fuse the speech act components into a unified whole. This gives critical reproach less purchase, as the ontic, normative, and expressive elements cannot be singularly identified for critique (from the perspective of the believer, with whom one is seeking mutual understanding). Further, assimilating each element to the other tends to buttress the whole. Secondly, and this perhaps follows Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic, the pressures purposive-rational action orientations and scientific thought exert works to erode the universality of religious worldviews. If religion can no longer compete with science for truth, law for norms, and art for expression, then it assumes more and more a subjectivized and restricted status. Religious truth is replaced by belief, which by its nature belongs to the subjective world which can, if not rebut critique, at least largely exist in conscious ignorance of it.

Such a view of religion does not come without significant consequences. Prior to modernity (in Habermas' account, if not in reality), religion played the dual functions of providing meaningful explanations of experience and of promoting social solidarity. In terms of the former, science has often provided a more compelling account, even if it is forced, in self-critical modesty, to respond agnostically to certain existential concerns. As to the latter, law has, albeit imperfectly, served as a surrogate for the coordination of action and promotion of solidarity. While religion accomplished the same goal at a pre-reflective level, it did so at the cost of coercion and the impossibility (or at least the impermissibility) of critical questioning. Modern law, by contrast (and ideally) avoids

both of these risks. It motivates not solely through the threat of penalty, but because it is understood as embodying general interests.[109] Solidarity is, or perhaps one day can be, ensured through the procedures by which it is constituted. That is, laws and norms need not reflect arbitrary, from the perspective of the outsider, divisions of the sacred and the profane, but the discursive will-formation of all affected individuals. Furthermore, modern forms of knowledge,whether ontic or normative, are characterized by their hypothetical or propositional status. That is, while their validity may be guaranteed for the groups from which they issue, this validity must constantly be renewed as new actors come to be affected. Religious positions, by contrast, are very differently constituted. Owing, as they frequently do, to either the direct or inspired will of God or worldly emissaries, they are neither temporally nor spatially restricted, nor do they require consent so much as recognition and acquiescence. Because they are private and rely upon beliefs rather than publicly articulable reasons, they are inadmissible, in this stage of Habermas' thought, from the realms of both public will-formation and legislative-judicial procedure. In that sense, then, individuals with religious beliefs must bifurcate their personalities into publicly-admissible selves and those sustaining religious values and beliefs which are relegated to the private sphere. The possibility of this is something I will consider below.

This picture of a theory of religion, *qua* Habermas, here assembled would be incomplete, including by his own (and Max Horkheimer's) standard of theorizing, without critical analysis. This latter effort will provide both additional contouring details,

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109 A critical social-economic analysis of law (in terms of its application, if not also by way of it form and structure) renders this generality highly problematic. What is new then, is at least the premise of generality.

while also noting those areas suffering from under-theorization or other conceptual weaknesses. To begin with I will consider something mentioned above: the place of definitions in theories of religion.

Critical Commentary

The Problem of Defining 'Religion'

Even within the academic study of religion, the problem of defining its focus of study remains insistent. Religion, like other concepts with a certain degree of popular currency (such as say, time) appears to be one of those terms which everyone understand the meaning of only until they attempt a definition. Definitions which invoke belief(s) in super-natural beings, probably one of the more common non-academic views of religion, run the risk of excluding traditions and practices we commonly recognize as religious, include those we do not, and of focusing on intellectual or imaginative activities at the neglect of actions and mutual understanding. As scholar of religion Bill Arnal points out, the academic situation is hardly more clear.[110]

The importance of defining religion, both in general and with reference to Habermas' project may not be immediately clear. If religion refers not to something we can either see or touch, but to a taxonomic method of grouping and understanding human activities, then its definition determines what is and what is not within the boundaries of analysis. In other words, if Habermas is to employ the term, and to offer both an analysis

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110 William E. Arnal, "Definition," in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. (New York: Continuum, 2000).

of the place of religion and an at-least implicit valuation, it is important to delineate to what those analyses and judgements refer. Furthermore, the definition of religion often has political as well as academic importance. Since the Enlightenment, religion has come to be reason's other, and the demarcation determines, in part, what can count as rational and what is excluded, in advance, from reason.[111]

With the exception of a single, tantalizing remark, Habermas never explicitly broaches the problem of definition. There, he says that "religions are said to consist of beliefs and ritual practices" in the context of a discussion of Durkheim.[112] Interestingly, Habermas goes on to critique Durkheim's understanding as being overly focused on the former, which he aligns with an enthralment by the philosophy of consciousness. This reads somewhat oddly, as Durkheim more than Weber appeared cognisant that religion was less a matter of belief, and more of ritual action and community representation. Both of these have stronger affinity to Habermas' communicative approach than a strictly cognitive orientation toward religion.

One cannot but wonder at the ease with which Habermas slides between Durkheim's understanding of religion and Weber's. At no point does Habermas problematize differing theoretical conceptions the two thinkers might have, or the possible consequences of opportunistically borrowing from each. Rather, he either assumes that their positions are commensurate, or that differences between the two are not sufficiently important to attempt a theoretical and conceptual reconciliation.

One way of thinking about different types of definitions of religion is to

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111 Arnal, "Definition", 23.
112 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)*, 50.

categorize them as either substantive or functionalist. The former selects out as important

particular beliefs or practices evident in those traditions we recognize as part of religion,

and around these builds the category. What it often fails to do is justify the importance of

these characteristics, instead taking them as self-evident.[113] Functionalist definitions, by

contrast, look to the 'work' that religion does: the personal, social, cultural, and political

functions it serves. Durkheim quite clearly fits with the latter type. For him religion

revolves around notions of solidarity and the establishment of collective self-

representations. I would argue that a Habermasian definition of religion, at least within

the context of *TCA*, would be functionalist as well. It would include some measure of the

way he understands religion to both precede and preclude communicative action, based

on its fusion of basic categories and its private nature.[114] In general, it characterizes a

lower level of rationality and communicative potential than can be found in a secularized,

differentiated modernity. Habermas' diagnosis is not entirely negative – he does accord it

a certain valuable role, but this place has long ceased to be necessary with the dissolution

of mythic consciousness.

Religion and Lifeworld and Politics

The restrictive role Habermas accords to religion has largely been filled and

surpassed. Yet, religion remains, for many, an intricate part of their lifeworld and

experience. As religious beliefs are not based upon rational reasons, they are, for

Habermas, excluded from public, political decisions. This poses what I consider to be a

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113 Arnal, "Definition," 23.

114 It is perhaps an open question whether religion is *per se* private, or whether this is simply a
consequence of (Western) rationalization.

significant problem. It is clear that Habermas is not so intolerant to suggest that religious individuals are, by nature of their beliefs, thoroughly irrational and thus incapable of contributing to the public sphere. Instead, what seems to be the case, at least from the perspective of *TCA*, is that these beliefs, and positions based upon them, ought to be relegated to the private, domestic sphere. It is, however, not entirely clear that this is either possible in actual practice or desirable in theory.

Religious beliefs form part of the invigorating, sustaining, and motivating background of life experience Habermas generally aligns with the lifeworld. For many, these beliefs and their associated practices, communities, and rituals form a complex nexus of meaning-making interpretative patterns. That is, religion is not a merely cosmetic aspect of individual personality, but is, for many, integral to their understanding and experience of selfhood. While we might imagine it possible to systematically exclude those political positions based explicitly upon religious/theological reasons, is it not also probable that these beliefs (and so forth) subtly influence the worldviews and almost all action of religious adherents? In other words, it is highly unlikely that one could entirely remove the religious components of an individual's thought; even if it were possible, one wonders precisely what would be left, and how well that would represent the individual's own self-understanding. Unless religion is to be aligned with systematically-distorted communication and thoroughly purged, then we must imagine that it is a largely irreducible component of an individual's cognitive and emotive horizon.

Supposing it is possible to carefully delineate those contributions to public will-

formation that are religious from those that are secular, and allow only the latter. The

question remains whether this would be a desirable restriction. Even if we are

sympathetic to an atheistic (or agnostic) understanding of the world, we cannot recognize

only the violence and damage wrought from religious worldviews, but must also

acknowledge its aesthetic, moral, and humanitarian contributions. Ignoring the rich fount

of resources provided by religion would amount to a social-cultural impoverishment. We

can also look to the individual actor. If religion could be safely domesticated to the

private realm, then surely agreements would be easier to reach, simply because the

degree of difference amongst individuals would be correlatively diminished. That is,

religion is one of those factors which highlights the diversity of the human species and

informs our collective contributions. This heterogeneity is not reducible to a problem

awaiting resolution, but is of inherent value.

Despite my reservations for the narrow role accorded to religion by Habermas, I

do confess a large degree of sympathy with his general intent. While I have argued that

public discussions and will-formation ought to not be ignorant of religious contributions

and thought, I generally accept Habermas' position that legislative practice and political

decision-making ought to be based upon reasons rather than belief. If the idea of a more

open, tolerant, and equitable society is not to be an always-elusive dream, then it must be

built upon foundations which are recognizable to all, not only to particular faith

communities. Yet, this society cannot come about upon the unnecessary and unfair

restriction of large portions of the population. What is needed, then, is a balance between

ensuring that agreement is reached based on reasons, while safeguarding the rights and

freedoms of expression of those individuals with religious orientations and commitments. This, I think, is a more productive direction for subsequent theory attuned to a Habermasian understanding of communication and the public sphere.

Habermas' Employment of Reconstructive Theory and Source Material

Throughout *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas utilizes a wide variety of methodological and stylistic approaches. While he avoids the aphoristic form found in some of the work issuing from the Frankfurt School, he is also not hesitant to mix short, suggestive thoughts with longer, more detailed analysis. In terms of the latter, he frequently employs a reconstructive presentation and style of thought.

Reconstructive theory, at least in Habermas' work, blends empirical data with highly speculative imaginings of past events to arrive at explanatory descriptions of the present. In some cases, these events, or stages, are indeed in the very distant (even ahistorical) past. With careful provisions and positioning, a reconstructive presentation can prove a fascinating, intellectually-productive route. It may open up entirely new ways of seeing familiar phenomena and provide a powerful investigative framework. My reservation, and this applies here only to Habermas' work with which I am familiar, is his over-estimation of the validity and explanatory power of reconstruction. Part of this concern is the way it makes the present look inevitable; as if singular causal chains exist amongst every moment of history, which can be read backward in a faithful manner. This suggests a far higher degree of continuity in human development than may actually be the case. Furthermore, reconstructive approaches – or at least Habermas' use – have a very

uneasy relationship with empirical data.

To be sure, there is a marked ambivalence in *TCA* toward empirical verification and the degree to which Habermas' theories are not only interesting and productive, but also true from a social-scientific perspective. At times, he suggests that his theory but awaits scientific confirmation. At others, he holds that parts of his work are intended more for enabling a new way of understanding than they are for aligning perfectly with the actual histories of events. One cannot but wonder, however, at the stability of a project underwritten by such an inconsistent attention to data. A more aggressive critique might ask whether such an approach is actually an attempt to immunize Habermas' thought, in advance, from critique.

In many places in his writing, Habermas refers to his interest in engaging with the work of epochal modern theorists. His intent in treating these thinkers as contemporaries by engaging their work in the context of his own interests is to simulate a virtual 'conversation'. In this he is, perhaps, relieved of the need to proceed in a fully systematic, thorough fashion. Yet, his theories must still be reliant, to some degree, on the validity of his sources. In other words, approaching, say, Weber or Durkheim, in a somewhat partial way may occlude a recognition or consideration of the validity of their source data. In his chapter on Durkheim, Daniel Pals raises concerns over the field reports upon which the former's work was based.[115] There is sufficient evidence, suggests Pals, citing critical reviews of Durkheim's work, to argue that Durkheim could have reached very different, or even opposite, conclusions based upon these field notes. In other words, Durkheim's reading may have been less about an impartial, objective reading of data, than a particular

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115 Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 116-117, *et passim.*

interpretation shaped to support his overarching theoretical positions. Durkheim, for his part, understood his work as scientific in nature, where evidence precedes conclusions. Furthermore, these same reports were not gathered by Durkheim himself, which shifts the verificatory burden one level further from Habermas. Given the historical distance between Durkheim and Habermas, one wishes for a greater degree of contemporary data analysis. In the end, the degree to which one mixes (in a potentially unsupportive manner) empirical data with more speculative theorizing becomes problematic only to the extent that one claims to be operating from a scientific standard. This is the crux of my issue here with Habermas. Not only does he inconsistently label his work as (social-)scientific, but he mixes verifiable empirical data with creative theoretical imagining, without strictly defining the mode within which he is working.[116] Even at those points where Habermas indicates a certain receptiveness to later scientific verification, he identifies neither how such a procedure might take place, nor recognizes the difficulty of an objective appraisal of a reconstructed historical-social theory of the distant past.

On the topic of sources there is another area of interest. At times, it is fascinating to note where Habermas does *not* go, especially given the enormous breadth of thinkers with which he works. Two writers who have clearly influenced his thought, even if the exact degree has shifted over the course of his long career, are Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. Freud wrote on, and Marx alluded to, in a powerfully critical mode, the topic of religion. No doubt there are marked differences between the approaches of Freud and Marx on the one hand, and Weber and Durkheim on the other. Yet it remains an

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116 One is reminded here of Habermas' critique of post-modernism as blending philosophy with aesthetics.

interesting problem to consider the reason for Habermas' explicit adoption of the latter and implicit rejection of the former, at least in the context of discussions of religion. On this issue he is, so far as I can ascertain, entirely silent.

A related concern points to the sheer overwhelming breadth of thinkers to which Habermas refers, especially when considering *TCA* not from its perspective on religion, but as a unified, critical theory of modernity. An incomplete list would include not only Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, but also Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Georg Lukacs, Richard Rorty, Karl Otto-Apel, Martin Heidegger, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Niklas Luhmann, John Rawls, Paul Ricoeur, W. Klein, and Stephen Tolumin. This list barely exceeds (and only incompletely so) the first 40 of the 900 pages comprising *TCA*! One is reminded of Jacques Derrida's remark that his most insistent critics seem to be those who have barely, if at all, read his work. While I am unwilling to lay this charge at Habermas' feet, it seems improbable that a thinker, even one as astute and prolific as Habermas, could have built a thorough and critical understanding of not only these resources, but the dozens of others that inform *TCA*. My concern is that this move puts the weight of systematicity most directly on Habermas' interpreters and critics. If one wishes to question Habermas' appropriation of, say, Durkheim, then a sympathetic defended can simply evade the argumentative force of the critique by asserting that the contested inclusion is supported in the overall framework of Habermas' other sources. Despite my misgivings over Habermas' understanding and treatment of religion, one can detect a different orientation in his later work, a turn which I will now consider.

Post-TCA: A (New) Openness to Religion?

One of the characteristics of Habermas' thought that is most consistently impressive is his willingness to revise positions and arguments in light of thoughtful critique. An example of this is the gradual distancing of Habermas from psychoanalytic theory, a move that is almost entirely complete by the point of *TCA*. The extensive attention paid to religion in the post-*TCA* years is another. By this I do not refer to simply an increase in the number of scattered references, but rather a progressively systematic, thorough, and at times even sympathetic encounter with topics of a religious nature, and even sustained dialogue with theologians.

It is possible to appreciate in Habermas' more recent statement a certain risk. One on hand, even the most tentative of conciliatory or sympathetic gestures is liable to raise the ire of those in the more militantly atheistic camp (one thinks of the New Atheists and their thorough rejection of religion in favour of a revived positivistic-scientific life praxis). On the other, anything short of full embrace can be expected to draw the challenge of an ultimately unrooted rationalism from the more dogmatic of theological circles. Fortunately, there is, between these two poles, substantial space in which to move. While the range of themes expressive of Habermas' later (if partial) receptiveness to religion is wide, I will focus here on the broad topic of translation. This discussion will, I hope, support the thesis that Habermas has opened up substantially to discussions of religion.

Once religion marked a superseded staged of human development and its

remaining traces counted as evidence of incomplete rationalization processes or regressive cultural tendencies. What remains unclear, at least in Habermas' essays in *Religion and Rationality* (2002), is whether he has opened up to religion as a continuing and vital source in modernity, or if it has become important only insofar as it is a diminishing, yet valuable resource for the present to mine in anticipation of the future.

One of Habermas' most succinctly powerful statements evincing a new openness to religion can be found in the essay "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World." It is worth quoting at length:

> As long as religious language bears with itself inspiring, indeed, unrelinquishable semantic contents which elude (for the moment?) the expressive power of a philosophical language and still await translation into a discourse that gives reasons for its positions, philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will neither be able to replace nor repress religion. (79)

Philosophy in the contemporary world has had to, in Habermas' view, give up totalizing positions and claims to the whole of reality.[117] Its newfound modesty comes from both a recognition of the superior explanatory powers of the sciences in the natural world, and a distancing from metaphysical and essentialist philosophic conceptions of the world which level diverse phenomena to homogeneity. What it can do, however, is act as a kind of translating field between expert cultures and the public upon which they are supported. Philosophy does this, in no small part, because it is bound by neither

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117 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume I)*, 1.

particular disciplinary focuses, nor within exclusive language games. If religion is one of those cultures which philosophy will translate, then one might wonder, first, at the reason(s) for Habermas' reconsideration.

On one hand, Habermas demonstrates considerable respect for the role religious institutions have played, especially in modern history. By this I do not particularly mean to indicate solely the Protestant Ethic and the anchoring of purposive-rational action attitudes, something to which Habermas evinces a decided ambivalence. Rather, I mean those points of time at which religious congregations, churches, and other institutions have reacted with considerable humanistic sympathy to crisis situations. If there is one historical moment to which Habermas returns, whether in his formal philosophy or in more casual interviews and biographical reminisces, it is the Holocaust. He offers the German Confessing Church as an example of both resistance to totalitarianism and an acknowledgement of guilt in the face of a collective inertia toward a threatened way of life. This suggests, at least partially, that Habermas has come to recognize that he too quickly subsumed religion with the past, as an irrational holdover without present-day relevance.

The consideration paid to the historical responses of religion which remain vital today pales in comparison to the more conceptually-oriented appreciation evident in Habermas' later work. Here he is drawn again to language. Habermas identifies, as above and in other passages, the possibility that there is in religious language – or in in language marked by religion – some potential to motivate, to shape, and to solidarize which has not yet been exhausted in rationalist reformulations.[118] This is a tantalizing, if

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118 Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," 71.

provocatively incomplete thought. What Habermas may mean is that the languages of religion, drawing as they do upon concepts of the whole and the holy, energize the emancipatory energies of individuals in a way not (yet) paralleled in secular languages. Perhaps too he is referring to intuitions and concepts and traditions which have, as yet, no strictly rational equivalent. Here he may be referring to Max Horkheimer's expressed longing for the "perfect justice" recognizable from Jewish-Christian messianic eschatology.[119] One may also expect that Habermas is not unsympathetic to the desire, at least, for reconciliation and redemptive justice in Walter Benjamin's work, though he surely does not understand this as the Messianic irruption of historical time, but as a communicative remembrance and dialogically-achieved justice.

What Habermas is calling for, then, is for philosophy to translate the contents of religion, where possible, into secular form. This means reformulating positions based upon beliefs into reasons. Where the former are particularistic, non-universalizable, and relevant primarily to specific lifeworlds, the latter are, at least ideally, amenable to universal recognition. Habermas points to a methodologically atheistic position, in which the truth claims of religion are understood as belonging to specific discourses. Parts of these are impossible to reform in a strictly rational manner: to them, philosophy must remain either atheistic or agnostic (the language varies). There are, however, concepts and forms endemic to these discourses which can be defended not only on the basis of a subjective belief, but by reasons. Most of these, it would appear, revolve around moral-practical concerns. The most familiar of these, and one to which Habermas makes

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119 Jürgen Habermas, "To Seek to Salvage an Unconditional Meaning Without God is a Futile Understanding: Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer," in *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity,* ed. Eduardo Mendieta. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 95.

frequent reference, is the notion of a universalistic morality based upon recognition of common humanity. In Christianity, this is represented by Biblical passages admonishing universal love for all and in the narrative of Christ's atoning death on the cross. Habermas claims, furthermore, that a universal morality characterizes all of the world religions.[120] [121]

One must remain wary to the very real dangers of translation. This concern refers, in part, to the prosaic sense of the term, as in the more-or-less literal movement from one human language to another. In addition to religious injunctions against the translation of holy texts, there are the risks of a loss or perversion of meaning, or of culturally-inappropriate borrowing. In the sense of translation within a specific language from one language game to another, there are also concerns. What Habermas identifies more clearly reflects a desire to respect the uniqueness of religious discourse, while at the same time holding to a very specific understanding of philosophy. There are terms – redemption is but one example – which are irreducible to secular language, without negating an insiders' sense of content. An overly eager borrowing risks trivializing the religious experiences these terms signify. Moreover, Habermas worries at philosophy naively incorporating religious terminology into its store of semantic resources. For him – and in this we can see the concern to defend a particular vision of the work and presentation of philosophy from post-modern and deconstructive approaches – this runs

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120 Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," 70.
121 "World religions" is a largely nebulous concept in terms of what counts and what does not. One can get a sense of this confusion by perusing any introductory world religions textbook. While some traditions will be universally represented (such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism), others (Taoism, Native American traditions, spiritual movements, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic sub-groups, and so on) are inconsistently considered. Habermas does not clarify his use of the term in any way.

the risk of philosophy sliding into metaphor, play, and (mere?) literature.[122] For

Habermas, this would amount to the relinquishing of philosophy's claim to truth and a

slide into an aestheticized mode of communication.

A Final Metaphysical Remnant?

I would like to close this chapter with a final, brief, and highly-speculative set of

comments. Whether Habermas has positioned himself as open or closed to religion, one

reading thereof – and a very convincing one – is that religion, through rationalization or

translation, is a phenomena with a definite temporal horizon of existence. Habermas'

philosophy, guided by his methodological atheism (or, at the least, agnosticism), largely

eschews metaphysical concepts. Yet, there are such suggestive parallels between his idea

of an ideal speech situation and the religious-theological notion of heaven and justice,

that one wonders if the former is thinkable without the latter.

The ideal speech situation is, in short, Habermas' idea of those conditions and

context towards which participants in free, unforced, and consensual dialogue strive, by

nature of their efforts for mutual understanding. One part of this concept revolves around

procedural ideas, while the other focuses on its defining characteristics. In terms of

procedure, there would be no restriction whatsoever of the possibility of raising or

challenging validity claims. All individuals affected by discourse would be permitted

unrestricted clarificatory or critical participation. Of course, such conditions can obtain

only when overt or implicit structural imbalances are not present. All differences of

power and all domination issuing therefrom would be effaced in a radical communicative

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122 Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," 75.

equality.

The description of an ideal speech situation, as given above, is clearly incommensurate with actual, lived communication. Our world is shaped by economic, social, cultural (and so forth) differences which distort the flow of communication in myriad ways. Habermas is arguing, in essence, for two ideas based upon the ideal speech situation. First, that the conditions of such a context are presupposed in actual communication. We enter into dialogue oriented to mutual understanding presupposing neither deceit or inequality. If we were to do otherwise, a strategic rather than strictly communicative approach would be necessitated. Secondly, the ideal speech situation acts a critical foil against which to measure distortions in real-life discourse. By measuring events against this communicative ideal, participants are ostensibly able to better identify those factors which lead to non-consensual or distorted forms of communication. Those agreements or plans of actions which result from discussions held in such an equalizing context would, holds Habermas, be entirely rational, in that they are based on the free exchange of arguments based upon reasons.

Habermas' idea is interesting and has no doubt a degree of conceptual utility. One wonders how a first-generation critical theorist might appraise the notion of an ideal speech situation. If lifeworlds and communication in the present are not actually free of coercion and imbalance, then it seems that the ability of any actor to imagine a situation free from traces of such injustice would be compromised, and would always bear traces of that injustice. More to the point for the purpose here, I find that there are very intriguing parallels between the ideal speech situation and the theological idea of

paradise. In both there is a perfect and achieved justice obtaining between all individuals.

Differences which might reflect hierarchies are levelled off entirely. Individuals are able

to ascertain their own understanding and the role and influence of life histories in a

basically transparent manner. Moreover, the ideal speech situation assumes a degree of

atemporality, in that the field of affected individuals is not confined merely to the present,

but also to the ever-possible opportunity for future negotiation and problematization. It is

also not fixed to a particular language game, or geographical context, but transcends all

concrete embodiments.   Consideration of all of these features rings an unexpected and

uncharacteristic metaphysical note in Habermas' thought.

Conclusion

        In this chapter, I have attempted to develop a Habermasian understanding or

theory of religion from within the context of communicative action as developed in his

TCA. I have argued that he constructs religion in a thoroughly functionalist manner

which relegates religion to the past. Furthermore, I understand Habermas' analysis as

overly dismissive of the importance and place of religion. I base reservations on a

consideration of the definition of religion, its function in public will-formation and

expression, and on his use of reconstructive theory and empirical data. Yet, as I have

said, I remain sympathetic to his critical, atheistic intent. In the conclusion of this

project, I will review the overall themes here discussed, attempt to summarize what I

understand as its contribution to the study of Habermasian philosophy and theory, and

point towards potentially fruitful research avenues for the future.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In this, the concluding section of my project, I would like to address four topics. First, I will identify and very briefly summarize the overall intent of the project as well as the key themes explored throughout. Next, I will note those areas of difficulty which presented themselves in the course of researching and writing this paper. Penultimately, I will indicate what contributions this thesis may make both to the academic study of religion and to the explication, analysis, and critique of Jürgen Habermas' philosophy and social theory. Finally, I will suggest possible future research directions insofar as they issue from my work here.

<u>Intent and Key Themes</u>

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Habermas surely ranks as one of the most influential philosophers and social theorists of the present century. His work explores a huge variety of themes, but remains always consistent in its support of reason and the goals of the Enlightenment. At the same time, he remains a perceptive and insistent critic of those forces and structures which undermine the pursuit and realization of universal justice and equality. The task I set myself was to investigate his signature work, the *Theory of Communicative Action*, for those ideas which might illuminate the

study of religion. While Habermas is not a scholar of religion and certainly not a theologian, the topic is of recognizable importance to his work. Furthermore, secondary scholarship on Habermas' work has come from a diverse array of disciplines, but only inconsistently and partially from scholars of religion. Interesting, given the atheistic perspective Habermas adopts, is the (rather one-sided) engagement with his work by Christian theologians.

The broad topics I selected as most important to investigate are Habermas' theory of communicative rationality and his engagements with Weber and Durkheim. The purpose of the first concern will be by now, I hope, much clearer. To understand and fully appreciate any of Habermas' work after 1984 (in the English-speaking world) requires at least a passing familiarity with the framework he has since that time employed: communicative rationality and action. In it is both an account and critique of Western's modernity's incomplete and highly selective rationalization. Those processes have, Habermas argues, been formed and co-opted to a pathological degree by attitudes and mechanisms favouring, if not requiring, a purposive-rational action orientation. Furthermore, they have shaped what it means to be rational in a very partial manner. Habermas does not univocally criticize this trend; instrumental rationality is certainly integral to many aspects of human experience and flourishing. His reservation, in part, is that this attitude has come to colonize those spheres of life that depend not upon (instrumental) success and efficiency, but instead rely on mutual understanding and cooperation. In communicative rationality Habermas locates an only partially realized source of action coordination which bears at its core a normative centre.

With an explication of central themes developed in *TCA* complete, it was next possible to use that structural support to begin retrieving those discussion most clearly related to religion. Though Habermas engages with an enormous array of thinkers both contemporary and classic, it proved relatively straightforward to select those most relevant to the purpose at hand. Max Weber and Émile Durkheim both pursued the study of religion during their independent careers with considerable zeal and apart from any explicit confessional commitments that would mark their work more clearly as theological.[123] While Habermas uses neither of them to explain religion *per se*, the reflections on each proved fruitful ground for understanding how Habermas himself conceives of religion and rationality. In Weber we were able to see, in part, how purposive-rational attitudes arose and became anchored in Occidental modernity. Weber's discussion of theodicy provided Habermas with a differentiated understanding of various fundamental attitudes toward the world, as expressed in several religious traditions. In this he was able to further support his contention that rationalization represents learning processes developed at the level of society, and not simply gains for the individual actor. Through the Protestant Ethic we were able to examine, in much greater detail, one of these developments. Here, existential questions were tied to a religious interpretation of human existence in such a way that they proved instrumental for the shape and character of modernity. Because this worldview prized success in vocational and economic domains as indicative of individual salvation, we could see in what ways rationalization came to increasingly one-sided expression. This, of course,

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123 I consider this statement to be generally valid, even though Weber considered a universal morality impossible without religious certification and reproduction.

had profound significance for market capitalism.

While Durkheim's general field of study was held in common with Weber, his specific interests and purposes were quite dissimilar. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Habermas' reading and interpretation was considerably different. His focus on Durkheim revolved in the main on the issue of solidarity. In contrast to the thoroughly concrete nature of mythic interpretations of the world, Durkheim identified as the originary locus of religion the cognitive, abstracting ability to divide the world into realms of the sacred and the profane. The latter is comprised of the bulk of everyday objects, experiences, and so on. In the sacred, with its associated ritual performances and observances, as well as normative prohibitions, Durkheim detected the idealized vision of the collective. In and through the totem, the community assured itself of its current experience of unity no less than it defined its ideal vision of itself. Yet this experiential framework could survive only so long as the sacred was shielded from challenges. As new attitudes and novel experiences put the test to established interpretative patterns and the tradition and beliefs sustaining them, the consensus generating from the coercive force of the sacred began to dissolve. More and more, communication and especially argumentation based upon reasons open to public critique, came to the fore. In short, where religion overcame myth, science overthrew religion. While the compatibility of Weber and Durkheim's differing perspectives remains an area of open discussion, we can see how Habermas utilizes both in a diagnosis and critique of modernity, and in what ways he constructs the category of religion.

Combining Habermas' discussion of the origin and place of religion produced

mixed results. On one hand, I argue that he too easily accepted problematic aspects of his source material, while even more damagingly he produced an overly dismissive account of religion's contemporary role. In the *TCA* era, religion characterizes but one stage of human development, and one which is notably inferior to that of the present. Yet my critique did find some promise in identifying a new attitude on Habermas' part towards religion, which recognizes both its vitality and power to motivate and inspire. I suggest that suppressing this entirely from the public realm of discussions and decisions was especially problematic.

Difficulties

The difficulties one imagines at the outset of a project, especially one early in an academic career, are often very different than those realized through the course of its writing and completion. Four areas still resonate as concerns that were, one hopes, largely overcome.

The effort that quite evidently went into the development of *TCA* is, in a word, humbling. Habermas has read, to whatever extent, in such a variety of fields that he can appear initially opaque. Much like the way the experience of reading, say, Derrida or Adorno, eventually opens up, so does Habermas. Before this can happen, however, one must approach each thinker with a large degree of trust and anticipatory enthusiasm. As one begins to recognize the themes that preoccupy Habermas, the direction of his research projects becomes clearer and easier to follow. Yet an ineluctable trace of dependence remains, even through the course of a single work. This is due to Habermas'

breadth; if we choose to critically pursue his engagement with Weber, for example, then patience and economy suggests we have to largely accept his treatment of, say, Parsons. To do otherwise is surely possible for some, but requires more erudition, time, and space than is (here?) possible.

A related comment circles around Habermas' language, style, and argumentative approach. While he may criticize the modes of the postmodern camps, Habermas does not find himself in the clear simply because he positions himself differently. Habermas' language ranges from 'academic-casual' (if rarely), to the extremes of technicality. He assumes, and justly I think, a degree of expertise on the part of his readers, or at least a consistent work ethic. For someone not steeped in Habermasian terminology, his writing poses certain, if not unassailable, challenges. Even when one builds a familiarity with the terms and concepts that support *TCA*, one can find Habermas' manner of presentation and argument taxing. He rarely moves in a straightforward line from premise to conclusion, but circles his ideas from a variety of theoretical perspectives, and attacks them, often simultaneously, from several angles. His writing often exhibits, if one is to be honest, a degree of repetitiveness – the degree of which becomes apparently only once one has followed his somewhat indirect routes. His language and prose style posing the problems they do, and the only curative I have found – even as some passages remain obscure – is patience, secondary literature, a dictionary (if not several), and copious notes, diagrams, and half-starts.

<u>Contributions to the Field(s)</u>

If only difficulties comprised this project and its reading of Habermas, then there would be no need of its completion at this point. There has been made here, I hope, at least three distinct contributions to the study of both Habermas' thought and religion. These successes, if that is the most appropriate term, roughly correspond to the concerns of each chapter.

From the first, there is a summary of selected themes from *TCA*. This work still remains vital and important in the present day. The summary has been compiled and presented in relatively accessible language. At the same time, I have not entirely forgotten the subtlety of Habermas' theories of communication and modernity. Academic summaries of *TCA*, while not entirely lacking, are relatively rare, of varying acuity and utility, and often presuppose as much as they explain.

Issuing from the second chapter is a focused explication of Habermas' readings of Weber and Durkheim in *TCA*. While others have tread this general Habermasian ground, they have not focused as singularly on the topic of religion, especially in the case of Weber. Moreover, my review can help highlight, in general, the ways in which Habermas engages well-considered classical thinkers in the context of contemporary projects. Furthermore, the second chapter helps to fill out the first, insofar as it provides additional detail to Habermas' theory of communicative rationality, especially from historical and reconstructive angles.

The third chapter contains what I view to be the most significant contributions. It was here that I was finally able to use the preceding analysis and reflection to construct a

Habermasian understanding of religion. While Habermas' general attitude toward and treatment of religion is problematic, this is not to say that the connections made with communication and rationality are uninteresting or unproductive. As I have noted, Habermas has become increasingly interested in theoretical engagements with religion in recent years. Scholarship focusing on Habermas and religion thus quite naturally focus on texts that largely postdate *TCA*. Thus, the discussion here represents an at least partially innovative treatment of Habermas' thought. While I do not claim to be comprehensive (as the range of pre-*TCA* material is beyond the scope of this project), the analysis here appears to me, from the perspective of English-language literature, to fill a generally under-served area.

Suggestions for Future Research

After having reflected on Habermas, religion, and the work here, four viable next-step projects become apparent. While I cannot go into detail on each, I will at least indicate their general shape and direction.

One feature of *TCA* that becomes clear, in its surprising absence, is a concrete sense of how to reinvigorate modernity with a revived and clarified commitment to communicative rationality. Given my interest in pedagogy and educational theory, I propose that Habermas' work can be applied in the context of formal, primary education. The education subsystem is one area tasked, like the family unit, with socialization and

the inculcation and reproductive of norms and values. While teaching can certainly

proceed in a non-communicative, authoritarian manner, this mode has clearly fallen out

of favour (at least in the Canadian context, with which I am familiar). Communicative

rationality can inform not only the delivery of curricular materials, but the always-

pressing issue of classroom management. For the former, it applies not only to the

humanistic areas of language and social studies, but to the sciences as well. I detect in

recent years, and especially in Manitoba, an expanded willingness to discuss the topic of

religion, even in publicly-funded schools.[124] Religion can be addressed from the

standpoint of mutual understanding, even in public (non-denominational, secular)

schools, and can serve as a test case for the application of Habermas' communicative

theory.

A second potential research direction is both seemingly obvious and apparently

unexplored. The idea is not to work forwards from *TCA*, but in reverse. There is a large

body of work predating *TCA*, and it has not, so far as I understand, been analyzed from

the perspective of religion, or at least not in the English language. Here, one may be able

to identify those features of Habermas' thought that shaped the treatment of religion in

TCA. Such a discussion would very helpfully complement my work in this project. One

focus could be on the intellectual sources and context which influence Habermas. While

Eduardo Mendieta has attended to much the same idea, he has focused primarily on the

Frankfurt School. Other directions may prove equally valuable.

A third avenue to pursue is both new religious movements and religion in those

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124 For example, I am presently involved in a project with the Province of Manitoba designing guidelines,
    resources, and a course template for the inclusion of discussions of religion within public school
    classrooms.

areas of the world in which secularization has not taken root to the same extent as in the West. One could use Habermas' thought to analyze both how innovative traditions function, and why religion, in some areas, is a growing phenomenon. I am particularly interested in an account of how so-called fringe traditions or "cults" may distort or impede the ability of initiates to operate communicatively, or how social conditions promote these conditions and thus the birth of new traditions, and how this may account, in part, for their success.

Finally, as I indicated in the third chapter, a more refined and non-repressive account of religion's role in the public sphere is needed. While Habermas has addressed this area in contemporary discussions, further clarification and detail is still necessary. If religion can inform public dialogue, but legal-judicial procedure and decision-making must remain atheistic, then a more nuanced understanding of how this can come about would prove useful.

Quite clearly, Habermas has not had the last word on religion, nor is it likely that that was what he ever intended. In his thought, we can recognize the need for dialogue to remain always open and always ongoing. If this – communication – is one, and perhaps the best, chance for equality and freedom, then all potential resources, religious or otherwise, need to be mined. All potentially-affected individuals, religionists, atheists, and variations of all sorts, need to be consulted. To do otherwise, to take shelter in repression or to retreat into obstinate silence or despair, is to give up on that dream shared by both religion and the Enlightenment: justice. This justice cannot be simply for future

generations, but must include those persevering within damaged forms of life in the

present day.

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