On the Public Uses of Reason: Habermas, Religion, and the Public Sphere

By

Matt Sheedy

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Department of Religion

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, MB

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Abstract

Jürgen Habermas is widely considered one of the most influential living philosophers and social theorists, whose work has spanned sixty years of academic writing. In the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, he began to engage more explicitly with questions of religion in his work, helping to popularize the term "post-secularism," and offered leading analysis on the problem of religion in the public sphere, expanding and innovating John Rawls's idea of the "public use of reason." While this shift in Habermas's work is significant, he has long been interested in questions relating to religion, dating back to his doctoral dissertation in 1954. To date, very few scholars have traced the idea of religion in Habermas's work as a whole, and none have developed an analysis of how his conception of religion changes in relation to shifts in his broader theoretical ideas, and to significant changes in politics, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. My dissertation thus offers the first English-language critical investigation of the social construction of Habermas's theory of religion. More specifically, I provide a critique of his theory based on ideas generated within the critical study of religions, and revisit the controversy between "deconstruction" and "rational reconstruction" in contemporary critical theory. Ultimately, I aim to expand Habermas's model of reason and rationality to include elements of myth, ritual, and symbols, along with their various iterations in contexts of interaction, and as they are expressed in cultural narratives about religion within the public sphere.

Introduction

Writing with the privilege of hindsight in 2005, Jürgen Habermas opens his essay "Religion in the Public Sphere" with the following observation: "Religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance since the epoch-making historical juncture of 1989-90."[1] Although the question of religion did not rise to the level of primary importance in Habermas's thinking until after the attacks of September 11, 2001, its centrality in his recent work is by no means an aberration, as he has long been interested in such questions dating back to his PhD dissertation on Schelling's concept of the "Absolute" in history. When considering the arc of his sixty years of academic writing, what is perhaps most interesting is how he has preserved many of the same ideas about religion that can be found in his early philosophical writings and given them a new life, so to speak, in his more recent social and political theory. Apart from a few essays by Eduardo Mendieta, however, most scholars who have become interested in Habermas's work on religion in the post-9/11 period have not taken this broader context into consideration. Whereas Habermas had previously understood religion and religious language as a resource for existential and emancipatory-minded philosophy in the interest of preserving its "utopian" contents in a "secular" form and as an important part of the "lifeworld" of distinct communities within the Euro-Western world, thus reflecting "private" interests and identity formations, he now understands it as a central part of the solution for how to generate meaning and motivation in modern, plural societies. Tracing these developments and the reasons behind them will be the aim of this dissertation, along with a critical examination of his theories and methods and an appraisal of its value for the study of religions.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Habermas gave a speech upon receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade on October 14, 2001, which he later published as "Faith and Knowledge" in his book *The Future of Human Nature* (2003). What was unique about this speech, as compared with his previous writings, was his emphasis on how the so-called Western world must come to see its own history of development as "an on-going secularization." Rather than focus his attention on the role of international institutions in responding to global conflict as he had done in the early 1990s in debates surrounding the first Gulf War,[2] Habermas sought to conceptualize the 9/11 attacks as a

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Durham, UK: Polity Press), 114.

[2] See Habermas, *The Past as Future*: *Interviewed by Michael Haller*, trans. and ed. by Max Pensky (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), 1994.

failure, at least in part, of "already secularized societies" to reconcile the relationship between "religious" and "secular" citizens within their own democratic constitutional states.[3]

Indeed, in the opening lines of "Faith and Knowledge" Habermas links the apparent resurgence of religion to a related debate that he had been having since the late 1990s on the question of genetic engineering, noting his concern with how the "self-instrumentalization" of human nature has been met with polarized response.[4] This debate was often framed as one between "science" and "religion," with religion typically serving as a stand-in for Christianity, be it vocal Protestant voices in Europe or the US or official proclamations from the Catholic Church. Habermas lays out these tensions as follows:

> One side feared obscurantism and the consolidation, based on scepticism toward science, of remnants of archaic emotions; the other side objected to the crude naturalism of a scientific belief in progress supposedly undermining morality. But on September 11, 2001, the tension between secular society and religion exploded in an entirely different way.[5]

Habermas goes on to make the claim that those who committed the 9/11 attacks were clearly motivated by "religious beliefs," as attested by statements from Mohammed Atta and Osama bin Laden, and notes what he calls a "perceptible time-lag between their motives and their means," which he attributes to the gap between "culture" and "society."[6]

What Habermas is suggesting here, as a first blush attempt to understand and contextualize the 9/11 attacks, is that they should be understood as a negative side effect of "an accelerated and radically uprooting modernization" in the countries where the plot was hatched—namely, those of the Middle and Far East. Whereas modernization in the Euro-Western world was experienced "as a process of creative destruction" over several centuries and was compensated for by significant improvements in the material conditions of life that helped to ease the transition of the institutional separation of Church and State, Habermas is at pains to remind his readers that legitimate feelings of humiliation in the non-Western world extend back through centuries of colonial domination, while international and inter-cultural relationships have been largely filtered through the language of the "military and the market;"[7] hardly the basis for a reciprocal relationship of trust and mutual understanding. Despite these uneven processes of modernization that placed the Euro-West at a historical advantage, Habermas points out that feelings of ambivalence toward "secularization"[8] are still ripe in the Euro-West itself, as the debate over genetic engineering clearly illustrates, suggesting that this "dialectic"

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[3] Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister, Max Pensky, and William Rehg (Durham, UK: Polity Press, 2003), xiii

[4] See Jürgen Habermas, "The Debate on the Ethical Self-Understanding of the Species," in *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister, Max Pensky, and William Rehg (Durham, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 16-100. [5] Ibid., 101.

[6] Ibid., 102.

[7] Ibid., 114.

[8] It is worth noting that it is Habermas who puts this word in scare quotes here, marking the only time I am aware of where he contextualizes the sematic uses of the concept.

has not yet come to a close.[9] As a first step in confronting these seemingly intractable problems, he urges pause and self-reflection, which includes a reconsideration of modern societies as *postsecular*:

> Only if we realize what secularization means in our own postsecular societies can we be far-sighted in our response to the risks involved in a secularization miscarrying in other parts of the world. … This self-reflection is one among several steps necessary if we want to present a different image of the West to other cultures. We do not want to be perceived as crusaders of a competing religion or as salespeople of instrumental reason and destructive secularization.[10]

These ideas are but a few pieces of a much larger puzzle that Habermas has added a considerable amount to in the intervening years since 2001, though they remain instructive for those unfamiliar with his work in highlighting some of the major concepts, methodologies and subject-positions that he has taken up over sixty years of academic writing. The first thing to notice is the still-dialectic nature of his philosophical thinking, where oppositions between things like "faith" and "knowledge," "secularism" and "religion" are taken up as conceptual pairs that he wants to think about together, however much he may resist the temptation to come to some sort of Hegelian synthesis. This interest is also very much a part of Habermas's indebtedness to the Kantian legacy in the philosophy of religion, where the *conceptual* and *political* boundaries of "faith" and "reason" are subject to constant renegotiation in light of epistemic advances and new social realities.

The second thing to notice is Habermas's interest in sociological theories of secularization, which includes a positive (albeit critical and revised) assessment of classical modernization theory (e.g., as it relates to an increase in material prosperity and structural changes like the separation of Church and State). Despite gains brought about by these and related developments, (e.g., the rise of "political Islam") Habermas describes them as "Janus-faced," since they also contribute to the "disintegration of traditional forms of life"[11] and deprive societies of scare resources of collective meaning and motivation that are necessary to bind them together in cooperative and non-instrumental modes of interaction. In light of this political resurgence of religion,[12] it is crucial for theories of modernization to rethink the relationship between "faith and knowledge" and how the coordinates of secularization have been set in place.

The last thing to notice here is how Habermas clearly identifies himself with the Western tradition of philosophy and states his interest in thinking through problems that arise in modern, liberal or pluralistic societies. While this orientation has the virtue of being honest, as Habermas locates himself in the worlds that he is most familiar with—namely, the German, European and American traditions of constitutional democracy—it is worth pointing out that his theories of communicative competence, rationalization, and deliberative

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[9] Habermas, *Future of Human*, 102-3.

[10] Ibid, 103.

[11] Ibid., 102.

[12] I prefer to frame these problems in terms of the political uses of religion by groups who identify as religious, as I will come to discuss in the conclusion, though I retain this phrasing here as it is more in line with Habermas's thinking.

democracy also claim universalist intentions, which presents certain challenges when addressing the claims of distinct cultures and of the category "religion" more generally.

Beginning my investigation on Habermas and religion by calling attention to this essay is useful for a number of reasons. For one thing, it marks a turn in his work toward a sustained focus on religion, which will characterize his thinking more than any other single topic in this most recent phase of his work (2001-present), and includes a debate with then-cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (2004), a widely discussed essay in political theory, "Religion in the Public Sphere," (2006) and a number of books, including *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2005 [2008]), *An Awareness of What's Missing* (2010), and *Nachmetaphysical Denken II: Aufsätzen und Repliken* (2012). Indeed, the recent Festschrift, *Habermas and Religion* (2013) is testament to this influence. The essay "Faith and Knowledge" is also a useful starting point as it was written for a (slightly) broader audience than Habermas's usual technical fare and in this sense represents a more accessible statement of his position, which makes it ripe for piecemeal appropriation and caricature. It was also around this time that Habermas conducted an interview with Giovanna Borradori that appeared alongside a companion interview with Jacques Derrida in the book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003). These reflections from two of Europe's leading thinkers on the role of philosophy in the wake of such events reveals a curious alignment of their very different (and sometimes antagonistic) approaches toward questions of language, modernity, and reason. Derrida's essay "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," (1996/1998) highlights his own interest in these themes at a (slightly) earlier phase, when he was grappling with similar challenges after the fall of the Soviet Union, including the idea that it marked the "end of history," and the apparent resurgence of religion.

It bears mentioning that any critical appraisal of Habermas's theory of religion must be able to locate the various concepts, subject domains, and overarching interests that guide his theoretical endeavours. At a minimum, Habermas's work blends a variety of methods and theories in philosophy, sociology and political theory, all of which represent different interpretations or, to borrow a term more commonly associated with Derrida's work, "iterations" of religion. Eduardo Mendieta calls attention to this distinction in Habermas's work when he writes:

> Even as sociology anticipated the eventual abolition of religion, philosophy continues to have an ever intense dialogue with religion and theology. With respect to political theory, religion has been and continues to be a major point of reference.[13]

Throughout much of Habermas's academic career, beginning in the 1960s and extending on through till the early 1990s, he paid little attention to religion in his politically oriented work and discussed it primarily as a stage in human development (or social evolution) in his sociological and anthropologically-informed texts—from *Structural Transformations in the Public Sphere* (1962 [1989]), where religion doesn't appear at all, to *Legitimation Crisis* (1971 [1973]), *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976 [1979]), and his magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). In Habermas's philosophical writings, however, starting with his doctoral dissertation entitled, *The*

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[13] Eduardo Mendieta, "Rationalization, modernity and secularization," in *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2011), 222-223.

Absolute and History: On the Schism in Schelling's Thought (1954),[14] and on through the 1960s and 1970s, Habermas picked-up on religious themes in the writings of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Karl Jaspers, Karl Löwith and Gershom Scholem (1983; 2001; 2002). Here religion is read exclusively through the lens of emancipatory themes found in certain strains of Christian and Jewish philosophy, which provided Habermas with important conceptual tools for grappling with existential problems (e.g., memory, hope, etc.) as well as key "semantic" resources that required translation into "secular" language so that their utopian character could be preserved within modernity.[15] It is this same impulse that will guide Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism throughout the 1970s and informs his idea of the "linguistification of the sacred" in *Theory of Communicative Action*, which stresses both the undoing of religious validity claims as well as the importance of "religious language," grounded in contexts of ritual praxis, in providing meaning and motivation for distinct communities. Since 2001, Habermas has made a gradual transition from speaking about "religious language" as a central resource of meaning and motivation for *some* to a phenomenon that is now considered to be crucial for *all*. Understanding the reasons behind this transition will be one of the central tasks of this dissertation.

Some Useful Appropriations

Throughout this dissertation I rely on a periodization of Habermas's work that was devised by Eduardo Mendieta and appropriated by Barbara Fultner in her introduction to the Acumen publication *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts* (2011). Fultner lays-out this periodization as follows: 1) *philosophical anthropology: critique of philosophy of consciousness and of positivism* (1954-70); *from the reconstruction of historical materialism toward a theory of communicative action* (1971-82); *postmetaphsycial thinking: rationality, morality and democracy* (1982-2000); and *postsecular and postnational thinking* (2001-). I have found this structure useful for conceptualizing Habermas's theoretical corpus and will adopt a slightly modified version of it in my own presentation of developments in his work.

The first phase, which includes Haberams's doctoral dissertation, *Das Absolute und die Geschichte. Von der Zwiespältigkeit in Schellings Denken* ("The Absolute in History: On the Schism in Schelling's Thought") (1954),[16] *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962 [1989]), *Knowledge and Human Interests,* (1968 [1972]), and *Philosophical Political Profiles* (1971 [1983] begins his critique of the transcendental subject as a model for critical theory and marks his turn toward theories of language and processes of social evolution in human history. Likewise the so-called "positivist dispute," (*Positivismusstreit*) beginning in 1963 with Habermas and Adorno debating the likes of Hans Albert and Karl Popper, later published as

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[14] A condensed version of Habermas's doctoral dissertation appeared in the German version of *Theory and Practice* and was later translated as, "Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism: Schelling's Idea of a Contraction of God and Its Consequences for the Philosophy of History," in *The New Schelling*, eds. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (London, UK: Continuum), 43-89.

[15] For a decent overview of these influences see Eduardo Mendieta, "Rationalization, modernity and secularization," 222-238.

[16] See note 14.

The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology, (1969 [1976]) sets the stage for Habermas's career-long critique of the false objectivity of scientism, which will factor significantly in his later reconceptualization of secularism, and his characterization of modern societies as "post- secular." During this phase, however, Habermas will lay the groundwork in his inaugural lecture at Frankfurt University in 1965 for the development of his idea that human interests are constitutive of different spheres of knowledge and the anthropological grounding of critical theory in *language*, which, as he famously claimed, is "the only thing whose nature we can know."[17]

In the second phase Habermas looks to develop and update Marxism with engagements in systems theory, (e.g., Niklas Luhmann) the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, the philosophy of language, especially his programmatic essay "What is Universal Pragmatics," (1976) and his magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action*, (1981 [1984/87]) which lays out his theory of communicative rationality and his conceptual distinction between the "system" and the "lifeworld." Crucially, this period of work will set the stage for Habermas's understanding of modern societies as conditioned by learning processes, which provides him with a measuring stick for assessing stages of social evolution that saw religion in a state of gradual decline.

The third phase marks a crucial turning point in Habermas's engagement with questions of religion and is nicely illustrated in Fultner's naming of this period "postmetaphysical thinking and morality." During this time Habermas will enter into debates in moral philosophy with such texts as *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (1983 [1990]) and *Justification and Application*, (1991 [1993]) provide a critique of French post-structuralism in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (1985 [1987]) and develop his major text in political theory *Between Facts and Norms* (1992 [1996]). It was also during this period that Habermas released a collection of philosophical essays *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, (1988 [1992]) and debated political theologians at the University of Chicago in 1988, the results of which later appeared in the book *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, (1992) marking the first time that he was seriously challenged on his theories of religion. In this same year, a Festschrift appeared under the title *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, (1992), which was spurred by the English publication of *Structural Transformations* in 1989, and includes a reply by Habermas, rethinking his position 30 years after the initial publication. This period is significant as it marks a gradual transition in Habermas's thinking of the "moral point of view" and a reconsideration of the status of religion in modernity, especially in his engagement with John Rawls concerning the place of "comprehensive doctrines" within the public sphere.

The last and current phase of Habermas's work, dating from 2001 to present, is by far his most critical engagement with religion. In addition to the texts previously mentioned, including his first book-length treatment on the topic in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, (2005 [2008]) this period will see him take up and promote the idea that modern, liberal societies in the Euro-West ought to be understood as "post-secular," which is both an empirical observation meant to challenge the presumptions of classic secularization theory as well as a norm-oriented idea aimed at countering the common "secularist" presupposition that religion is merely backwards and passé. A recently

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[17] Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987), 314.

released Festschrift entitled *Habermas and Religion*, (2013) confirms the influence of these developments as part of a broader discourse on religion in the post-9/11 era. The implications and development of these ideas are on-going and will no doubt influence currents in philosophy, political theory, and religious studies for some time to come.

Another heuristic that I appropriate in my thinking on Habermas's work comes from Amy Allen's essay "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too: Habermas's Genealogy of Postsecular Reason" in *Habermas and Religion* (2013). Following Hegel's efforts to detranscendentalize Kant's theory—which is another way of saying historicizing his work—Allen notes how Habermas picks up on this Hegelian impulse in his own efforts to reconstruct the emergence of reason on "postsecular" terms. As she writes,

> Habermas refers to this historical reconstruction as a genealogy of post-secular reason. The aim of this genealogy is to uncover the rootedness of secular Enlightenment normative ideals—including the ideals that guide Habermas's own work—in a particular religious tradition and context, specifically the emergence of the monotheistic religions of the Axial Age.[18]

Distinguishing between three modes of genealogical inquiry—subversive, vindicatory and problematizing—Allen describes Habermas's model as a blend of *vindicatory* and *problematizing* genealogy, simultaneously aiming to destabilize current dichotomies, such as "naturalism and religion," while also pointing toward ways of thinking that can help to vindicate "religion" (my scare quotes) in order to justify a "moral point of view" for modern, plural societies. While my own approach is largely supportive of the general parameters of Habermas's socio-political theory, my interest is perhaps best categorized as a problematizing genealogy of his work, which Allen defines as follows:

> Problematizing genealogy aims not at normative evaluation—either negative or positive—of the practices that it excavates, but rather, as Colin Koopman explains, it attempts "to clarify and intensify the difficulties that enable and disable" the practice it studies.[19]

This approach is particular relevant to on-going debates within the study of religion. On the one hand, it helps bring these political and philosophical debates more in-line with on-going critiques of the category "religion" and the ways in which it is often reified in the interest of dominant groups (e.g., liberal notions of equality and toleration). On the other hand, by offering a critical genealogy of Habermas's theory of religion, its strengths as a practical and norm-oriented theory with an interest political questions helps to underline why theories of religion must also deal with these pragmatic ideas in a serious way.

A Breakdown of Chapters

Chapter 1. **Religion, Communication, and the Evolution of Society**. This chapter will provide an overview of Habermas's work during the first two phases of his career, from roughly 1954-1982, tracing developments in his early theory of the public sphere, the

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[18] Amy Allen, "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too: Habermas's Genealogy of Postsecular Reason," in *Habermas and Religion*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press), 133.

[19] Allen, "Having One's Cake," 134.

relationship between types of knowledge and human interests following his "linguistic turn," his contributions to the philosophy of religion, and his theory of social evolution, culminating in the *Theory of Communicative Action*. The aim of this chapter will be mostly propaedeutic, providing a general sketch of Habermas's main theoretical developments during this period, while discussing how religion is being constructed (e.g., in relation to certain thinkers, theologies, and theoretical models).

Chapter 2. **Discourse Ethics: Creating Space for Religion.** This chapter, which covers a period from roughly 1982-1990, lays out Habermas's proposal for addressing problems in contemporary ethics and moral philosophy. While religion does not factor much into this discussion, this chapter represents a crucial turning point in Habermas's thinking that is foundational for his theory of religion in the public sphere. Among other things, discourse ethics provides a framework for the public use of reason and centers on the question of how to establish the "moral point of view" in modern societies. Moreover, it attempts to strike a balance between the universal and the particular, the "right" and the "good" in moral and political theory. Here I will draw upon the critiques of Thomas McCarthy, Seyla Benhabib, and Wendy Brown in order to highlight certain tensions that remain in Habermas's work to this day.

Chapter 3. Postmetaphysical Thinking and Political Theology. Beginning with an overview of Habermas's idea of postmetaphysical thinking, which sets out to defend a particular conception of reason against a variety of critics and touches on the curious status of religion and "religious language" as a persistent and potentially useful source of meaning for philosophy, I will then turn to focus on a debate between Habermas and a group of public and political theologians at the University of Chicago in 1988. This chapter will help to establish Habermas's shift from talking about religion exclusively in relation to philosophy and social theory towards taking up what he calls a performative stance, where he is compelled to confront religious claims in contexts of public and political deliberation. This foreshadows shifts he will develop in addressing the place of religion in the public political sphere starting in the 1990s in his debate with John Rawls.

Chapter 4. Deliberative Democracy, Rawls, and the Use of Public Reason. In this chapter I will briefly outline Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and revisit his debate with political philosopher John Rawls in the mid-1990s over such questions as the status of "truth," "reasonableness," and so-called "comprehensive doctrines" in the political and public spheres. Here the boundaries between "philosophy" and the "political" are rigorously debated. It is during this period that Habermas will develop a more inclusive view on the place of religion in public debate paving the way for his post-9/11 shift toward re-imaging the genealogy of religion as a crucial component of "post-secular" reason.

Chapter 5: Habermas and Derrida: **The Politics of Deconstruction**. In this final chapter I will explore the Derrida-Habermas debate as a way to highlight problems with Habermas's model. My aim in not to undermine or reject his theory of religion, but to show that by ignoring "deconstructive" insights he is left with a theory of religion that is over-determined by a narrow genealogy that seeks to salvage from

"religion" only that which is deemed progressive and emancipatory, while subordinating aspects of embodied ritual, and classifying so-called "fundamentalist" expressions as largely pathological. To be sure, this serves certain pragmatic functions, such as helping to mediate the boundaries between acceptable forms of public reasoning in modern plural societies. While there is some merit to this strategy, which owes a considerable debt to the German Idealist concept *Aufheben*—of salvaging emancipatory contents from religious concepts for their "secular" use, which has parallels with Derrida's emphasis on inheritance—it ignores how common iterations of "religion," *as shifting discursive concepts*, tend to reflect dominant narratives and ideologies and marginalize those that fall outside of accepted boundaries. These boundaries that Habermas sets, I will claim, often pit insiders' claims against his own preferred model of post-metaphysical reason and prescribe a compromise-strategy where secular and religious citizens are encouraged to engage in acts of reciprocal translation. One problem with this model, as I will come to argue, is that it assumes its object in advance without also asking how "religion" can, and often is, utilized in order to signify other, related concepts—and how those things may not be best categorized as "religion," as Habermas sees it, but more productively categorized as "culture," "politics" or some hybrid formation in between.

Chapter 1 - Religion, Communication, and the Evolution of Society

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Habermas engages many of the same questions that had concerned the first generation of Frankfurt theorists in the 1920s and 1930s, including the critique of positivism and the development of a of critical social theory that could help to point in the direction of a just and rational society.[20] Given his interest in the public sphere as a conceptual and practical site for the realization of social emancipation—albeit one, as I will come to discuss, whose potential had been missed—Habermas turned to focus on questions of epistemology and methodology in the relationship between science and philosophy, which he frames in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968 [1971]) along three distinct trajectories.[21] These concerns were expanded in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967 [1988]), *Toward a Rational Society* (1968 [1970]) and *Theory and Practice* (1971/1973). The necessity for a reengagement with and a critical understanding of the inherent tensions between theory and practice was underscored, for Habermas, by the fact that neither positivist philosophy nor Marxist theories of praxis paid much heed to the hermeneutic and communicative dimensions of social interaction.[22] This deficit was the reason that Habermas sought to reconstruct historical materialism throughout the 1970s, in works such as *Legitimation Crisis* (1973 [1975]) and *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976 [1979]) leading to his two-volume signature work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, (hereafter *TCA*) (1981 [1984/1987]).

In this chapter I will focus on the first two phases in Habermas's work, following Eduardo Mendieta and Barbara Fultner's periodization from 1954-1982, dealing with: 1) his early articulation of public reason and the public sphere; 2) his re-imaging of critical theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s; 3) his treatment of religion in some of his philosophical writings and; 4) his treatment of religion in *TCA*. While Habermas's emphasis will shift depending on whether he is discussing religion from a historical-

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[20] See Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos* (March) 1977: 120-133; Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 188-243; and Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968), 134-58.

[21] Crucially, this text contains Habermas inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt in 1965, where he first lays out this program. See Habermas "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective" in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 301-350.

[22] See Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" in *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970), 81-122.

anthropological, political or philosophical perspective, one theme that remains consistent in his work during this time is the assumption that religion represents an antiquated mode of thinking that, while important for socialization within distinct cultural groups and for preserving existential and emancipatory impulses for philosophy as a whole, is little more than a fated worldview that offers little in the way of a "binding/bonding effect" for modern societies, which are understood to be caught in a postmetaphysical bind of needing strong, post-traditional ideals in order to secure legitimacy, without having recourse to any shared comprehensive doctrines to secure their collective will.

The structure of this chapter is somewhat anachronistic as it shifts from a more or less linear development in Habermas's thought—from his early book on the public sphere to his "linguistic turn," and the development of a social-evolutionary model—before taking a turn to address his philosophy of religion, which covers some of Habermas's earliest published writings in the late 1950s through till the late 1970s, and then returning to his discussion of religion in *TCA* at the end of this period. While there are certainly ways to weave Habermas's philosophical writings on religion into the architecture of his more social theoretical work during this time period, because they were originally published as stand-alone essays and eventually included in the volumes *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, (1971) and *Kultur und Kritik. Verstruete Aufsätze,* (1973) and complied in English in *Philosophical-Political Profiles* in 1983, treating them separately has at least two advantages. First, it highlights how Habermas's more conciliatory views on "religion" in the first, second, and much of the third phase of his work, was largely confined to what I am here calling his "existential-emancipatory" philosophy.[23] Second, by introducing his more general theory first, my intention is to signal the somewhat marginal place that religion held in his work prior to the 1980s. It is only after this period with his collection of essays in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (1983 [1990]) that Habermas begins to regularly include at least one philosophical (or philosophical-political) essay as part of his larger social-theoretical argument, including essays where religion is either a significant or a central topic.[24] It is my claim that this shift is marked by what we might call Habermas's "ethical turn" with the development of his theory of discourse ethics in the early 1980s and, perhaps most importantly, with the reception of these ideas in the Anglo-American world following a wave of translations of his work, in particular his influential *Theory of Communicative Action*.[25] Given this post-1980 emphasis on ethics and politics Habermas's interest in religion prior to this time *as an existential and emancipatory ideal* will gradually expand as his political aim of inclusion comes up against the reality of persistent religious identities within the public

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[23] While discourse ethics marks a turn toward new trajectories in Habermas's theory of religion, his essay "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," (1988) will mark his first critical engagement with theologians who have responded to his work and thus signals a clear shift from taking up religion *as* philosophy to a more ethical-political engagement.

[24] See *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* 1983 [1990]); *Justification and Application* (1991 [1993]); *The Past as Future* (1991 [1994]); *A Berlin Republic* (1995 [1997]); *Inclusion of the Other* (1996 [1998]); *Time of Transitions* (2001 [2006]); *The Future of Human Nature* (2003); *The Divided West* (2006); and, *Europe: The Faltering Project* (2008 [2009]), among others.

[25] See *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action*, eds. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1991.

sphere. For the time being, however, religion is located largely as a remnant from the past that continues to linger somewhere in the margins, outside of the public use of reason.

Reason and Publicity in the Bourgeois Public Sphere

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962 [1989]) provides a socio-historical overview of the emergence and decline of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth century Europe, focusing on developments in England, France and Germany, including a chapter on changing ideas of "publicness" and the use of public reason as expressed in the writings of Kant, Hegel, Marx, de Tocqueville and Mill.[27] It also stands out for its relative lack of jargon when compared with the rest of Habermas's writings, and is filled with an array of historical examples discussing the role of such institutions as coffee houses, newspapers, and literary salons in their contribution to the emergence and development of the idea of the public sphere. By stressing the emancipatory potential of the bourgeois public sphere in the first part of the book, Habermas carved out a very different theoretical territory from his mentors Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947 [2002]) marked a departure from their earlier and more "optimistic" models for critical social theory in the 1930s[28] toward a critique of Enlightenment ideals and their emancipatory potential for modern societies.[29] As they famously wrote at the beginning of *Dialectic*, "Myth is already Enlightenment and Enlightenment reverts to mythology," signaling the instrumentalization of rationality and the domination of nature as an all-encompassing ideology of the modern world.[30] Whereas Adorno and Horkheimer would come to see the Marxian ideal of social emancipation in a negative light and advocate instead for the (critical) cultivation of individual autonomy in order to resist the deprivations of the established order, Habermas understood the ideals of *autonomy* and *solidarity* as two sides of the same coin and argued for the radicalization of existing democratic institutions, including the (formal and informal) public sphere, as a way to withstand the corrosive impacts of market capitalism and state administration.

Adding further to this divide was a falling-out between Habermas and Horkheimer, who felt that the young scholar was too indebted to Marxian ideas of the student

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[27] Habermas, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere: Idea and Ideology," in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 89-129.

[28] See footnote 1.

[29] See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1923-1950* (1996); Max Horkheimer, The *Eclipse of Reason* (1974); Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1981) and *Minima Moralia* (2005).

[30] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), xviii.

movement in West Germany, which he likened to the mass populism of the Nazi era.[31] On the other hand, Habermas's emphasis on bourgeois democracy as a pacemaker in struggles for liberation was often dismissed by his allies on the Left, making his argument a rather unusual one during a time of strong divisions within the German political and intellectual scene. In retrospect, it seems fair to suggest that Habermas was searching for a theory that could combine the more radical impulses of the Left within a legal and political framework committed to ensuring rights and representation under the rule of law. As Robert Houlb puts it, "What attracted Habermas to the notion of a public sphere then and now is its potential as a foundation for a critique of society based on democratic principles."[32]

While Habermas's focus would quickly move away from the ideal of public discourse as a primary mode of social integration toward a theory of communicative competency and interaction,[33] the centrality of these themes will be taken up once again upon the occasion of the English translation of *Structural Transformations* (1989), spurring an English-language *Festschrift* on the topic,[34] and will figure decisively in his major work of political theory, *Between Facts and Norms* (1992). Also unique to *Structural Transformations* is Habermas's emphasis on the role that literary culture played during the development of a burgeoning capitalist commercial economy and its role in challenging the aristocratic monopoly on aesthetic representations in feudal societies.[35] As Habemras writes,

> Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became "critical" also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason.[36]

This historical opening toward the idea of public deliberation is attributed to two main processes: first, the reconstitution of the family as an intimate and private sphere increasingly distinct from the economic activity of material production, which provided a space where "private experiences grew out of the audience-oriented subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain" and helped to cultivate a new understanding of the public use of reason.[37] The second and related process was the emergence of the world of letters, giving birth to a literary culture, as seen in such novels as Samuel Richardson's

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31 As Craig Calhoun et.al write in their introduction to *Habermas and Religion*, "The aged Max Horkheimer criticized Habermas's treatment of the public sphere for what he saw as an invitation to renew popular, possibly populist struggles that he feared (remembering the rise of National Socialism) could be potentially dangerous." See Calhoun et.al, *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 7.

32 Robert Houlb, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

33 As Pieter Duvenage writes: "During the 1960s and early 1970s Habermas further deepened his ideas of a public sphere in the direction of a theory of rationality. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, rationality is explained in terms of self-reflection, but in his work of the early 1970s it becomes increasingly clear that Habermas links rationality to a concept of public communication." See Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 73.

34 See Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1992.

35 See Duvenage, 73.

36 Habermas, *Structura; Transformations*, 24.

37 Ibid., 28.

Pamela or Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Linking these processes together, Habermas argues that the subjective expressions cultivated in the private realm of family life had "become fit to print" creating a space where "relations between author, work and public changed."[38]

The spread of coffee houses in England, salons in France and table societies (*Tischgesellschaften*) in Germany marked a further stage in the development of institutions that existed at an arms length from the church, state, and market society, thereby creating a (partial) leveling of the playing field for the promotion of general interests. Such innovations, Habermas argues, opened up a new space for the development of an autonomous sphere that was considered distinct from traditional centres of power, where any educated, private (bourgeois, male) citizen could access books, journals, etc., and become a part of the debating public. These structural changes in social organization offered a focal point for Habermas for conceiving of the public sphere as not only a driver of emancipation, but also a potential site for on-going democratic will-formation with the idea of public reason at its core.[39]

Idea and Ideology of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Chapter four of *Structural Transformations*, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere: Idea and Ideology," traces a variety of theoretical developments from Hobbes through Mill, in order to demonstrate some of the ways that concepts such as the "public sphere," "public opinion," and "publicity" were tied to changing ideas about the relationship between *bourgeois* and *homme*. These included concepts like autonomy and reason, which found new and innovative expressions as the question of who could and who should posses such ideals—from literate elites, to the working classes—was contested and expanded.[40] Tracing this genealogy is important for Habermas in order to underline paradigmatic shifts in the idea of the public reason as well as to highlight challenges that remain the subject of ongoing debate.

One such example of an innovated move in the notion of autonomy can be found in Rousseau's social contract and his idea that legitimacy should rest upon the "will of the people." While marking an important paradigm shift, Habermas points out that Rousseau's insistence on a strong republican ideal that linked *homme* and *citoyen* together denied the possibility of an "autonomous private sphere" (civil society) understood as distinct from the identity of the polis or state. In this view, public reason was tied to the collective will in such a way that autonomous input and critique remained limited at best.[41] Kant, for his part, paved the way for the development of a more modern concept of "publicity" with his idea of a binding principle between politics and morality. As he argued in his well-known essay "What is Enlightenment," since individuals are in need of external guidance in order to develop their capacity for reason, public

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[38] Ibid., 49-50.

[39] See Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* 6.

[40] See Andrew Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas* (Montreal, QB: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 40.

[41] Habermas, *Structural*, 90.

deliberation becomes the natural vehicle for cultivating these inherent abilities.[42] In a nutshell, Kant's novel idea sought to re-imagine the common understanding of moral autonomy as *deliberative*, to use a modern term, where, as Habermas writes, "thinking for oneself seemed to coincide with thinking aloud and the use of reason with its public use."[43]

While Kant had argued that the world of the academy was at the centre of enlightenment—a remark that sounds rather elitist to modern ears—he also insisted that philosophers' should take their ideas before the public and not simply assert them from on high.[44] Indeed, the idea that private persons do not need to be dominated by external forms of coercion and are capable, in due time, of participating in the development of a legal constitution has become almost axiomatic in modern liberal thought (if not always applied in practice). That such persons, according to Kant, would eventually come to obey this constitution out of a sense of moral duty is a far more contentious claim and remains a topic of considerable debate, as will be discussed in Chapter four.[45] In any event, Kant's understanding of "publicity" as the vehicle through which the idea of public reason would eventually come about and where an autonomous "public opinion" would be realized was and remains a topic of considerable debate. With the critiques of Hegel and Marx, however, this ideal began to crack at the seams as the "classic relationship of *bourgeois-homme-citoyen*" was increasingly contested.[46]

Hegel famously rejected Kant's attempt to align politics and morality, arguing that the conflict between property-owners and labourers within civil society "is so far from annulling this natural inequality that it … raises it to an inequality of skill and resources, and even to one of moral and intellectual attainment."[47] For Hegel, Kant's ideal of free mobility into the property-owning class did not consider the sheer "disorganization of civil society," where antagonisms were the order of the day and reconciliation required the strong, guiding hand of the state.[48]

Marx, in his turn, rejected Hegel's deference to the state and sought to unravel the "false consciousness" that conflated *bourgeois* with *homme*, arguing that as private persons began to communicate to an increasingly larger public the idea of publicity took on a decisively political tone that would eventually spread beyond the private domain of bourgeois salons and coffee houses and into the collective consciousness of the masses. Habermas frames this paradigm shift as follows:

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[42] See Kant, "Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment," in *Basic Writings of Kant* (New York: Random House: Modern Library Paperback Editions, 2001), 133-42.

[43] Habermas, *Structural*, 104.

[44] This was, it should be noted, limited to the (male) property-owning class, who had the time and opportunity to cultivate such sensibilities within the private domain. See Habermas, *Structural*, 110-11.

[45] Ibid., 111.

[46] As Habermas writes, "A series of fictions in which the self-understanding of the bourgeois consciousness as 'public opinion' was articulated extended right into the Kantian system, and therefore it was possible to derive from it in turn the idea of the bourgeois public sphere precisely in its connection with the presupposition of a natural basis of the juridical condition." Ibid., 117.

[47] Hegel quoted in Habermas, Ibid., 118.

[48] Ibid., 119.

> Yet by about the middle of the nineteenth century it was possible to foresee how, as a consequence of its inherent dialectic, this public sphere would come under the control of groups that, because they lacked control over property and therefore a basis of private autonomy, could have no interest in maintaining society as a private sphere. … As soon as the mass of non-owners made the general rules governing transactions in society into a topic of their critical public debate, the reproduction of social life as such (and no longer just its form of private appropriation) became a universal concern.[49]

As is well known, Marx would attempt to solve Hegel's dilemma over the enigma of "political society" by arguing for a socialization of the means of production; only in this way would *domination* be substituted by *reason*. Moreover, Marx maintained that owning private property was no longer a prerequisite for the use of autonomous reason, thereby removing it from the private realm and placing it into the public sphere itself.[50] In this way, the idea of bourgeois *as* homme was turned on its head and replaced with a notion of citoyen *as* homme, where autonomy would be generated through the realization of a just social order.

While appreciative of Marx's innovative diagnosis of the bourgeois public sphere as a reified construction of actually existing social relations, Habermas points out that he remained tied to a quasi-Kantian understanding of the philosophy of history, where it was believed that justice and autonomy would eventually come about through the unfolding of some "natural order." Liberals such as Mill and de Tocqueville, by contrast, took a different Kantian tact, arguing for active political reform in the face of the many inequalities that were evident in bourgeois society.[51] For Mill, the expansion of the public sphere did not bring about emancipation but rather highlighted new forms of domination and conflict that had previously been ignored. For him as well as for other liberals "public opinion" was at best a blending of subjective opinions and not the end result of some rational consensus, which is a point of contention that will be taken up by Habermas in his debate with John Rawls. More importantly, the valorization of public opinion was seen to be in danger of becoming a coercive force in and of itself given the many "unreconciled interests" that it entailed.[52] For Mill, as for de Tocqueville, what was needed was representative government, where public opinion could be tamed and channeled through "authoritative insights of materially independent citizens."[53] The inability to resolve these competing interests led Mill to advocate for tolerance over unity, where, as Habermas describes it, "The unity of reason and of public opinion lacked the objective guarantee of a concordance of interests existing in society, the rational demonstrability of a universal interest as such."[54] This observation coincides with two central themes that Habermas will develop throughout his career: the unity of reason and the search for universal human interests.[55]

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[49] Ibid., 127.

[50] Ibid., 128.

[51] Ibid., 130-131.

[52] Ibid., 133.

[53] Ibid., 136.

[54] Ibid., 135.

[55] See, for example, Habermas, "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of Its Voices," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 115-148.

Putting aside the problems with this general narrative on the early bourgeois public sphere,[56] what is important to note here is that for Habermas the emergence of social-welfare democracies represents a further challenge to these historical trajectories, not least because under such conditions the state is transformed into an active economic agent while business comes to perform more and more tasks for the state, thus causing an "interweaving of the public and private realm."[57] Here the individual disputants of the bourgeois public sphere—however idealized in this early formulation—are replaced by special interest groups, such as trade unions, corporations, and political parties who represent factional interests that serve to reintroduce distracting and divisive forms of economic conflict into public debate.[58] Adding further challenge to this picture, the 18th century literary public sphere, which Habermas claims functioned to promote the spread of information and culture, has largely been replaced by an ever-expanding culture of consumption.[59] Under these premises, which are partly indebted to the influence of Horkheimer and Adorno's work on the "culture industry,"[60] autonomy ceases to function in the Kantian sense of an exercise of reason, becoming interiorized and channeled through the subjective preferences of a consumer-driven society[61] and finds expression through mediums such as advertising, where special interests play a decisive role in the management of public relations.[62]

In a similar vein, party politics draws upon these same mechanisms in order to secure power, often placing its own internal interests above those of the electorate.[63] Habermas's point is not to suggest that people are passive dupes at the hands of state and corporate power, but rather that the predominance of mechanisms like advanced advertising techniques have the effect of distorting the possibilities for rational modes of argumentation by provoking unconscious desires[64] thereby placing subjective preferences over the concerns of an ideally united citizenry.[65] Habermas concludes, somewhat pessimistically, that the opportunity for developing a rational public sphere was missed as the intertwining of state and society led to a kind of "refeudalization."[66] He does not opt for the more "negative" philosophical theorizing of late Horkheimer and Adorno, however, but instead diagnoses two competing trends in social-welfare states: the manufactured publicity of public relations and propaganda along with more critical responses of public communication via well-organized pressure groups that are able to hold powerful special interests to account. In this sense, the "political autonomy" of competing actors to negotiate and debate becomes the locus and potential of the public

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[56] See *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992) and *After Habermas: New Perspective on the Public Sphere* (2004) for two collections of critiques on this topic.

[57] Habermas, *Structural*, 54.

[58] Ibid., 198.

[59] Ibid., 161.

[60] See Hokheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (2007); Deborah Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* (1996).

[61] Habermas, *Structural*, 171.

[62] Ibid., 192.

[63] Ibid., 203.

[64] Ibid., 217.

[65] Ibid., 211.

[66] Ibid., 231.

sphere rather than the "private autonomy" of the bourgeois.[67] Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, which includes his work in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, *Towards a Rational Society*, *Theory and Practice* and *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas will focus on the emancipatory potential of students' movements as a crucial (and even central) cite for revealing problems with democratic legitimacy and as an example of less dominated modes of social interaction. It is important to note that religion barely registers in this text, despite the fact that Habermas had completed his dissertation on conceptions of the "Absolute" in Schelling's work in 1954. Among other things, this highlights the more circumscribed role that he saw for "religion" during this time, where tracing a socio-political history of paradigm shifts within European philosophy toward the development a more emancipated idea of autonomy and solidarity is located in relation to the idea of public reason and the spaces that enable it to emerge. This "structural" emphasis finds a more concrete object in Habermas's engagement with the student movement and the role of technology as an emancipatory force for modern societies. Before turning these developments, however, it is important to note Habermas's shift toward language as the ground upon which he will construct his critical theory of society.

Knowledge and Human Interests

Following on the heels of *Structural Transformations*, which quickly made waves on the German intellectual scene, Habermas took a position at Frankfurt University, where his inaugural lecture, entitled, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective" set the stage for his future research program. Here he develops a philosophical anthropology that attempts to marry certain trajectories in the theory of knowledge (from Kant to Hegel, Marx to Comte and Mach) to social theory (e.g., hermeneutics, pragmatism, psychoanalysis), while aligning cognitive competencies with human interests—technical (instrumental), practical (moral), and critical (emancipatory), a point that I will touch on below. This approach marks a further distance from Horkheimer and Adorno, setting new and different standards for a critical theory of society.[68] Part of the impetus behind this move can be explained by Habermas's burgeoning theory of postmetaphyical reason, which is critically informed by his understanding of religion. As he writes in his inaugural lecture in 1965:

> The word "theory" has religious origins. The *theoros* was the representative sent by Greek cities to public celebrations. Through *theoria*, that is, through looking on, he abandoned himself to sacred events. In philosophical language, *theoria* was transferred to contemplation of the cosmos. In this form, theory already presupposed the demarcation between Being and time that is the foundation of ontology. … When the philosopher views the immortal order, he cannot help bringing himself into accord with the proportions of the cosmos and reproducing them internally. … Through the soul's likening itself to the ordered motion of the cosmos, theory enters the conduct of life. In ethos theory molds life to its form and is reflected in the conduct of those who subject themselves

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67 Ibid., 232-33.

68 It is important to note that Habermas's shift was partly inspired by the earlier, pre-war writings of Horkheimer and Adorno who at the time had argued for a more comprehensive and integral critical theory. See footnote 1, along with Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London, UK: Verso), 2006.

to its discipline.[69]

Here traditional forms of theory are understood as thoroughly metaphysical, where the aim of human consciousness is to align one's self with some imagined Ideal. In this sense, it remains limited and ethno-centric as it is bound by a dependence on a closed system of thought that relies on a particular set of fixed concepts in order to discover the apex of Being. Once brought down into the mundane world and made self-conscious of contingency and materiality, such modes of thought are seen as ever greater attempts to try and square a circle, resulting in an endless chain of logical contradictions, especially when they bleed into technical-instrumental modes of reasoning that have become the domain of modern science. While I hesitate to read too much into this quotation in regards to Habermas's theory of religion at this stage in his work, his use of the adjective "religious" here is suggestive of an orientation toward a worldview that has not successfully differentiated spheres of knowledge and thus remains stuck in a fixed tautology. Here we may note certain affinities with rationalist or intellectualist[70] interpretations of religion—from Feuerbach to Marx, Hume to Dawkins—where its cogency is measured against the force of logical propositions. While Habermas will follow a line more in the tradition of Kant, Hegel and Marx that seeks to translate "religious" impulses into "secular" ideas and thereby salvage their "messianic" content,[71] his work in social theory will also situate religion along Weberian and Durkheimian lines; that is, in relation to "value spheres" and as a source of collective meaning that functions to bond groups together in a solidaristic fashion. Both here and in his latter work, Habermas will continue this line of thought, while adding newer and more complex trajectories.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas argues that the structures of knowledge that have developed from traditional on down to modern societies are determined in no small measure by certain interests and goals. While Habermas acknowledges the destructive force of instrumental rationality that had so deeply troubled his predecessors,[72] he wants to conceptualize it in a different light by arguing that it corresponds with a *technical interest* that is directed toward the natural world and results in an objectified and instrumental relationship. This interest is necessary inasmuch as it allows human beings to gain some level of control and prosperity through the productive transformation of the material world. *Practical interests*, by contrast, are oriented toward understanding other human beings with the aim of coordinating action and regulating behavior. The third and final interest, which Habermas will modify in his later work, is that of *emancipation*. The elevation of these interests to the level of anthropological categories are dependent on humanity's unique position in the "order of nature," where,

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[69] Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," 301-2.

[70] See William Arnal, "On the Definition of Religion," in William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of 'Religion'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19-20.

[71] These ideas were also taken up by Habermas's predecessors Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Karl Jaspers, Gershom Scholem, and especially Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg. See Habemras, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (1983); *The Liberating Power of Symbols* (2001); *Religion and Rationality* (2002).

[72] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

through the cultivation and use of language, they are able to rise above the fray of a mere "species being." As he lays it out in an oft-quoted passage from his inaugural lecture:

> What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: *language*. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus. Taken together, autonomy and responsibly constitute the only Idea that we posses a priori in the sense of a philosophical tradition… However, only in an emancipated society, whose members' autonomy and responsibly had been realized, would communication have developed into the non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue from which both our model of reciprocally constituted ego identity and our idea of true consensus are always implicitly derived. To this extent the truth of statements is based on anticipating the realization of the good life.[73]

These lines might appear unintelligible if not placed in the context of Habermas's corresponding theory of social evolution, which looks to align epistemological and structural developments that have occurred within human societies as a by-product of communicative competence and the "learning processes" that follow, which, among other things, are responsible for cooperative endeavors that have enabled certain advances (however uneven) in human development or "civilization." In short, rationalization, which Habermas will later discuss as a by-product of the "linguistification of the sacred," has a certain *telos* that enables both cognitive and structural advance, though its direction is not set in stone and can easily go off the rails. At this stage, Habermas claims that the human interest in "self-preservation" against the forces of nature results not only in increasingly complex social systems guided by an instrumental rationality, but is also, as he puts it, "present in the individual as libido" and "has detached itself from the behavioral system of self-preservation and urges toward Utopian fulfillment."[74] While Habermas will later shift his language and emphasis away from these psychoanalytic ideas, which deeply informed his model for *emancipation* (e.g., through the model of the analyst-analysand relationship), he will retain and develop aspects of hermeneutics and pragmatism in his broader theory as key tools for addressing questions of interpretation and understanding between scientific domains and the public sphere (i.e., experts and citizens). This research impetus will also factor prominently in his bourgeoning theory of language, which was first termed "universal" and later "formal pragmatics."[75] Here, religion does not factor prominently in Habermas's broader social theory and appears (if only by implication) in the domain of *practical interests*, where it retains a certain type of rationality, though one that is tied to particular lifeworlds that come into conflict when stepping outside of the protected harbor of a community of shared ideals.

The Problem of Science and Technology and the Communicative Turn

It is well known that European Enlightenment thinkers challenged classical doctrines of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and developed new ways of differentiating political decision-making from social morality. Habermas describes the development of

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73 Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," 314.

74 Ibid., 312.

75 See Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1998.

theories of natural law, especially those that followed in the trust-wary footsteps of Thomas Hobbes, as overly concerned with finding technical solutions for how to deal with social behaviour through the coercive mechanisms of the state. Under these conditions, the practical problem of cultivating virtuous citizens came to be seen as more of a technical issue to be dealt with through the regulation of social relations within emerging nation-states. With this historical background in mind Habermas addresses the widespread problem of *decisionism* in essays such as "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision in our Scientific Civilization," (1963 [1973]) and "Science and Politics," (1964 [1970]) where he looks to challenge the "strict division" between political decisions and scientific knowledge that had influenced the work of Max Weber. At the heart of his critique was an attempt to overturn the reigning positivist doxa of "value-free" investigation, which upheld science and technology as the only rationally justifiable forms of knowledge, rejecting all other modes of inquiry as dogmatic and ideological. According to this line of thought (or at least its more rigid iterations), values are understood to be *subjective* and therefore not justifiable on a rational basis. If, on the contrary, as Habermas will argue, the goals of "enlightenment" and emancipation can be re-configured in line with certain practical interests, then it can be demonstrated that reason is not limited to the domains of science and technology.

In his intellectual biography on Habermas, which draws connections between his public/political interventions throughout his academic career with shifts in his theoretical work, Matthew Specter zeroes in on Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the context of the then-current discourse on technology in West Germany. For example, he observes:

> At its core, the impulse to reconstruct historical materialism stems from the same political objectives that drove Habermas's critique of technocratic reason and plebiscitary government in the 1960s, namely, an analysis of the obstacles to egalitarian, democratic will-formation in advanced capitalist states.[76]

Specter locates Habermas's changing political position during this time as an attempt to negotiate the fault-lines between a critique of the governing regime and support for the students' movement(s) in Germany, of which he was a participating ally and a sympathetic critic. While on the one hand arguing that the students' concerns helped to reveal the lack of a viable public sphere where decisions could (potentially) gain legitimacy through rigorous debate, Habermas was also critical of a tendency within these movements to subordinate the rule of law or even advocate for its abolition altogether (e.g., the goal of revolution as an end in itself), along with the pervasiveness of anti-technological sentiments that had become commonplace.[77] There is an interesting parallel here with arguments that Habermas will later develop in his work on religion in relation to the confusion among some within the reigning protest culture between the spheres of aesthetic-expressive and purposive-rational reasoning, which he frames at this point in time as an unbridled "chasing after experience" in search of the "New

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[76] Matthew Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 89-90.

[77] Specter, *Habermas*, 92.

Immediacy." Habermas lays out the problem in *Towards a Rational Society* (hereafter *TRS*) as follows:

> The slogan of the New Immediacy designates an attitude [that] radically rejects adaptation to self-regulating systems in favor of immediate gratification. This is based on the experience that complex detours through systems of purposive-rational action continually postpone goals. Today motives of action are increasingly linked to generalized means for attaining random goals, and are exhausted in abstract endeavors to acquire income, leisure time, prestige, influence, etc.—and all this beneath the crust of a specific boredom. It is to this that a number of students are reacting with the insistence that aesthetic experience, instinctual gratification, and expression be realized here and now.[78]

While there may very well have been something to these tendencies that Habermas identifies among the students' movement(s), what interests me here is how then-contemporary struggles within the (West German) public sphere served as a testing ground for Habermas in identifying social pathologies and a clear example of why he deemed it necessary to re-imagine the conceptual domains of reason, following the work of Max Weber. In this sense, it could be argued that Habermas's diagnosis and immanent critique of social trends occurring in his own backyard serve as his primary data-set during this time for generalizing broader trends across *all* modern societies. Here it is worth pausing to ask to what extent did events such as these, where the overvaluation of aesthetic experience at the expense of rejecting all forms of purposive-rational action, influence Habermas's conception of religion? One can see certain parallels with his critique of so-called "New Age" movements in more recent writings,[79] which he cites as symptomatic of broader social pathologies without providing a microanalysis of internal variations within these movements that might reveal significant differences and problematize his overly generalized conception. This tendency toward macro-generalizations will mark a persistent thread in Habermas's work and constitute one of the main problems with his classification of religion.

Following Habermas's early model and diagnosis of legitimation problems in late-capitalist societies, the anti-technological fervour among certain sectors within the students' movement(s) was seen to be in many ways the obverse of an overly technocratic state that had abandoned any substantial notion of "society," understood as a consciously organized entity through the intentional interaction of human beings *qua citizens* working toward common goals and with certain common ideals. Under these premises, Habermas argues that decisionistic and technocratic models came to dominate political consciousness in advanced capitalist societies as technical questions were dealt with by experts whose authority was legitimated through various modes of representation and mediation (e.g., plebiscites and public relations) and was largely removed from public debate.

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[78] Habermas, "The Movement in Germany: A Critical Analysis," *Toward a Rational Society*, 33.

[79] Find As he writes in his interview, "A Conversation About God and the World": In any event, what I see nowadays in the 'esoterica' sections of bookshops appears to me more as a symptom of ego weakness and regression, the expression of a yearning for an impossible return to mythical forms of thought, magical practices, and closed worldviews, that the Church overcame in its battle against 'the heathens.' But history teaches us that religious sects can be very innovative. So maybe not everything on the market is Californian claptrap or neopaganism." See Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 152.

At the heart of the problem of the "scientization of politics" in 1960s West Germany was an over dependency on technological rationality, which, Habermas argued, created a radical disconnect between facts and values and an over-determined ethos of technology as a guiding principle for managing social relations. At the same time, processes of labour and interaction created different sets of interests that subordinated traditional values and distorted their connection to the social world.[80] What was required, instead, in the movement toward a rational society, was a "dialectic of potential and will," where the capacity of technical knowledge could be brought into mediation with social life through modes of public discussion that were not subject to mere domination.[81] "For only to the extent that, knowing the technical potential of our historically determined will, we orient ourselves to the given situation, can we know in turn what specially oriented expansion of our technical potential we want for the future."[82] In this sense, the rationalization of politics can only be realized through the public sphere, where technical progress and enlightenment become constitutive of one another.

In his essay "Technology and Science as Ideology," Habermas confronts these conflicts through a reformulation of Max Weber's theory of rationalization and a critique of Herbert Marcuse's notion of a "New Science," which, for Habermas, reflected the more utopian elements on the German Left. While he agreed with Marcuse that scientific-technical progress served as a legitimating force for contemporary capitalism and in this way obscured the potential that it held for actualizing a more just society, Habermas argued that there is no way to turn science into a tool that could somehow overcome "instrumental reason," where "the viewpoint of possible technical control would be replaced by one of preserving, fostering and releasing the potentialities of nature."[83] In Matthew Specter's estimation, it was this essay that, as he puts it, "spurred Habermas to work out a theory of rationality beyond technical rationality," and "was the founding gesture of Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism via Weber and Western Marxism."[84] Unlike Marcuse who, along with Adorno and Horkheimer, held that technical reason not only obscures the social interests that help to determine its various applications, but also *prevents* reason as such, Habermas argues that such a view amounts to a mystification of technological power.[85] For Habermas, the problem is not technological reason *per se*, but the reduction of *praxis* to *techne* and the extension of this logic to all spheres of life. As an alternative strategy, Habermas will re-position *techne*, along with the category of "work," within the sphere of purposive-rational action so that rationalization within this domain is understood as a necessary process for developing productive forces and technological control. By contrast, rationalization within the sphere of the social domain was characterized by *interaction*, which pointed toward the ideal of communicative interaction free from domination.[86] At this stage in Habermas's theory,

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[80] Habermas, "Technical Progress and the Social Life-World," in *Toward a Rational Society*, 53.
[81] Ibid., 59-60.
[82] Habermas, "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion," in *Toward a Rational Society*, 74.
[83] Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" Ibid., 86.
[84] Habermas, "Technology and Science," 121.
[85] For example, the idea that its world-constituting effects must be radically transformed if humanity is ever to break with "one-dimensional" thought.
[86] See Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978), 23.

then, it was necessary to distinguish between different modes of reason and rationalization, where "work" factors as a prominent concept given its relationship to the emancipatory ideas of the Left.[87]

Crucial for understanding Habermas's early classification of religion is this distinction that he draws between work and interaction, which correspond to two distinct types of rationality—*purposive-rational action* and *symbolic interaction*. Whereas the former relies on a mode of validity that is tied to rules that can be assessed as either correct or incorrect propositions (e.g., the sun rises in the east and sets in the west), when it comes to interaction, as he writes, "the validity of social norms is grounded only in the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations."[88] Furthermore, Habermas will argue that in addition to these two types of rationality and their corresponding modes of validity, social systems can be differentiated by determining what type of action predominates within them.[89] It is at this point that Habermas will chart an evolutionary anthropology of stages of social development, which fall along the lines of: 1) archaic; 2) traditional; and 3) modern societies, where "traditional" societies are sub-divided into primitive and developed "civilizations." Here the reader may be able to anticipate, at least in a general sense, how religion will fare in this taxonomy.

The first stage is that of archaic societies, which Habermas dates to the end of the Mesolithic period (approx. 20,000-9,500 BCE), and is witness to a world where purposive-rational actions are understood in terms of "ritual attachment to interactions," and where founding myths undergird the social structure through certain hierarchies and bonds of kinship.[90] Putting aside potential problems with the dates ascribed to these so-called "archaic" societies and the alleged universality of this type of interaction, the purpose of Habermas's conceptual differentiation here becomes clearer when he makes the leap into the realm of "civilizations." As he frames it:

> But it was probably only in civilizations, that is under the conditions of a class society organized as a state that the differentiation of work and interaction went far enough for the subsystem to yield technically exploitable knowledge that could be stored and expanded relatively independently of mythical and religious interpretations of the world. At the same time social norms became separated from power-legitimating traditions, so that 'culture' attained a certain independence from 'institutions.' The threshold of the modern period would then be characterized by that process of rationalization which commenced with the loss of the 'superiority' of the institutional framework to the subsystems of purposive-rational action. Traditional legitimations could now be criticized against the standards of rationality of means-ends relations. Concurrently, information from the area of technically exploitable knowledge infiltrated tradition and compelled a reconstruction of traditional world interpretations along the lines of scientific standards.[91]

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87 This was also thought to have direct implications for public debate. As Specter notes, "The distinction between these two concepts, 'work' and 'interaction,' enable him to solve a conceptual problem that he thought impaired the left: namely, the belief that a change in the mode of production would automatically result in desirable changes in the relations of production." See Specter, *Habermas*, 123.

88 Habermas, "Technology and Science," 92.

89 Ibid., 93.

90 Ibid., 114.

91 Ibid.

From this particular formulation we may glean what Habermas means by "religious interpretations" as those that are unable to differentiate between the self, social roles, and the larger order of society. In short, there is a failure to separate the subjective, intersubjective and objective domains of reasoning that have become axiomatic in modern societies; that is to say, partially, on the level of institutions and as cognitive presuppositions that Habermas believes should guide processes of reasoning and social interaction. Furthermore, Habermas's pairing of religious with "mythical" interpretations here seems to indicate a conceptual analogy that suggests that early "religion" was wholly "mythical." In this mode of interaction the natural world is thoroughly anthropomorphized and the differentiation between things like humans, animals and gods is minimal. This is said to be due to the inherent scarcity of archaic life and a relative inability to cope with the forces of nature. Here we may recall Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of myth in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they write that, "The word was thought to have direct power over the thing, expression merged with intention."[92]

Traditional societies, by contrast, are identified by the presence of: 1) a centralized ruling power; 2) social divisions along the lines of socioeconomic classes (as opposed to kinship lines); and 3) a central worldview, which Habermas describes as "myth, complex religion," which serves to legitimate political power. In such societies, the presence of surplus products has surpassed the systems of distribution that were present in kinship societies, creating newer systems of distribution and labour that add a layer of institutionalization that was not formerly present.[93] Such societies are deemed to be "traditional" based on the persistent dependence of "mythical" and "religious" systems as organizing principles that underpin the institutional framework. As Habermas conceives it:

> The expression 'traditional society' refers to the circumstance that the institutional framework is grounded in the unquestionable underpinning of legitimation constituted by mythical, religious or metaphysical interpretations of reality—cosmic as well as social—as a whole. 'Traditional' societies exist as long as the development of subsystems of purposive-rational action keep within the limits of the legitimating efficacy of cultural traditions. … This immunity is a meaningful criterion for the delimitation of traditional societies from those which have crossed the threshold to modernization.[94]

Two things to note here are, first, the ordered taxonomy of mythical-to-religious-to-metaphysical interpretations that Habermas sets into play and, 2) the border that is drawn between traditional and modern societies depending on the centrality of "cultural traditions" as a legitimating force in and of themselves. While it is not entirely clear just how religion is being differentiated here, it would seem to suggest an intermediary stage when "mythical" worldviews (i.e., as described above) have been surpassed in favour of a social order that functions in a way that is semi-independent from nature, but still relies upon supernatural ideas in order to ground its relationship to the social world. The lines that immediately follow the above quotation seem to suggests as much:

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[92] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 47.

[93] Habermas, "Technology and Science," 94.

[94] Here Habermas cites Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* as a source for these ideas. Habermas, Ibid., 95.

> What is new [in the passage from traditional to modern societies] is the level of the development of the productive forces that makes permanent the extension of subsystems or purposive-rational action and thereby calls in question the traditional form of the legitimation of power. The older mythic, religious, and metaphysical worldviews obey the logic of interaction contexts. … The rationality of language games, associated with communicative action, is confronted at the threshold of the modern period with the rationality of means-ends relations, associated with instrumental and strategic action. As soon as this confrontation can arise, the end of traditional society is in sight: the traditional form of legitimation breaks down.[95]

What takes its' place, according Habermas's schema, are capitalist modes of production where the institutional framework becomes tied to social labour. Here he draws on the example of property relations, which shift from a purely political relation to a mode of production where legitimacy is bound to a market economy of exchange. This, Habermas argues, is what is behind early modern concepts of "rationalist natural law."[96] This shift is crucial since it changes the power structure in ways that usher in the move from public religion to private belief:

> First, traditional worldviews and objectifications lose their power and validity as myth, as public religion, as customary ritual, as justifying metaphysics, as unquestionable tradition. Instead, they are reshaped into subjective belief systems and ethics which ensure the private cogency of modern value orientations (the "Protestant ethic"). Second, they are transformed into constructions that do both at once: criticize tradition and reorganize the released material of tradition according to the principles of formal law and the exchange of equivalents (rationalist natural law). Having become fragile existing legitimations are replaced by new ones. The latter emerge from the critique of the dogmatism of traditional interpretations of the world and claim a scientific character. Yet they retain legitimating functions, thereby keeping actual power relations inaccessible to analysis and to public consciousness.[97]

These processes that Habermas describes, indebted as they are to Max Weber's theory of secularization, lead to an "iron cage" of sorts, though he will go on to suggest that the prison's bars are not without their weak spots.

Habermas takes up this problem in *Legitimation Crisis* (1973 [1975]) where he argues that modern, capitalist societies are unable to successfully integrate two key sources of motivation—civil and familial privatism. The former refers to the steering systems of administration that require little participation from citizens on the whole (e.g., apart from paying taxes and voting), while the latter indicates a differentiation in work and education that shift familial life more and more toward patterns of leisure and consumption.[98] The essential crisis here is the same that was outlined in "Technology and Science as Ideology," namely, that the development of advanced systems of administration in order to stabilize social organization become increasingly cut off from the lives and needs of every day people and where the legitimacy of the social order is largely conferred upon expert cultures (e.g., technocrats). Interestingly, Habermas argues that while these "priviatisms" are necessary in advanced capitalist societies they still rely upon pre-capitalist cultural patterns that they cannot reproduce themselves. In this sense,

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95 Ibid., 95.

96 Ibid., 97.

97 Ibid., 98-99.

98 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975), 75.

they feed "parasitically upon the remains of tradition"[99] since their own *modus operandi* functions under different patterns of motivation—patterns that cannot find a comparable basis for legitimating themselves and must therefore act in contradictory ways. Habermas lays out the stakes as follows:

> Bourgeois culture as a whole was never able to reproduce itself from itself. It was always dependent on motivationally effective supplementation by traditional worldviews. Religion, having retreated into the regions of subjective belief, can no longer satisfy neglected communicative needs, even in conjunction with the secular components of bourgeois ideology (that is, an empiricist or rationalist theory of knowledge, the new physics, and the universalistic value system of modern natural law and utilitarianism).[100]

In a nutshell, unlike traditional societies, bourgeois society cannot offer solutions to life's contingencies (e.g., absolution from guilt and death); provide mediation with the forces of nature; offer strong bonds of solidarity between groups and individuals; nor provide a strong political ethic upon which to unite a diverse citizenry.[101] Contrary to Marcuse, however, the problem for Habermas is not one of technology per se but of finding a mode of practice that is linked to communication, which finds its natural home in the public sphere.

At this stage in Habermas's work, he still maintains hope in the emancipatory possibilities that can be found in certain countercultures as well as in "post-auratic" art, a theme that is taken up in the next section in his essay on Walter Benjamin. What is of primary concern for Habermas is to show that technological rationality does not displace symbolic interaction, since, as he puts it, "Rationalization at the level of the institutional framework can occur only in the medium of symbolic interaction itself, that is, through removing restrictions on communication."[102] For this reason, it is necessary to develop a "Public, unrestricted discussion, free from domination, of the suitability and desirability of action-orienting principles and norms.'"[103] In *Towards a Rational Society*, Habermas looks to the potential that he sees in certain strains of the students' movement, which point "toward the new conflict zone owing to identifiable interests" (e.g., nuclear proliferation).[104] Evidently, religion(s) do not and cannot fulfil this need since they are seen to rely on an order that fuses the cognitive and the moral-practical domains and thus cannot adequately express a "new" language that could be potentially binding for all.[105] As he puts in *Legitimation Crisis*:

> Religious systems originally connected the moral practical task of constituting ego- and group-identities (differentiation of the ego vis-à-vis the social reference group on the one hand, and differentiation of the collective interpretation of the world-mastery of problems of survival that arise in the confrontation with outer nature) in such a way that the contingencies of an imperfectly

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[99] Ibid., 76.

[100] Ibid., 77-78.

[101] Ibid., 78.

[102] Habermas, "Technology and Science," 118.

[103] Ibid., 118-19.

[104] Ibid., 120.

[105] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 117-18.

> controlled environment could be processed simultaneously with the fundamental risks of human existence.[106]

Here he suggests that a religious understanding of universal human problems such as guilt, loneliness, sickness and death attempt to circumvent the contingency of material reality by providing answers to such problems with concepts like consolation, redemption, and salvation, which are located above the head of the social realm.[107] While religious worldviews provide answers to contingency, once the sciences gain legitimacy the outer forces of nature become increasingly de-sacralized and lose their explanatory power within that domain (i.e., as explanations of cause and effect). Habermas wonders whether a communicative ethics that appeals to the norms of rational speech is enough to fill this gap, which is a problem that he continues to grapple with today.

One central question that Habermas asks at this point is whether particular religious worldviews that have made the distinction between cognitive and socially integrative domains can "fulfill the moral-practical task of constituting ego- and group-identity?" Or, to put it differently, how do moral norms function to bind people together on the level of society once nature has become "disenchanted"? Habermas makes two brief observations that are suggestive of themes that he will later develop in relation to postmetaphysical reason and the role of religion in the public sphere, posed here in embryo. Pointing to the work of certain German theologians he writes:

> For, in the first place, the repoliticization of the biblical inheritance observable in contemporary theological discussion (Pannenberg, Moltmannm Sölle, Metz), which goes together with a levelling of this-worldly/other-worldly dichotomy, does not mean atheism in the sense of a liquidation without a trace of the idea of God—although the idea of a *personal* God would hardly seem to be salvageable with consistency from *this* critical mass of thought. The idea of God is transformed [aufgehoben] into the concept of a Logos that determines the community of believers and the real life-context of a self-emancipating society. 'God' becomes the name for a communicative structure that forces men, on pain of a loss of their humanity, to go beyond their accidental, empirical nature to encounter one another *indirectly*, that is, across an objective something that they themselves are not.[108]

If I understand Habermas correctly here, he is suggesting an evolution of sorts amongst certain (progressive and/or radical) theologians in Germany, whose ideas of God suggest a type of regulative ideal that upholds certain values (and perhaps a certain character?) that are able to transcend the mundane realm of day-to-day existence and offer a glimpse at a more reconciled way of Being. In this sense, "God" is partially de-transcendentalized into a form of Logos, by which Habermas seems to mean an animating principle, though one that places meaning in the here and now.[109] Habermas does not elaborate upon these premises in *LC* except to state, directly below this passage, that perhaps philosophy too could conceive of a "demythologized unity of the world," though one that must reject a positivist orientation since "[w]e can no longer avert recognizable contingencies by

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106 Ibid., 118-119.

107 Habermas cites Levi-Strauss here. See Fn. 2, Ibid., 119.

108 Ibid., 121.

109 This idea is apparent in Habermas's debate with theologians in 1988, as evidence in the title of his essay, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World."

producing a rationalizing illusion."[110] Here we can already see the development of a discourse that Habermas will expand upon in *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2005 [2008]), though for now it remains up to philosophy to mine such "religious" resources for their emancipatory potential.

Bringing all of this together, the idea of religion in Habermas's sociologically and anthropologically informed social theory during the late 1960s and early 1970s, is located in mythical modes of thought and is understood to preserve its metaphysical character in modernity by becoming private (i.e., it no longer serves as the basis of legitimacy for society *as a whole*). Advances in the forces of production and the development of a market economy mean that governments must re-align their basis of legitimacy more in-line with steering mechanisms (i.e., administrative bureaucracies) that function at odds with common familial goals and with society as a whole. Here religion exists almost as a type of "survival," conferring meaning for familial and larger group formations, but less at the level of institutions or the state. At this stage in his work, Habermas was still very interested in the emancipatory potential of the student movements to provide a new basis for legitimacy that he hoped would manifest in the form of a more radical, participatory democracy—although one that adhered to parliamentary systems and the rule of law. Given the thrust of social movements during this time and the relative success of welfare state systems in mitigating basic social ills, Habermas's diagnosis of these emancipatory possibilities is not unwarranted, though it is largely dependent (and self-consciously so) on structural developments in certain Euro-Western societies. Future developments such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the events of 9/11 will create new constellations that shift these coordinates for Habermas toward new possible sites of motivation and meaning, including a central role for religion. For the time being, however, it is in the domain of philosophy where "religion" retains an important place for him in the genealogy of emancipatory reasoning.

Philosophy and Religion

A collection of essays entitled *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (1981 [1983]) (hereafter *PPP*) provides the most detailed example of Habermas's thoughts on religion from a philosophical perspective during the first and second phase of his career, with essays dating between 1958 and 1979. While religion is not his primary focus here, it is central in at least two of the essays and is marked as a consistent theme throughout.[111] Much like his work in social theory during this time, which relies on a model of social evolution and a revised conception of Max Weber's secularization thesis, Habermas's more philosophical writings locate religious concepts and language as part of the genealogy of Western reason and grant them value to the extent that they contain ethical and existential impulses that prefigure and help to situate the present *inheritance of meaningful ideas*. At this stage, Habermas does not foresee a strong role for theological discourses in contemporary societies though he does show a keen interest in how philosophy might

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[110] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 121.

[111] See Habermas, "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers" and "Gershom Scholem: The Torah in Disguise," In *Philosophical Political Profiles*.

translate such ideas in a productive fashion.[112] Crucially, nowhere in his work is there a sense that communities who identify as religious might play a role in these processes of translation.

Opening this collection is Habermas's essay "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose," (1971) which is a line he borrows from a question posed by Theodor Adorno in 1962, which he (Adorno) answered as follows:

> The only philosophy we might responsibly engage in after all that has happened would no longer make any pretense of being in control of the absolute. Indeed, it would have to forbid itself to think the absolute, lest it betray the thought. And yet it must not allow anything to be taken away from the emphatic concept of the truth. This contradiction is its element.[113]

While Habermas does not ultimately follow Adorno's more "negative" philosophical path, he shares in his desire to maintain a critical tension with emphatic or, better yet, aporetic conceptions of truth and of the "absolute," which can be seen as a running thread—sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit—throughout his body of work, continuing into his more recent focus on questions relating to religion.[114] While Habermas's social theory is clearly more indebted to the reconstructive social sciences than is Adorno's, especially when it comes to structural dynamics in the public sphere, communicative competence and, later on, deliberative democracy, these two thinkers are perhaps closest in their thinking when it comes to the aims of philosophy, encapsulated in Adorno's line: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed."[115] In this sense, and without any illusions that it can accomplish anything more, one goal of philosophy is to preserve those ideas that may not appear useful or plausible in the present so that they can be drawn upon at a more opportune time. This is what Adorno referred to in *Minima Moralia* as "messages in a bottle."[116]

The goal of the essays in *PPP* is to explore the legitimate tasks for philosophy in the wake of Hegel, which includes a critique of the persistence of the philosophy of consciousness, instrumental reason, and a reconstruction of the dialectic between disenchantment and scientism.[117] To put it concisely, for Habermas philosophy must give way to a more tempered and mediating role in relation to developments in the (social) sciences:

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[112] A few notable exceptions include his brief mention of certain German theologians in LC (see above) and some brief remarks in his introduction to *Observations on the Spiritual Situation of the Age.*

[113] Quoted in Habermas, "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose," in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 1.

[114] See, for example, Habermas, *An Awareness of What's Missing*, (2010); "A Reply to My Critics," in *Habermas and Religion* (2013).

[115] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Taylor & Francis e-library, 2004, xi.

[116] See, for example, section 153, where he writes: "Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light." Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London, UK: Verso, 2005), 247.

[117] Here it is worth noting that the theme of dialectical tension will become the impetus for several of Habermas's essays on religion, including "Israel or Athens" (1997 [2001]); "Faith and Knowledge" (2000 [2003]); as well as for his book, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2005 [2008]).

> Until Hegel, philosophy and religion always claimed to fulfill different functions. Since late antiquity, philosophical thought was compelled to specify its relationship to the saving truth of the Judeo-Christian redemptive religion. … But in no case, despite Boethius, did a philosophy serious about its claim want to replace the certainty of salvation of religious faith. It never offered a promise of redemption, confident expectation or consolation.[118]

In both this essay and in several of the essays contained within *PPP*, Habermas will trace how "religious" concepts—namely, those derived from certain Jewish and Christian theological traditions—were reanimated in German Idealist philosophy, sometimes productively (as with the Marburg school) and sometimes destructively (as with Heidegger).[119] In each case, Habermas will assimilate and transform these ideas, taking up the various traditions to which he is an heir, in an attempt to use them productively for his own critical purposes.

While affirming that the former unity of theoretical and practical reason[120] has come up against the "world-historical process of rationalization,"[121] which, among other things, has forced a separation between ethics and politics, facts and values, Habermas rejects any strict division between theory and practice common among positivist schools of thought.[122] This is because all (then) contemporary theories—from philosophical anthropology to hermeneutic phenomenology to neo-positivism and linguistic critique—are bound to their own cultural and historical circumstances, thus making any normative claims dependent upon the ever-shifting interplay of knowledge and human interests. After Hegel and the rise of historical materialism, the claims of the "cultured elite" came to be measured against the cries of the masses in the form of dialectical thinking.[123] This movement away from relying upon any firm ontological ground that was located outside of this world (e.g., Kant's noumenal realm) paved the way for developments such as Marxism, existentialism, and historicism, all of which staked out a new practical terrain that was firmly tied to the social world and grounded in radical critique.[124] This turn, for Habermas, marked a crucial opening toward *postmetaphysical thinking*.

> The complex and shifting relations between philosophy and religion has also changed in the meantime. … Metaphysics had heretofore been in a more promising situation to either substitute for or conceptualize (in order to integrate) the competing form of world interpretation. Postmetaphysical thought does not dispute determinate theological affirmations; instead it asserts their meaninglessness. It means to prove that in the system of basic terms in which the Judeo-Christian tradition has been dogmatized (and hence rationalized) theologically meaningful affirmations cannot be set forth at all. This critique is no longer immanently related to its object; it strikes at the roots of religion …[125]

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118 Habermas, "Does Philosophy," 11.

119 See Habermas, "Martin Heidegger: The Great Influence (1959)," in *Philosophical Political Profiles*, 53-60.

120 Habermas, "Does Philosophy," 3.

121 Ibid., 9.

122 See Habermas, "The Analytic Theory of Science and Dialectics," and "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism," in Adorno et.al, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London, UK: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1976), 131-62; 198-225.

123 Habermas, "Does Philosophy," 11.

124 Ibid., 12.

125 Ibid.

In this passage, Habermas finds the impulse toward metaphysics, theology and religion (concepts that he does not differentiate here) productively transposed into emancipatory goals for both the individual (e.g., existentialism) as well as for society as a whole (e.g. Marxism). In this way, "salvational claims" enter into philosophy such that the interest in "liberation and reconciliation" comes to be articulated in terms that are distinct from a strictly "religious" or dogmatic understanding. He continues:

> Critical in equal measure of the claims to totality made by metaphysical knowledge and by religious interpretations of the world, it is, with its radical critique of religion, the basis for absorbing the utopian contents of both religious tradition and the cognitive interest in emancipation. Finally, critical of the elitist self-understanding of the philosophical tradition, it takes its stand on universal enlightenment—about itself as well.[126]

Habermas's answer to the question "Does philosophy still have a purpose," is, of course, an affirmative one, and suggests that a critical theory of the sciences should align with practical philosophy in the hope that such a fusion will enable a broader influence for philosophy than ever before. Under these re-imagined conditions:

> [philosophy] would no longer have any need of the organizational form of a doctrine embodied in individual philosophers. It would incur a politically effective task inasmuch as it went against the twofold irrationality of a positivistically restricted self-understanding of the sciences and a technocratic administration isolated from publicly discursive formation of will.[127]

Here we see a not only a plea for a decisive shift away from the philosophy of consciousness, but also an early articulation, *in nuce*, of Habermas's theories of communicative action, discourse ethics and deliberative democracy, all of which entail an emphasis on the public use of reason between individuals in dialogue with one another.

Habermas brings this essay to a close by returning to discuss the "collapse of religious consciousness," where the former alliance between the philosophies of the "cultured elite" and "a widely influential religion" is understood to have given way to a mish-mash of "ersatz religions." The crux of the problem for Habermas is that philosophy is not able to offer consolation in the same manner that religion can (e.g., toward the meaningless of death, suffering, salvation, and so forth), despite its assimilation of "Judeo-Christian" ideas. As a consequence, he suggests that there has been a widespread loss of hope (e.g., in things like redemption and grace) [128] in advanced industrial societies, the remnants of which are now typically found in "interiorized faith traditions" (e.g., transcendental meditation), leading him to muse:

> Some indicators speak in favor of the fact that, in reaction to the mass loss of religious certainty of salvation, a new Hellenism is taking shape, that is, a regression below the level of identity reached in communication with the one God in the monotheistic high religions.

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126 Ibid., 14.

127 Ibid., 17.

128 See Habermas, "Israel or Athens? Where Does Anamnestic Reason Belong? Johannes Baptist Metz on Unity Amidst Multicultural Plurality," in *The Liberating Power of Symbols: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Peter Dews (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 78-89.

This rather curious statement can be partly explained by Habermas's indebtedness to the Western philosophical tradition (and to monotheism), which he views as a harbinger of social evolution inasmuch as it aims to re-orient subjects away from kinship bonds, where identity is tied strictly to one's tribe, toward a gradual opening of moral autonomy, which he sees as a necessary prerequisite for individual rights. While Habermas's critique of "ersatz religions," "Hellenism," and "neo-paganism" may seem elitist and even prejudicial, his conception here, right or wrong, suggests that they are scattered by-products of what were once more unified identities and thus represent a dangerous splintering that functions against the goals of social cohesion. Additionally, from the point of view of many theological traditions a "new paganism" has arisen, creating further conflict and the withdrawal of collective motivations in the interest of productive social action.[129] Within this matrix philosophy, in consort with the sciences, can only offer "a fragile unity of reason, namely the unity of identity and the nonidentical that is established in rational discourse." This aporia is one that Habermas only begins to tease out in this phase of his work, following in the footsteps of such thinkers as Karl Jaspers, Ernst Bloch, and Walter Benjamin.

The earliest essays in this collection contain thoughts on the writings of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Bloch, and Karl Löwith, along with a piece reflecting on many Jewish influences in German philosophy. These essays were written during a period when Habermas was influenced by Karl Löwith's interpretation of the Young Hegelians and the idea of philosophy as a mode of social transformation.[130] According to Pieter Duvenage, it was the influence of thinkers like Marx, Lukács, and Löwith in particular that convinced Habermas that ontological and metaphysical approaches were not the solution to the problems of "spiritual fragmentation" and alienation and that only a social-rational approach was fit to the task. One consequence of this, Duvenage argues, was the subordination of aesthetics within Habermas's critical theory, which persists in modern consciousness as a sort of remainder that falls beneath the level of productive rationalization.[131]

In the earliest of these essays, "Karl Jaspers: The Figures of Truth," (1958) Habermas raises a number of concerns that will become more relevant in his later work, including his rejection of the philosophy of consciousness in favour of a communicative model of interaction, as well as his career-long interest in existential questions and the challenge to situate them within a postmetaphsyical philosophy.

Habermas engages appreciatively with Jaspers's post-Nazi reflections on the perils of any philosophy that attempts to provide a rational understanding of truth that is *binding for all* (my emphasis).[132] He characterizes Jaspers's project in political terms as a "historically reflective liberalism," which inverts the traditional model of individuals' pursuing their own interests with a model of competing groups, each of whom is instructed to adopt a modest version of their own truth that cannot be reduced to the

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129 Habermas notes transcendental meditation or "small activist groups trying to transform the world under the sign of political theology, anarchism, or sexual politics." See "Does Philosophy," 18.

130 See Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, 81, 147.

131 Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics*, 10.

132 Habermas, "Karl Jaspers: The Figures of Truth," *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, 45.

whole.[133] For Jaspers this "political intention" should ideally come about through a radical awareness of a common human past that corresponds with our shared present, which he envisions through a conception of great thinkers (e.g., philosophers and religious leaders) as "ciphers." As Habermas frames it:

> The unification of the world seems threatened at its very core by self-destructive inner strife so long as the heritage of the separate destinies, reciprocally appropriated, does not aid in realizing the common present. This end is served by communication among the world-historical traditions, which were established by great individuals in the so-called axial period (800 B.C-200 A.D): Confucius and Lao Tzu in China, Buddha in India, Zoroaster in Persia, the prophets in Palestine, and the Greek philosophers and tragedians in the West.[134]

According to Jaspers, the dogmatic aspects of these philosophies must be left behind, while their distinct-yet-interrelated kernels of "truth" should be salvaged as "contents of an existential impulse."[135] While appreciative of this sentiment, Habermas is skeptical of how such a "polemical tolerance," mediated through "great philosophers," could promote global solidarity, even if such an ideal form of "awareness" were empirically possible. The crux of the problem, as Habermas sees it, is Jaspers's reliance on an outdated philosophy of consciousness that assumes these great thinkers are somehow capable of "awakening" individuals across time and space. One contradiction that Habermas finds here is the tension between authoritative interpretations of these figures, which would make their words relevant and binding, versus the myriad interpretations that inevitably arise in "the reality of that objective life context which is made by human beings."[136] This perspective thus ignores both the historical contexts in which these "great figures" ideas emerged as well as the highly differential reception of some imagined contemporary audience.

This appreciative critique of Jaspers's hopeful idealism is instructive for understanding Habermas's earlier position on the question of religion for at least two reasons. First, it highlights his interest in existential concerns, which he revisits with renewed emphasis in the most current phase of his work (2001-present), especially in relation to Kierkegaard, and, second, it makes mention of the "Axial age" and the idea of a shared origin and genealogy between philosophy and religion—a theme that will also rise to the level of a significant preoccupation in his later work. It remains an open question, however, whether or not Habermas will fall into the same trap that he accuses Jaspers's of here—that is, of elevating de-contextualized concepts that he finds in the "world religions" (namely Christian and Jewish) as a way to bind communities together.[137]

In "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers," (1961) Habermas traces the rich legacy of Jewish thought within the history German philosophy, from "religious"

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133 Habermas, "Karl Jaspers," 46. John Rawls puts forward a similar idea with his conception of public reason, which will be discussed in chapter four.

134 Ibid., 46.

135 Jaspers, quoted in Habermas, Ibid., 46.

136 Ibid., 48.

137 See Habermas, "The Conflict of Belief: Karl Jaspers on the Clash of Cultures," in *The Liberating Power of Symbols: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Peter Dews (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 30-45.

thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber to "secular" thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Theodor Adorno. While this essay was intended to highlight the longstanding interdependence between German and Jewish thought, dating back to Kant's debt to Moses Mendelssohn, it also points to the crucial role that Habermas attributes to the "Jewish spirit" for infusing German philosophy with its particular legacy of critique, including "religiously" inspired concepts such as transcendence, mysticism and redemption that have carried over and re-animated the traditions' ethical, existential and emancipatory aims. For example, noting the religiously infused philosophy of Franz Rosenweig, Habermas writes:

> Idealism only entered into competition with the theology of creation; still in bondage to Greek philosophy, it did not look upon the unreconciled world from the standpoint of possible redemption. Its logic remained in the grips of the past: 'True lastingness is constantly in the future. Not what always was is lasting; not what gets renewed at all times, but solely what is to come: the kingdom.' The meaning of this, of course, is only disclosed to a logic that does not, like that of Idealism, deny its linguistic body; it has to open itself up to the underlying logic deposited in the language—a resonance from the ancient kabbalist idea that language reaches God because it is sent out from God.[138]

Here Habermas, following insights from Rosenweig through to Benjamin, is claiming that the influence of Kabbalah helped to reinvigorate a spirit of hermeneutics within German philosophy, where the concept of redemption was not merely seen as a forward progression, but as a form of renewal and a taking up of the past. In addition to this hermeneutic tradition, which, he writes, "had schooled Jewish thought for centuries in the exegetical virtues of commentary and analysis," Habermas argues that the spirit of critique was the means of Jewish emancipation from Judaism itself,[139] of its "rationalization," which he views already in this early phase of his work as the proper *telos* for religion in the modern world.

In his essay "Gershom Scholem: The Torah in Disguise," (1978) Habermas looks appreciatively at the "Judeo-Christian" idea of creation *ex nihilo*, which he understands in contrast to "mythical" thought that views creation as coming from something pre-existent. This is conceptually appealing to Habermas precisely because it self-consciously relies upon its own resources as a means of interpretation and justification. For example, writing about Scholem's work in relation to the tradition of Kabbalah, Habermas observes:

> The kabbalists have a natural interest in raising the value of the oral Torah over the Bible; they give an important place to the commentaries through which each generation appropriates the revelation anew. They no longer identify revelation with the written Torah. For them, truth is not fixed, not expressed positively in a well-circumscribed group of propositions, so that tradition could be exhausted in the truest possible reproduction. Instead revelation is the Torah's process of tradition itself; revelation is intrinsically related to the creative commentary. The written Torah becomes complete only through the oral; the voice of God speaks through the conflict of interpretations of scriptures of every generation, until the last day. If this conflict were to cease, the divine source would be dried up. Later this kabbalistic conception is radicalized yet again. The written Torah stands already as a translation of the divine word into the language of human beings; it is already simply a disputable interpretation. The oral Torah is everything; the mystical

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138 Habermas, "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers," *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, 24.
139 Habermas, "German Idealism," 27.

> Torah is a mystical notion referring to the messianic state of a future knowledge.[140]

In his later reflections on Kant, Habermas notes that in the early modern period, when "factual knowledge became autonomous" and "religion was brought before the bar of reason,"[141] the philosophy of religion was born. Concepts such as "natural" vs. "revealed" theology, made popular through Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, were not only important steps in a dialectic of enlightenment, but also as a means towards the articulation of "religion within the limits of reason alone"—an ideal that Habermas himself has long upheld as witnessed in these lines quoted above on Scholem's interpretation of Kabbalah. Scholem is thus upheld as an ideal religious thinker that seeks to self-consciously take up and renew tradition in relation to the concerns of the present. Habermas's reflections on Scholem's work also have a contemporary political function inasmuch as they mark an important iteration of his generations' "spiritual development" during post-war Germany. Moreover, Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1946) marked a turning point in Habermas's own thinking, "with family affinities between the theosophy of Jacob Böhme and the teaching of a man name Isaac Luria,"[142] which offer a crucial link to more prominent "philosophers" like Schelling and Hegel:

> Behind Schelling's *Ages of the World* and Hegel's *Logic*, and behind Baader, loomed not only the Swabian spiritual predecessors, not only Pietism and Protestant mysticism, but also (mediated by Knorr and Rosenroth) that version of the Kabbalah in whose antinomian consequences were anticipated, more clearly than any where else, the figures of thought and preoccupations of the great dialectical philosophy.[143]

These "antinomian consequences" (i.e., a rejection of socially established morality for a personal faith) are linked here to the idea of God's contraction or withdrawal from the world in the work of Schelling, which was the topic of Habermas doctoral dissertation in 1954, *The Absolute and History: On the Schism in Schelling's Thought*, and was later summarized in his essay, "Dialectic Idealism in Transition to Materialism: The Historical-Philosophical Consequences of Schelling's Idea of God's Contraction," (1961) published in the German edition of *Theory and Praxis*.[144] In this essay, Habermas interprets Schelling as trying to provide an account of redemption for a corrupt world in light the idea of the Absolute. The link with Protestant and Jewish mysticism, mediated through the work of Schelling, is seen as a bridge that will eventually lead to historical materialism. As Habermas writes in his essay on Scholem, "To Luria that coming of the

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[140] Habermas, "Gershom Scholem: The Torah in Disguise," *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, 206-7.

[141] Habermas, "The Boundary Between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 209.

[142] Habermas, "Gershom Scholem," 202.

[143] Ibid. In his 2002 interview with Eduardo Mendieta, entitled "A Conversation About God and the World," Habermas will reiterate this sentiment with an emphasis on Schelling's idea of the "tense relation between 'egoity' and 'love' in God himself." See Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 160.

[144] This essay was translated into English in 2004 as "Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism: Schelling's Idea of a Contraction of God and Its Consequences for the Philosophy of History," in *The New Schelling*.

Messiah means no more than the signature under a document that we ourselves write."[145] Such antinomian trends, expressed here through mysticism, are therefore seen as harbingers for more "enlightened" forms of thought:

> Denied any sort of political-historical confirmation, radical praxis transposed itself into religious criticism; the rationalism of natural rights inherits the unfilled transformation of Sabbatianism into emancipation, even if it is just an emancipation of the ghetto. It is only a step from mystical heresy to the enlightenment: Jonas Wehle, the head of the Prague mystics in 1800, cites the authority of both Sabbathai Zevi and Mendelssohn, Kant and Isaak Luria.[146]

Once again we see the idea that God's contraction creates an opening in thought toward the creativity of human beings in the midst of material history. Such mystical writings are not merely irrational for Habermas since, as Eduardo Mendieta points out, "They possess a form, a grammar or syntax, that unleashes rational insights, even arguments. Religious ideas possess not just specific semantic contents about God, but also a particular structure that catalyzes rational argumentation."[147] This idea will be taken up more fully in the last section of this chapter when I turn to Habermas's idea of the "linguistificaiton of the sacred."

In the "German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers" Habermas suggests that it was the Jewish tradition within German Idealism that helped mark the transition to historical materialism and spurred the fermentation of a critical utopia.[148] Two key thinkers that influenced Habermas philosophical development are Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, who, as Mendieta points out, "exemplify the conceptual extremes between which Habermas seeks to negotiate a middle path."[149] Heavily influenced by Marxism and certain strands of Jewish and Christian theology, both Bloch and Benjamin represent for Habermas the ideals of "transcendence from within and transcendence from without."[150] Whereas for Bloch transcendence is already immanent in history and can be seen in a latent form in the utopian longings of religious concepts like salvation and redemption, for Benjamin, historical materialism must draw upon the services of theology if it is to avoid the dehumanizing effects of instrumental rationality, what Habermas calls "rescuing critique."

In his essay on German Jewish philosophy, Habermas credits Bloch for having effectively drawn upon kabbalistic mysticism in order to challenge a purely economic Marxism by introducing a form of speculative materialism into the mix. For example, in Bloch's reading of the Zohar he argues that "[m]atter is in need of redemption" and "political praxis replaces religious praxis," thereby showing the transformation/translation and continuity of utopian (religious) ideas in(to) a "secular" form. This idea is also illustrated in an exchange with Adorno about God and philosophy, where Bloch notes the following:

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145 Habermas, "Gershom Scholem," 207.

146 Habermas, "Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism," 65.

147 Mendieta, "Rationalization, Modernity and Secularization," 232.

148 Habermas, "German Idealism," 42.

149 Mendieta, "Rationalization, Modernity and Secularization," 226.

150 Ibid., 228.

> In hope, the matter concerns perfection, and to that extent it concerns the ontological proof of the existence of God. But the most perfect creature is posited by Anselm as something fixed that includes the most real at the same time. Such a tenet is not defensible. But what is true is that each and every criticism of imperfection, incompleteness, intolerance, and impatience already without a doubt presupposes the conception of, and longing for, a possible perfection.[151]

Here the notion of hope—represented *as a religious concept*—is understood to contain a kernel of philosophical truth inasmuch as such "negative thinking," through a consummate critique of the social world, points towards its opposite. To the extent that religious concepts contain such utopian impulses they offer signs of such longings (i.e., redemption, reconciliation, etc.) that have always been present throughout history, latent yet there for the taking. While Bloch criticized religious myths as illusions, he nonetheless argued that they should be taken "seriously as a pre-appearance of something to be achieved in the future."[152] In this sense, and following along the lines of a Marxian critique, Bloch aimed to preserve whatever might have been "true" in "false consciousness."[153]

One of the most interesting and important philosophical essays written during the second phase of Habermas's work is "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness Raising or Rescuing Critique" (1972). Here Habermas details his most explicit position on the role of aesthetics to date, including a critique of Adorno and Marcuse, along with a critical appraisal of Benjamin's notion of "rescuing critique," which he looks to appropriate in the service of his own critical theory of communicative praxis within the public sphere. Here we find an early expression of Habermas's appreciation of the "semantic" value of symbolic forms, which he believes can and should be rescued for its potential motivating force in the service of "secular illumination." While not fleshed out at this stage in his work, Habermas will later come to develop a similar understanding of "religious language" starting in the late 1980s and developed after 9/11, the content of which will serve an analogous function to that of art in his social evolutionary model of collective "learning processes"—that is, as important cultural and historical resources of meaning that remain undifferentiated (or at least *less* differentiated than modern forms of reason) in their relationship to truth and thus hold a power that is worth salvaging for the present.

In this essay Habermas describes Marcuse and Adorno's theories of art as a form of "consciousness-raising critique," where the aim is for individuals to cultivate and draw upon their own powers of self-reflection in relation to aesthetic truth.[154] For Adorno, autonomous works of art, such as the dramas of Samuel Beckett or the music of Arnold Schönberg, provide a seedbed for the raising of consciousness by pointing towards ideals (if only negatively) that can then be juxtaposed with actual, existing realities, and in this way raise awareness that can be utilized in the service of political transformations. Habermas insists that this mode of self-reflection, however, remains *esoteric*, as highlighted by Adorno's strong rejection of mass art and techniques of reproduction as a

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151 Quoted in Mendieta, "Introduction," in Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 10.

152 Habermas, "Ernst Bloch: A Marxist Schelling," *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, 64.

153 Habermas, Ibid., 63.

154 Habermas, "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness Raising or Rescuing Critique," in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, 133-45.

form of what he called "degeneration."[155] By contrast, Habermas maintains that Benjamin's criticism, described as a "rescuing critique," which examines the allegorical nature in works of art and looks to transpose "what is worth knowing from the medium of the beautiful into that of the true and thereby rescue it,"[156] offers a counterpoint to Adorno's emphasis on the mimetic relations of inner and outer nature that excludes questions of solidarity and the need for public deliberation. Benjamin's influential essays on this topic, in particular "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—the latter of which shares in Adorno's concern with the fate of art once it has become "deritualized," while maintaining a muted hope that even mass-produced art may provide an opportunity for critical illumination through a retrieval of *Jetztzeit* or "now time"—focuses on that within the past that is *contemporaneous* with the present.[157] While the danger inherent in the deritualization of art through the techniques of mass production represents a loss of its "aura" according to Benjamin, it is also an opening, according to Habermas's reading, for the dissolution of the aura and its undifferentiated connection with "magical worldviews," to be "rescued," by which he means productively transposed and universalized as an emphatic experience that can be placed within the public sphere.[158] Here we find an early articulation of Habermas's notion of "semantic potential," which he links not only to artistic expressions, but also to mythical understandings of the world commonly associated with religion. As Habermas writes:

> Benjamin thought instead that the sematic potential on which human beings draw in order to invest the world with meaning and make it accessible to experience was first deposited in myth and needs to be released from it, and that this potential cannot be expanded but only transformed. Benjamin was afraid that semantic energies might escape during this transformation and be lost to humanity.[159]

Following this line of thought, one critical task for philosophy is to remove humanity's dependence upon mythical thinking while maintaining its "semantic energies," since the failure to do so "would be to lose the poetic capacity to interpret the world in light of human needs. This is the secular content of the messianic promise."[160] For Habermas the value of Benjamin's work lies in the *potential* of his theory of artistic experience provided that it can be utilized within a theory of historical materialism—a task, he maintains, that Benjamin himself did not quite achieve.[161] It is important to note that Habermas offers a clue at the end of this essay to a theme that will be taken up once again in the current phase of his work, though now in a more muted form, jettisoning terms such as "emancipation" for a more generalized conception of "justice." As he observes:

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155 Habemras, "Walter Benjamin," 141.

156 Ibid., 138.

157 Ibid., 140.

158 Ibid., 144-46.

159 Ibid., 148.

160 Ibid., 150.

161 Ibid., 155.

> Here we are talking only about the doubt that Benjamin's semantic materialism suggests: Can we preclude the possibility of a meaningless emancipation? In complex societies, emancipation means the participatory transformation of administrative decision structures. Is it possible that one day an emancipated human race could encounter itself within an expanded space of discursive formation of the will and yet be robbed of the light in which it is capable of interpreting its life as something good? The revenge of a culture exploited over millennia for the legitimation of domination would then take this form: Right at the moment of overcoming age-old repressions, it would harbor no violence but it would have no content either. Without the influx of those semantic energies with which Benjamin's rescuing criticism was concerned, the structures of practical discourse—finally well established—would necessarily become desolate.[162]

Herein lies one of the central components of Habermas's philosophical project; namely, how to salvage the utopian contents of "religion" for their productive use in a postmetaphysical world.

Social Evolution and Communicative Action

Habermas's "linguistic turn" in the 1970s, is perhaps best characterized as an attempt to build upon the idea that understanding language and its uses is key to addressing problems of meaning and motivation, and of differentiating "communicative" from "strategic" action. Readers will recall that one of the main disagreements that Habermas had with the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, following *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* was with their lack of attention to pragmatic theory and to the philosophy of language in its more empirical guise, which he argues lead them in the direction a one-sided focus on instrumental reason and the presumption of its "totalizing" effects on individuals and on societies as a whole.[163] Habermas underlines these concerns in an interview with Peter Dews in 1986, where he discusses how after the war both Adorno and Horkheimer failed to take the contributions of the social sciences and analytic philosophy seriously and denied the possibility of grounding the concept of reason in a systematic way.[164] He also notes how during the post-war period contemporary philosophy was completely ignored in Adorno's lectures at the University of Frankfurt, including thinkers like Peirce, Mead, and Dewey who would become important to his own work.[165] In his characterization of this stage in Habermas's career, referring to the later half of the 1970s and early 1980s, Mendieta observes:

> This period is one in which the philosophical-anthropological reconstruction of knowledge interests, developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, becomes a project about rescuing, transforming, and updating Marxism by infusing it with systems theory, developmental psychology, and social theory in general. … The shift from the epistemic subject, to the linguistic structure of both action and understanding becomes the core stone of Habermas's new programmatic orientation. It could be argued that the project of the 'reconstruction' of Marxism

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162 Ibid., 160.

163 See, for example, Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* 106-130, esp. .113; *Autonomy and Solidarity*, 56, 188, 196.

164 Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, 56.

165 Ibid., 188-89.

ends when Habermas writes the 1976, "Was Heisst Universal Pragmatik?" ("What is Universal Pragmatics?").[166]

Habermas theory of "universal," later "formal pragmatics," covers a highly technical and complex terrain involving theories of action, hermeneutics, pragmatics, semantics and speech act theory, among other things.[167] Given the limitations of space, I can only point to a few of the general parameters of these ideas here in the interest of highlighting those aspects of Habermas's work that prefigure his conception of communicative action and discourse ethics.

Given his interest in how modern societies are structured and how they function to regulate interactions, which were developed as early as *Structural Transformations*, Habermas turned to questions of "communicative competence" as a way to show how action-coordination is possible. Here he distinguishes between *purposive-activity*, which is oriented toward success, and *social action*, which requires some level of action-coordination between participants.[168] Unlike "linguistic competence," which refers to the ability to produce well-formed sentences, communicative competence is defined as the ability to produce utterances that are appropriate to various contexts and situations. Building on the work of J.L. Austin and his theory of speech acts, Habermas defines communicative action as that which is oriented toward achieving *illocutionary* aims, which refers to the idea of making promises with the intention of following through on them.[169] Habermas develops these ideas by arguing that the performance of a speech act entails three types of validity claims: claims to truth, normative rightness, and sincerity. The first corresponds to the *objective* world of empirical testing, such as how to build a bridge or an aeroplane, the second to *intersubjective* relationships of dialogical exchange, and the third to *subjective* states of mind, such as emotions.[170] These concepts are intended to provide a critical model for distinguishing between strategic actions and validity claims, which Habermas will argue are cognitive inasmuch as they can be rationally examined and critiqued.

Two further points of note here involve Habermas's indebtedness to hermeneutics and to Kant respectively. In the first case, following the work of Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas defends the idea that hermeneutics must remain committed to developing a "better understanding" of both texts and people rather than just focusing on questions of difference.[171] Likewise, his notion of formal pragmatics is understood as *counterfactual* in the sense that he wishes for it to function as a regulating ideal, though one that he will

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166 Mendieta, "Appendix: Religion in Habermas's Work," in *Habermas and Religion*, 394-395.

167 For a collection of Habermas's work on this topic, see *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, edited by Maeve Cooke. For an overview of these ideas, see Barbara Fultner's essay, "Communicative action and formal practices," in *Habermas: Key Concepts*, 54-73.

168 See Habermas, "Social Action, Purposive Activity and Communication," in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, 105-182. As Habermas puts it at the beginning of his 1976 essay, "What is Universal Pragmatics," the goal of formal pragmatics "is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979), 1.

169 Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, 150.

170 Habermas, "Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 75-6.

171 Habermas, "Hermeneutic and Analytic Philosophy: Two Complementary Versions of the Linguistic Turn," in *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 73.

claim has a "factual role" in structuring communicative action and discourse; that is, actions aimed at social coordination and not toward mere success.[172] With the development of his pragmatic theory of language in "What is Universal Pragmatics," Habermas moves away from a theory of emancipation and a corresponding emphasis on labour, interaction, and social movements toward an emphasis on reconstructing the ways in which social actors interact communicatively in a performative attitude, while building on the implications that this has for how modern subjects might orient themselves in modern, plural societies.

The Theory of Communicative Action is arguably Habermas's most complex work and is easily his longest in a lengthy academic career. While I cannot begin to represent the complexity of his arguments here, a brief overview of some of *TCA's* major themes will help to set the stage for his theory of discourse ethics as well as call attention to his important concept the "linguistificaiton of the sacred," which marks the culmination of his theory of religion during the first and section phases of his work.

In this two volume work, Habermas sets out to accomplish three main tasks: 1) to develop a concept of communicative rationality that could off-set more instrumental ideas about reason; 2) to develop a concept of society that traces the relationship between what he calls the "system" and the "lifeworld" and; 3) to develop a theory of modernity that can account for the ways in which social pathologies are unfolding in the present. [173] Habermas's treatment of religion in this text builds on his previous social evolutionary model and filters it through a sociological framework of the functionalist variety. Accordingly, religion is measured in terms of its world-shaping and legitimating functions for distinct communities (lifeworlds) and placed within the structure of large-scale societies that characterize the modern period.

With his idea of communicative rationality Habermas draws a connection between the structural differentiation characteristic of many modern, Western societies and the corresponding cognitive shifts in mentality that were necessary to bring these changes about in the first place. The main challenge that Habermas sets for himself in *TCA* is to conceptualize the relationship between the "system" and the "lifeworld" in such a way that a space is opened up for communicative reason to serve as a bulwark against the "colonizing" effects of bureaucracies and market forces, which, as we have seen, tend to undermine those sources of legitimacy (religious or otherwise) that characterize more close-knit communities.[174] This problem is nicely thematized in volume one of *TCA*, in a chapter entitled, "Some Characteristics of the Mythical and the Modern Ways of Understanding the World," when Habermas writes:

> The caesurae between the mythical, religious-metaphysical, and modern modes of thought are characterized by changes in the system of basic concepts. With the transition to a new stage the interpretations of the superseded stage are, no matter what their content, *categorically devalued*. It

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172 Habermas, "Communicative Action and the Detranscendentalized 'Use of Reason,'" *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 26-27.

173 For example, how communicative domains of social life are being increasingly colonized by systems imperatives of advanced markets and bureaucratic organization. See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984), xlii.

174 This is a themes that Habermas had attempted to develop earlier in "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 100-101.

> is not this or that reason, but the kind of reason, which is no longer convincing. A devaluation of the explanatory and justificatory potentials of entire traditions took place in the great civilizations with the dissolution of mythological-narrative figures of thought, in the modern age with the dissolution of religious, cosmological, and metaphysical figures of thought. These devaluative shifts appear to be connected with socioevolutionary transitions to new levels of learning, with which the conditions of possible learning processes in the dimensions of objectivating thought, moral-practical insight, and aesthetic expressive capacity are altered.[175]

Habermas's debt to thinkers including Jean Piaget, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons are evident here as he links processes of cognitive development with structural transformations that have moved away from a strong "religious, cosmological and metaphysical" grounding toward a more differentiated understanding of the functions of social order. Given Weber's gloomy prognosis of rationalization as leading toward an "iron cage," Habermas wants to redeem the basic thesis of the *Protestant Ethic* with insights from the theories of George Herbert Mead and Emile Durkheim, whose emphasis on communication, interaction, and the binding power of social norms will provide the background material
for his conception of the "linguistification of the sacred."[176]

As we have already seen in *Legitimation Crisis*, the critical hinge-point that distinguishes mythical or archaic societies from traditional ones for Habermas is the cognitive and structural shift from bonds of kinship to bonds of ethical affinity, where the self-understanding and self-worth of individuals becomes loosened from the strict boundaries of social hierarchy and a strong communal orientation.[177] This is where "religion," as opposed to "myth," is said to come into its own. As Habermas puts it in *TCA*:

> What is new is the idea that individual misfortune can be undeserved and that the individual may cherish the religious hope of being delivered from all evil, from sickness, need, poverty, even from death. Also new is the formation of communities independent of ethnic associations, the organization of religious communities for the redemptory fates of individuals.[178]

Also crucial in this shift is the formalization and dogmatization of "magical ideas" about the world. Where "religion" is said to split off from "magic" is in the transition from a group orientation toward symbols (e.g., totemism) and the concomitant need to propitiate the forces of nature through collective ritual toward the establishment of a more self-conscious relationship with "sacred power" that is based on a communicative exchange (i.e., less ritualistic and more dogmatic).[179] Moreover, such processes of rationalization are said to require a more differentiated understanding of causes and
effects in interpersonal relations, which, in turn, gives rise to an "ethical attitude," where judgments and evaluations come to be aligned more and more with criticizable norms and corresponding feelings such as accountability, moral consciousness, etc.[180] Such a

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175 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, *Volume One*, 68.

176 Ibid., 141.

177 As will be noted momentarily, this accounts for his suspicion of so-called "new age" and "polytheistic" religions inasmuch as they are assumed to function in ways that inhibit moral autonomy.

178 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, *Volume One*, 201.

179 Ibid., 212.

180 Ibid., 212-13.

transition, significantly, opens up space for individuals and groups to understand and orient their behaviour in relation to universal principles instead of being beholden to traditional orders of life.

At this stage, what defines worldviews as "religious" for Habermas is when their founding notions are not submitted to argumentative doubt and the normative regulations of everyday life are still tightly bound to expressive sentiments that find their basis in some "originary" power that is left unscathed from critique. In this sense, mythical thought protects rationalized religious worldviews "from the consequences that would endanger the tradition-securing modes of pious belief or reverential contemplation."[181] On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, religion (as opposed to myth) is believed to catalyze what Habermas calls the "linguistification of the sacred" through a process of sublation (*Aufheben*), which marks a movement away from ritual praxis toward argumentative modes of justification (e.g., dogma). In this way, religion functions within Habermas's communicative paradigm to bring about more complex modes of interaction and enables learning processes that have the potential to enhance mutual understanding and social cooperation (e.g., beyond the closed language games of particular groups). Such processes can only take place, however, if communicative actors are able to relate "simultaneously to something in the one objective world, something in their common social world, and something in one's own subjective world."[182] Without the recognition of such necessary distinctions or "cognitive presuppositions," Habermas fears that ideological fragmentation will carry the day leading to the proliferation of social pathologies on the level of the "lifeworld" and domination on the level of the "system."

Despite Habermas's largely functionalist approach to religion in *TCA*, his emphasis on Durkheim allows him to construct a more nuanced understanding of "religious" worldviews than the standard rationalist or intellectualist approaches, which tend to reduce such phenomena to false propositional logic and a critique of dogmatics more generally. Following Durkheim, Habermas argues that "religious symbolism" and ritual practice orients groups toward modes of normative consensus,[183] leading to the gradual universalization of morality and law.[184] Far from viewing such symbols and rituals as mere relics, however, Habermas understands them as a fundamental link between the individual, the group, and society as a whole. As he puts it, "we can give a nontrival meaning to the religious origins of institutions only if we take into account the religious world-interpretation as a connecting link between collective identity and institutions."[185] The link between humans, society, and nature (i.e., the cosmos) is therefore understood as a positive force for social integration since it minimizes the gap between the system and the lifeworld and makes the problem of legitimacy easier to manage.[186]

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[181] Ibid., 214.

[182] Ibid., 392.

[183] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 52.

[184] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two*, 46.

[185] Ibid., 56.

[186] As Habermas puts it, "Because these worldviews project a totality in which everything corresponds with everything else, they subjectively attach the collective identity of the group or the tribe to the cosmic order and integrate it with the system of social institutions." Ibid., 56.

With the onset of rationalization as societies transition through increasingly progressive stages of structural differentiation, religion gets passed on in the form of "cultural knowledge," which Habermas characterizes as "a knowledge that is based on both cognitive and socially integrative experiences."[187] Despite these positive evaluations of "religion's" function in aiding the development of processes of social evolution, however, Habermas does not see it as a force for *collective solidarity*, which, it is worth repeating, is one of the overarching aims of his critical theory of society. Deferring instead to his own communicative paradigm, Habermas will argue that, "the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts." Moreover, he continues, as "the spellbinding power of the holy" loses its' aura of power the only "binding/bonding" force that remains is that of criticizable validity claims.[188] It is for this reason that Habermas will claim that social integration can only (or at least *ought to*) take place by paying attention to validity claims that are raised in speech acts. As he puts it: "the unity of the collectivity can be established and maintained only as the unity of a communication community, that is to say, only by way of a consensus arrived at communicatively in the public sphere."[189]

What is perhaps most interesting at this stage in Habermas's work is the suggestion that religion dissolves and transforms into a mode of discourse ethics, where the former authority of the sacred passes over into everyday communicative practice:

> Inasmuch as the sacred domain was constitutive for society neither science nor art can inherit the mantle of religion; only a morality, set communicatively aflow and developed into a discourse ethics, can replace the authority of the sacred *in this respect*. In this morality we find dissolved the archaic core of the normative, we see developed the rational meaning of normative validity.[190]

On the surface it would appear that Habermas's prognosis here falls somewhere in between a description and an evaluation—an 'is' and an 'ought.' On the one hand, the epistemic shift toward a more differentiated understanding of the world undermines symbolic forms of social unity as potential modes of solidarity. Since communal authority has become de-centralized and is not able to constitute the social whole; all that can (or at least *ought to*) replace it is a mode of ethics that places communicative interaction at its core as the primary mechanism through which groups and individuals can transcend their own limitations. The logic of this idea becomes clearer when Habermas contrasts this orientation with the stultifying effects of the "system."

If "religion" finds its strongest foothold in archaic societies where it is largely undifferentiated from the institutional and steering function of the system, the rise of nation states signals an uncoupling of political will from bonds of kinship as more clearly defined social classes begin to emerge, which gradually come to be understood as

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187 Ibid., 56.

188 Ibid., 77.

189 Ibid., 82.

190 Ibid., 92.

contingent realities of social life and not the product of some cosmic order.[191] One consequence of the development of these system mechanisms is that they increase the likelihood for the repression of "dependent classes."[192] Habermas summarizes this idea as follows:

> [T]he lifeworld, which is at first coextensive with a scarcely differentiated social system, gets cut down more and more to one subsystem among others. In the process, system mechanisms get further and further detached from the social structures through which social integration takes place.[193]

Ironically, it is at this level, where system imperatives move societies out of the protective shelter of "tribal" order and develop a need for the bureaucratic administration of increasingly larger numbers of people that the ideological function of religion takes its strongest hold.[194] Here Habermas follows Weber in his explanation of religion's ideological function in complex societies:

> Theocentric worldviews put forward theodicies so as to reinterpret the need for a religious explanation of suffering perceived as unjust into an individual need for salvation, and thus to satisfy it. Cosmocentric worldviews offered equivalent solutions to the same problem. What is common to religious and metaphysical worldviews is a more or less clearly marked, dichotomous structure that makes it possible to relate the sociocultural world to a world behind it. The world behind the visible world of this life, behind the world of appearances, represents a fundamental order, when it is possible to explain the orders of a stratified class society as homologous to that world-order, worldviews of this kind can take on ideological functions."[195]

Despite this orientation toward a "world behind" the "sociocultural world," however, Habermas places a higher degree of value on so-called "prophetic" religions since they "have the form of doctrines that can be worked up intellectually and that explain and justify an existing political order in terms of the world-order they explicate."[196] Traditions under the guise of a "polytheistic" order do not register as well on his social evolutionary scale.[197] Problems with this classificatory schema aside, Habermas's point

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[191] It is important to note that Habermas is well aware that a "collectively shared, homogenous lifeworld is certainly an idealization, but," he wants to maintain, "archaic societies more or less approximate this ideal type by virtue of the kinship structures of society and the mythical structures of consciousness." Ibid., 157.

[192] Ibid., 188.
[193] Ibid., 154.
[194] Ibid., 188.
[195] Ibid., 188-189.
[196] Ibid., 188.
[197] On the question of polytheism, Habermas writes the following: "Polytheism is a late form of this mythical view, which makes it possible to personify the competition among life problems as a struggle among the gods and to project it into the heavens. At the developmental level of civilizations, society is differentiated according to occupational strata, so that the unity of the lifeworld can no longer be so readily guaranteed by mythical interpretations of the world. Now religious metaphysical worldviews carry out this unifying function, and all the more impressively the more they are rationally organized. It is, however, just this integrative achievement that is placed in question in modern societies by the differentiation of cultural spheres of value. To the degree that the rationalization of worldviews issues in modern structures of consciousness, worldviews as such fall to pieces," Ibid., 244-245.

here is that the rise of system imperatives and the stratification into class societies creates the conditions for the development of "a norm-conforming attitude toward legitimate order."[198] He calls this process a "structure forming significance" unique to modern societies, which uncouples the sacred domain from all aspects of public life and moves it increasingly into the private sphere. He continues, "With this secularization of bourgeois culture, the cultural value spheres separate off sharply from one another and develop according to the standards of the inner logics specific to the different validity claims."[199] One goal, then, for the social theorist whose aim is to help articulate processes of social cooperation is to figure out how to combat the colonization of the lifeworld and to highlight how the differentiated spheres of modern societies can function together in a more productive way and even serve as a source for collective unity. Here "religion," is sublated in the form of a communicative ethics, which is an argument that could be seen as far back in his work as *Legitimation Crisis* when he argues that:

> "God" becomes the name for a communicative structure that forces man, on pain of loss of their humanity, to go beyond their accidental, empirical nature to encounter one another indirectly, that is, across an objective something that they themselves are not.[200]

While communicative interaction is not described here or elsewhere as a replacement for "God," when we consider Habermas's work in light of the influences of such thinkers as Durkheim, Mead, Piaget, Weber and others, especially those in the German Idealist tradition, it is not too much to suggest that it points to a this-worldly ideal of autonomy and solidarity—what Habermas will call in his debate with theologians, (to be addressed in chapter 3) "transcendence in this world."

Tying all this together, Habermas's work undergoes a number of significant shifts during the first and second phases of his career, including his break with historical materialism and Marxian theories of labour and interaction toward an emphasis on the communicative dimensions of reason and the structures (both performative and institutional) that are required for developing a critical theory with the practical intent of building a model for a just social order. At this stage in Habermas's work religion undergoes a number of shifts, from an existential and emancipatory idea to be taken up in the domain of philosophy, to a social evolutionary phase that still retains a special place within the lifeworld of distinct communities. While Habermas's emphasis and appreciation for the "prophetic traditions" will not change, referring then as today, to certain concepts and theological ideas within the Jewish and Christian traditions, he does not yet see religion as an emancipatory force in and of itself, but rather as a type of discourse whose potential has not yet been exhausted. As the theories of discourse ethics and deliberative democracy begin to develop in his thought, along with a shift in focus toward debates in the Anglo-American world, the prevalence of religion when engaging in a "performative attitude" (and not just theorizing about it), will begin to open up space for an increasingly central role.

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198 Ibid., 194.

199 Ibid., 196.

200 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 121.

Chapter 2 – Discourse Ethics: Creating Space for Religion

In the wake of the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas looked to extend his theory of communicative reasoning toward problems in ethics, taking particular aim at moral skepticism, postmodernism, and historicizing relativism in texts such as *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (1983 [1990]) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (1985 [1987]) *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, (1988 [1992]) and *Justification and Application* (1991 [1993]). In this phase of his work, dating from roughly 1982-2000,[201] the themes of postmetaphysical thinking, rationality, morality and democracy are tied together in a substantial way and religion becomes more prevalent in his work. In this chapter, I will argue that this opening toward religion is due in part to the political nature of discourse ethics, which marks a shift from Habermas's former emphasis on the students' movement to procedural ethics as an exemplary model of public reason. This period also includes an important restatement of the idea of the public sphere, which comes in the form of a *Festschrift* in 1992[202] after the English publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1989, as well as Habermas's discourse theory of law and democracy *in Between Facts and Norms* (1992 [1996]). In this chapter I will deal with the first part of this phase, from roughly 1982-1991, starting with *MCCA* and ending with *JA*, and focus on Habermas's theory of discourse ethics and its reception in moral and political theory. I will begin by laying out some of the parameters of discourse ethics, followed by a look at his essay "Morality and Ethical Life," which attempts to apply these reconstructive ideas in the philosophy of language to questions in contemporary political theory. A brief look at some attempts to rework discourse ethics will follow, with an emphasis on Seyla Benhabib's revision of Habermas's "universalization principle" and her influential feminist critique, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other." After establishing the parameters of these crucial debates—their major fault-lines, aims and aporias, including Wendy Brown's critique of Benhabib and Habermas's own reply to his critics—I will conclude with some reflections on what this might suggest for questions surrounding the use of "public reason" and on the status of religion in the public sphere. While this chapter does not focus on "religion" in any substantive way, it is a crucial for understanding later developments in Habermas's theory for at least two reasons. First, as was suggested in chapter one, discourse ethics is in many ways Habermas's replacement for religion inasmuch as it signals an attempt to articulate the "moral point of view" that all competent social actors can agree to and

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[201] As noted in the introduction, Barbara Fultner frames this period "postmetaphysical thinking: rationality, morality and democracy" while Mendieta classifies it as "Postmetaphysical Thinking and Deliberative Democracy."

[202] See Calhoun *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992).

engage with (i.e., as a deontological procedural mode of mutual perspective taking). Second, it is in these debates that Habermas will establish his priority of the "right" over the "good" and in this way define the parameters of public reason with an emphasis on questions of justice over concrete forms of life. One problem with this approach, as Benhabib points outs and as Brown's work further illuminates, is that Habermas's over-emphasis on discourses of justification circumscribes the boundaries of things like reason, culture and religion in an a priori fashion and reifies religion as a particular, bounded category.

The Program of Discourse Ethics

Habermas first lays-out his theory of discourse ethics in *MCCA*, followed by a work of clarification and refinement in *JA*. Based in part as a response to then-dominant trends in philosophy such as "postmodernism" and moral skepticism of the Anglo-American variety, as well as more politically-oriented reactions against multiculturalism and universalism (e.g., "neo-conservatism"),[203] discourse ethics was originally conceived as a form of *meta-ethical cognitivism*—that is, a view that ethical sentences express propositions that can be evaluated as true or false and can thus be decided on the basis of good *reasons*—with the "intention of analyzing the conditions for making impartial judgments of practical questions, judgments based solely on reasons."[204]

Habermas labels his most forceful opponents in "Discourse Ethics" as the *subjectivists*, who in the continental tradition are typically associated with Nietzsche.[205] The basic view of the subjectivists is one of skepticism toward moral claims in general, depicting them variously as an expression of wishes, feelings, or a will to power. In a similar vein, the *emotivists* and *imperativists* in the Anglo-American tradition argue that normative statements should be seen only in functional terms, as attempts to either persuade others to one's side or to express a particular subjective attitude.[206] These various positions hinge on the skeptic's assumption that moral disagreements are unresolvable in principle. In contrast, Habermas will align his position with the cognitive claims of the *objectivists* (e.g., *realists* and *intuitionists*), while criticizing their tendency to assimilate normative and descriptive statements, as when G.E. Moore argued that descriptive statements like "the table is yellow" could be considered true or false in a manner analogous to normative statements about "rightness" or the "good."[207] As an alternative to the position put forward by Moore, Habermas draws on the work of Stephen Toulmin and P.F. Strawson, noting how the former was able to show "what is specific to the justification of moral commands" by asserting that while questions of "rightness" are not objective properties like tables or chairs, they must, nevertheless, be

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[203] See Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1991.
[204] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 43.
[205] Around the time of this writing, Habermas had launched one of his strongest salvos against this "Nietzschean" tendency in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* where he takes on theorists such as Foucault and Derrida. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1987.
[206] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics" 54-55.
[207] Ibid, 52-53.

defended with actual reasons.[208] Strawson, for his part, looked at the cognitive role of everyday moral intuitions and argued that emotional attitudes are embedded in everyday life and are therefore "accessible to us only in the performative attitude."[209] Moral judgments are thus seen to be performances aimed at trying to convince others that they ought to agree with us that our assertions are true. What is important for Habermas in Strawson's formulation is his emphasis on *interaction* in determining questions of moral justification and how such processes require speakers and hearers to defend their claims with good reasons if they are to be considered valid in a substantial or measurable way.[210] Following the lead of Toulmin, Habermas will reject a purely semantic analysis of sentences (e.g., Frege) and form his proposal along the lines of a theory of argumentation, where mutual perspective-taking becomes the hallmark of ethical dialogue in the pursuit of finding a normative, procedural ground for moral reasoning.

To summarize, Habermas's first step in his program of discourse ethics is to discredit claims to moral skepticism by establishing the difference between descriptive and normative statements,[211] while affirming that, "normative claims to validity are *analogous to truth claims*."[212] That is to say that while normative claims are not identical to truth claims, they admit of a certain logic that can be confirmed or denied through a procedural method of mutual perspective taking. Like empirical claims, moral judgments and moral norms put forward certain types of validity claims, such as those relating to factual truth and normative rightness, and can therefore be justified and open to criticism. Ultimately, then, the question of "rightness" hinges on *the quality of the justifying reasons* that are put forward in the context of deliberation. For Habermas it is therefore necessary to focus on the internal logic of moral argumentation in order to establish it as a basis for determining the validity of a norm.

In part two of his essay, Habermas addresses the problem of how discourse ethics might be normatively grounded through a method of moral argumentation, where norms are understood in relation to moral dilemmas that emerge *within particular lifeworlds*. Here he draws on concepts that he previously articulated in his theory "universal pragmatics"[213] which makes the claim that all "discourses" contain inescapable presuppositions between speakers and hearers when they are oriented toward communication that is aimed at reaching understanding. In this sense, language is said to be "rational" when speakers coordinate their discourses consensually, and "moral" when an agreement is reached based on claims to validity that have been recognized through a process of mutual perspective taking.[214] Furthermore, Habermas argues that in cases where both parties agree to defend their claims to normative rightness—that is, validity

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[208] Ibid., 53.
[209] Ibid., 47.
[210] Ibid., 50.
[211] This distinction is expressed in an early essay in *MCCA* as one between the cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical dimension. See Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," 19.
[212] See Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 56.
[213] For a more detailed analysis of this idea, see Habermasm "What is Universal Pragmatics," *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; "Social Activity, Purposive Activity, and Communication," *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Volume One*, 273ff.
[214] As Habermas writes, "The fact that a speaker can rationally motivate a hearer to accept an offer is due not to the validity of what he says but to the speaker's guarantee that he will, if necessary, make efforts to redeem the claim that the hearer has accepted. It is this guarantee that effects the coordination between speaker and hearer." Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 58-59.

claims that are tied to social and political norms—*with good reasons*, a "binding/bonding effect" is created between the speaker and the hearer. Here he stresses the need for a "bridging principle" for practical discourses that is analogous to the use of induction in theoretical discourses.[215] For this Habermas turns to Kant and the "basic intuition" of the Categorical Imperative, which contains an "underlying idea, which is designed to take into account the impersonal or general character of valid universal commands." In other words, moral principles must be able to meet with the assent of all who might be affected by them. For this reason, they can be considered bridging principles inasmuch as they aim toward consensus and the expression of a "general will" or a "universal law."[216]

Having argued that the moral standpoint exists and can be articulated in formal and procedural terms, Habermas looks to distinguish between moral and non-moral premises in order to justify his theory as a "cognitive" one (i.e., universally generalizable) and not merely an instance of trying to smuggle the moral assumptions of a particular tradition in the backdoor. The goal, then, is not to justify individual or group norms of action, but to demonstrate how norms can be justified in a *general way*. As a first step, Habermas turns to the rules of argumentative or communicative speech as they are laid out by Robert Alexy, which aim to rule-out the use of coercion in a "cooperative search for truth":

> (3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
>
> (3.2) a. Everyone is allowed to questions any assertion whatever.
> b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
> c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
>
> (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3.1) and (3.2).[217]

Alexy's rules are particularly important for discourse ethics since they serve as the basis for Habermas's justification of the universalization principle (U).

In an attempt to clarify the moral standpoint, Habermas proposes two principles: the discourse principle (D) and the moral principle (U). Whereas (D) puts forward the conditions that are necessary for achieving an impartial point of view in order to justify a norm or action, (U) seeks to justify moral norms that could potentially bind all people. In the case of (D), Habermas proposes the following formulation:

> Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse.[218]

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[215] As he puts it, "In theoretical discourses the gap between particular observations and general hypotheses is bridged by some canon or other of induction. An analogous bridging principle is needed for practical discourses," Ibid. 63.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid., 89.

[218] Ibid., 93.

Commenting on this principle, William Rehg points out that when assuming (D) one implicitly affirms the idea that shared reasons require consensus and that consensus must come out of rational discourse.[219] This is, of course, a distinctly modern idea of moral autonomy, where the conscience, motivation, and consent of each individual is (ideally) required and (ideally) factored into a deliberative context of argumentation.

The universalization principle (U) is necessarily stronger than (D) since it holds that a contested norm cannot meet with the consent of participants in a practical discourse unless certain conditions are in place. With a nod to the conditions laid-out by Robert Alexy, Habermas clarifies the universalization principle as follows:

> If every person entering a process of argumentation must, among other things, make presuppositions whose content can be expressed in rules (3.1) to (3.3) *and if we understand what it means to discuss hypothetically whether norms of action ought to be adopted* (emphasis mine), then everyone who seriously tries to discursively redeem normative claims to validity intuitively accepts procedural conditions that amount to implicitly acknowledging (U). It follows from the aforementioned rules of discourse that a contested norm cannot meet with the consent of the participants in a practical discourse unless (U) holds, that is,
>
> Unless all affected can *freely* accept the consequences and the side effects that the *general* observance of the controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of *each individual*.[220]

The central feature of (U) is that it is explicitly dialogical, as contrasted, for example, with Kant's Categorical Imperative or Rawls's Original Position and requires that participants take a "hypothetical attitude" toward the claim that is being tested. In this sense (U) is not a given or an a priori principle, but is, rather, derived from *contexts of argumentation*. Taken together these two principles aim to illustrate both the rules of argumentation that should guide any discourse along with the conditions for acceptability for a controversial norm once it has been taken up in a practical discourse. To put it differently, the discourse principle posits that for a norm to be considered valid it must follow a procedure that is inclusive of all participants who agree to engage with one another *intersubjectively* and with the *intention* of achieving consensus. Since discourse ethics advocates the adoption of formal procedures as a way to undercut the power of dominant local norms by reconstructing the features of consensus decision-making, it claims to offer a universal account of moral reasoning. In his distillation of Habermas's (U) principle, Rehg notes that Habermas takes a cue from George Herbert Mead's concept of ideal perspective taking, which requires that participants "take an interest in each other's interests."[221] Whereas (D) aims to explicate the terms of ethical discourse, then, (U) specifies the rules for testing whether or not a given norm can claim some level of impartiality. Habermas offers an important caveat here by noting that a person must agree to enter into argumentation in the first place if her theory is to be taken seriously and admits that there will likely be "a residue of decisionism" that cannot be avoided.[222]

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[219] See Rehg, "Discourse Ethics" in *Habermas: Key Concepts*, 124.

[220] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 92-93.

[221] William Rehg, *Insight and Solidarity: The Discourse Ethics of Jürgen Habermas* (Berkley, CA: The University of California Press, 1994), 39.

[222] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 99.

Nevertheless, the skeptics' rejection of the "moral point of view" remains caught up in a performative contradiction since she cannot deny that she exists in a world of ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*), where subjects do indeed make assertoric and normative validity claims that bear upon questions of justice and the good life.

In the Shadows of Kant and Hegel

The priority of the right or the good, justice or the good life, is a theoretical battle often framed in relation to Hegel's critique of Kant, where supporters of one or the other side elevate the universal or the particular in some ordered hierarchy, with many nuances and variations in between. In his own formulation of this rather messy terrain, Habermas offers the following observation:

> Theories of duty have always centered on the principle of justice, whereas theories of the good have always emphasized the common weal. Hegel was the first to argue that we misperceive the basic moral phenomenon if we isolate the two aspects, assigning opposite principles to each. His concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is an implicit criticism of two kinds of one-sidedness, one the mirror image of the other. Hegel opposes the abstract universality of justice manifesting itself in the individualist approaches of the modern age, in rational natural right theory and in Kantian moral philosophy. No less vigorous is his opposition to the concrete particularism of the common good that pervades Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. The ethics of discourse picks up this basic Hegelian aspiration to redeem it with Kantian means.[223]

Habermas wants to show how discourse ethics is able to mediate these positions by taking Hegel's critique seriously, while retaining Kant's orientation toward universalism by reformulating the principle of justice in the form of a procedural ethics that can, as he puts it, "include competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life," while at the same time "insuring that the interests of individuals are given their due without cutting the social bonds that intersubjectively unite them."[224] Part of what motivated Habermas's reformulation of ethics is a concern to avoid the "ethnocentric fallacy" that is inherent to all particular moralities. As Habermas writes, in uncharacteristically plain language:

> As long as the moral principle is not justified—and justifying it involves more than simply pointing to Kant's 'fact of pure reason'—the ethnocentric fallacy looms large. I must prove that my moral principle is not just a reflection of the prejudices of adult, white, well-educated, Western males of today.[225]

This is a tall order indeed, which Habermas hopes to overcome "by deriving (U) from the universal presuppositions of argumentation."[226] One problem that he anticipates here is how to confront the overly *generalized* nature of procedural theories when questions of moral judgment typically require people to draw upon their own intuitions in a

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[223] Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel's Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 201.

[224] Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life," 202.

[225] Ibid., 197.

[226] Ibid., 204.

substantial way?[227] Giving Hegel his due, Habermas acknowledges that there will always be an unbridgeable gap between the *form* and the *content* of moral judgments, though he is not willing to take this critique to the end as some do since this would mean abdicating the task of identifying universal interests, which he deems necessary for not only grappling with the problem of morality in a "postmetaphysical" world, but also for justifying the rule of law. If legal norms, especially those of a cosmopolitan flavour, are to be based on anything more than the assertion of power or a *modus vivendi*, then they must be able to stand up to some standard of justified universal principles. The notion of "human rights," for example, must aim to institutionalize general, revisable, universal principles, however imperfect and contradictory, if it is to have any meaning at all.[228] Here the distinction between question of justification and questions of application is paramount. Whereas neo-Aristotelian theories look to uphold contextual judgments that are strongly tied to the motivations, evaluations, and normative concerns of distinct communities,[229] Habermas wants to retain Kant's separation between questions of justification from those of application.[230] As he anticipates in *Structural Transformations* and develops further in works like *TCA* and *PDM*, no modern theory can regress behind the view of the "subject writ large" of the philosophy of consciousness. For the communicative ethicist, "[t]he only higher-level intersubjectivity it acknowledges is that of public spheres" where discourse "stretches the presupposition of context bound communicative actions."[231]

Habermas ends this essay on an interesting note, by putting forward a proposition that affirms the ability of discourse ethics to retain a strong link to the lifeworld of ethical substance by underling the pragmatic features of argumentative speech in deliberative contexts of collective will formation.

> These considerations address the issues of whether and why discourse ethics, though organized around a concept of procedure, can be expected to say something relevant about substance as well and, more important perhaps, about the hidden link between justice and the common good, which have traditionally been divorced, giving rise to a separate ethics of duty and the good. On the strength of its improbably pragmatic features, practical discourse, or moral argumentation, serves as a warrant of insightful will formation, insuring that the interests of individuals are given their due without cutting the social bonds that intersubjectively unite them.[232]

While this "hidden link" between justice and the good may very well be present in the way that Habermas describes it (e.g., if the pragmatic features of moral argumentation are able to strike the right balance between individual rights and group interests), at least two questions remain: does this position speak of a more substantial ethics than Habermas is willing to admit (i.e., by privileging advanced modes of argumentation)? And, moreover,

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227 Ibid., 199.

228 Ibid., 204-5.

229 Ibid., 206.

230 Habermas is careful to clarify that the kind of moral universalism that he has in mind is one that is only really possible to conceive of in modern, plural societies that have undergone a certain amount of struggle and created space for such ideals to be approximated, however imperfectly, in coded law, institutional settings, etc. Habermas, Ibid., 208.

231 Ibid., 202.

232 Ibid., 202.

is it able to adequately represent "ethical life" by merely pointing toward procedures that enable a non-coercive exchange to arise? In the next section, these concerns will be taken up with a nod to the critiques of Thomas McCarthy and Seyla Benhabib.

Discourse Ethics: Critique and Appraisal

In her books *Critique, Norm and Utopia* (1986) and *Situating the Self,* (1992) Seyla Benhabib reconstructs discourse or communicative ethics through a feminist critique that calls into question the priority of the "generalized" over the "concrete other" in moral and political theory. Although she is largely supportive of Habermas's attempts to salvage the legacy of universalist moral and political theories that shift the emphasis from legislative to interactive reason, Benhabib wants to underline and even "radicalize" elements of discourse ethics that she will claim are "universalist without being rationalistic," that emphasize understanding as opposed to a consensus for all, and that stress differences of identity and different modes of reasoning against what she sees as Habermas's relatively narrow conception of rational moral autonomy embodied in the universalization principle (U).[233] Considered in connection with religion in the public sphere, where the public/private distinction that is commonly upheld in Western liberal democracies privileges particular "public" expressions over others, Benhabib's preference for stressing concrete forms of life within a procedural framework offers an important supplement to Habermas's thinking, which is often too quick to generalize concepts (e.g., religion, tolerance, etc.) and the identities of distinct communities whose differences are often mis-recognized and thus hastily assimilated under such models.

In contrast to Habermas's strong assumptions about the justification of (U), as when he states, for example, that, "Every person who accepts the universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech and who knows what it means to justify a norm of action implicitly presupposes as valid the principle of universalization,"[234] Benhabib argues that assumptions about the implicit "know-how" of moral actors at the higher stages of reasoning (i.e., post-conventional morality) presupposes a normative content to discourse that precedes argumentation itself and thus presumes the existence of certain values in an a priori fashion. This idea hinges in Habermas's adoption of Lawrence Kohlberg's six-stage model of moral development, which he takes up in his essay, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action."[235] The stages are laid out as follows:

Level One: Pre-conventional Morality
Stage 1: morality is determined in terms of obedience and punishment.
Stage 2: morality is understood in relation to one's own interests and allowing others the same freedom.

Level Two: Conventional Morality

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[233] Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 8.
[234] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 86.
[235] See Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 119ff.

Stage 3: morality is understood as following rules, meeting social expectations and a general concern for others.
Stage 4: morality means fulfilling duties, maintaining order and concern for one's group.

Level Three: Post-conventional Morality
Stage 5: morality is understood in terms of basic rights, values and legal contracts over and above the preferences of one's self or group. There is some orientation toward universal values, though utility remains the primary criteria.
Stage 6: morality is understood in relation to an understanding and acceptance of the underlying principles of a moral law or rule.

Where Benhabib and others[236] have taken particular issue with Habermas's universalization principle is with his abstract framing of moral autonomy at the highest stages of development, despite his efforts to account for questions of cultural difference. This criticism, in a nutshell, holds that Habermas's justification of (U) runs the risk of circularity or inconsistency since it posits a benchmark for moral agents where substantive questions of difference are minimized or even erased.[237] Before turning to Benhabib's argument for discarding with (U), it will be useful to review Thomas McCarthy's critique of Habermas's position, which Benhabib draws upon in her own re-construction of communicative ethics.

McCarthy's critique of Habermas dates back to his essay "Reason and Rationalization: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermenutics," that appeared in the 1982 volume *Habermas: Critical Debates*,[238] where he challenges the idea that communicative rationality has somehow "overcome" hermeneutics with the aid of Kohlberg's 3-stage model of moral development and the theory of universal pragmatics. Here McCarthy argues that whereas at the lower stages of development there exists a discrepancy between the child or "traditional culture" and the investigator, at the higher stages this dynamic breaks down as the moral subject attains the same level of discursive reasoning as the investigator herself:

> At this level the model of the pre-reflective subject versus the reflective investigator gradually loses its foothold. In the end we are all participants in the debate as to what is higher. To be sure,

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[236] See Thomas McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions* (1991); Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism* (1993); and Agnes Heller, *Beyond Justice* (1990).
[237] In James Gordon Finlayson's estimation this problem arises because "the programme of discourse ethics assumes that morality must be justified on non-moral premises; it must be an argument that can convince even a moral skeptic, provided she is rational." See Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 89.
[238] McCarthy's 1982 essay was entitled "Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermeneutics," in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, eds. John B. Thompson and David Held (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1982. The earlier title is arguably more instructive as it picks up on the core problem that he sees with Habermas' debate with Gadamer; that is, the presumption that he has been able to effectively deal with the problem of cultural relativism through creating a model that accounts for discourses of justification vs. discourses of application. McCarthy continues to address this issue in a recent essay, "The Burdens of Modernized Faith and Postmetaphysical Reason in Habermas's 'Unfinished Project of Enlightenment," *Habermas and Religion*, 115-131.

> explicit reconstructions of implicit kinds of know-how retain their point, but only as contributions to this debate. They cannot by themselves settle it.[239]

For McCarthy, the problem of relying on such a "reconstructive" approach, which takes its cues as much from anthropological models in the tradition of Levi-Strauss[240] and Jean Piaget as it does from linguistics and (cognitive) developmental psychology, is that it fails to account for how the higher stages of moral development boast many potential variations in the final court of appeal, which makes Habermas's strong formulation along neo-Kantian lines vulnerable to the charge of Eurocentric bias.[241] Drawing attention to Habermas's differentiation of validity claims[242] McCarthy argues that, "it is rather evident that this way of setting out the fundamental structures of communication reflects the influence of epistemological and ontological distinctions characteristic of modern Western culture."[243] What is at stake here is whether Habermas's attempt at differentiation is able to capture universal conditions of understanding that are not culturally and historically dependent and, more importantly, whether this emphasis on universal, moral reasoning prejudices debates on moral autonomy in the first place?

McCarthy draws attention to Habermas's differentiation between "mythicomagical" and "modern" modes of thought, where the former functions to "level" different domains of reality, such as those between "nature" and "culture," and "results in an anthropomorphized nature and a naturalized culture."[244] One potential problem with this analysis, McCarthy argues, is that Habermas's top-down reconstruction of universal or formal pragmatics fails to account for the "vertical" reconstructions that often happen within particular cultures,[245] where, for example, different types of knowledge (e.g., spatial concepts among advanced nomadic or hunting populations) and language-use may very well operate at "higher stages" within "non-Western" epistemological frameworks.[246] These observations are not meant to reverse the elevation of one over the other, however, nor to suggest an argument for cultural relativism, but simply to point out that such developmental models tend to privilege Euro-western standards of cross-cultural research design and render other conceptual modes of knowledge inferior in an a priori fashion by assuming that species-wide, universal competencies can only exist on the formal-operational plain, suggesting that they are a "naturally" higher stage of

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[239] All references here can be found in Thomas McCarthy, "Reason and Rationalization: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermeneutics," in *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 150.

[240] Ibid., 136.

[241] William Rehg describes such a theory as one that is deontological, impartialist, proceduralist and dialogical. See Regh "Discourse Ethics," 116.

[242] Here Habermas aims to lay out a procedure for "rational" evaluation along the lines of truth, rightness and sincerity; different modes of language use, including objectivating, norm-conformative and expressive; and the different domains in which he claims that speech is carried out, corresponding to the objective, social and subjective worlds. For a further elaboration on these premises see Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*; Barbara Fultner, "Communicative Action and Formal Pragmatics," in *Habermas: Key Concepts*, 54-73.

[243] McCarthy, "Reason and Rationalization," 134.

[244] Ibid., 136.

[245] Ibid., ,138.

[246] Ibid., 142.

development.[247] To be sure, McCarthy is in full agreement with Habermas regarding the "know-how" of rational agents at the *lower* stages of moral development since authoritarian and strong group-centred moralities can hardly weather the storms of contemporary forms of pluralism. As McCarthy puts it in a statement that is worth quoting in full:

> As long as we are dealing with modes of thought that are, in Habermas's formal-pragmatic sense, not "open," there is some plausibility to the model of reconstructing the intuitive, pretheoretical knowledge underlying the performances of competent subjects. In such cases there is an asymmetry between the insufficiently decentred thought of an individual or a culture and the differentiated, reflective thought of the investigator. And this asymmetry provides a foothold for the conception of explicating an intuitive know-how, of knowing 'better' in this sense the structures and rules underlying a subject's performance. … This seems to be the case, for example, with the progressive formation of a conception of the permanence of objects and of their invariance under certain operations; it seems also to hold for the child's developing ability to coordinate social perspectives in interpersonal relations to the extent required for role taking in family and society. In such cases, it seems, we are dealing with the acquisition of unreflectively mastered kinds of know-how—in relation to the external and social worlds—that are constitutive of the human form of life. To the degree that they can be characterized formally, we might claim to have identified universal structures of human reason.[248]

With these important considerations in mind, a point of contention arises when we turn to the "higher" stages of development, for while we may be able to justifiably differentiate between "higher" and "lower" when it comes to basic learning processes about the operations of the objective world, (e.g., attributing a natural event like an earthquake or a tsunami to "God's wrath" is demonstrably false) or the ability to distinguish between the needs and desires of "ego and alter," self and other, it is not at all clear, to draw on an example from political theory, that a "justice-as-fairness" model is *necessarily* higher than a contractarian or a utilitarian view,[249] since all such models *may* sufficiently articulate a post-conventional understanding of the world while maintaining different meta-ethical positions about how best to represent the "moral point of view." Moreover, McCarthy argues that Habermas's presumption that a "mythicomagical" worldview represents a conflation between "nature" and "culture" is underdetermined in his theorizing.[250] Whereas Habermas rejects the idea of a "reconciliation with nature" or a "philosophy of nature" as a regression to metaphysics and a "re-enchanted world,"[251] McCarthy claims that there is no reason why such theories could not successfully differentiate their own conceptual validity from that of scientific reason and position themselves as fallible and non-foundational—a position, he adds, which "might provide a view of our place in nature that could complement and relativize the objectivating view of a nature to be dominated."[252]

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247 Ibid., 143.

248 Ibid., 143.

249 Ibid., 142.

250 See Wendy Brown's discussion on "culture" in *Regulating Aversion* (2006), chapter 6.

251 See Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics," *Habermas: Critical Debates*, 245.

252 Ibid., 149.

To repeat, McCarthy's claims are not meant as an argument for cultural relativism, but rather seek to question the strength of Habermas's position once moral actors show an ability and a willingness to differentiate between basic levels of knowledge and recognize the claims and subject positions of others in a non-objectivating and non-strategic manner (i.e., when engaging in communicative reasoning). This criticism has implications for Habermas's understanding of metaphysics and, by extension, so-called "religious" worldviews, since it problematizes the tendency to guard against what we might term "metaphorical" language as a mode of discourse that is *necessarily* "lower" and contrary to more objective claims to knowledge.[253] McCarthy is also careful to stress that it is not his intention to uphold some hermeneutical model of dialogical understanding over and against more rigorous and systematic commitments to explanation and critique. His point, rather, is only to suggest that such "specialized forms of discourse" are not necessarily contrary to the acquisition of knowledge and *could* be utilized in the service of political struggles for recognition and change, which is an aim that both he and Habermas share. As he puts it:

> The view of the human species as in and of nature that we would get from this perspective would be quite different from the view of the human species as set over against nature that we adopt in the objectivating sciences. And this change in viewpoint from domination to harmonization might well have consequences for our sense of obligation to nature and for the norms governing our interactions with it.[254]

While I find myself in general agreement with McCarthy's claims when considering their potential usefulness in the domain of practical discourse, (e.g., as an opening toward a more reflexive concept of the uses of metaphorical language) what interests me in his critique is what it reveals about the problematic boundaries that Habermas sets in place for negotiating the "universal" and the "particular" and, more importantly, what all this might suggest for how he imagines the distinction between "religion" and "reason" (or the "secular," etc.) and the considerable overlap and malleability of these conceptual "worlds" or "domains." I will return to this point in next chapter when discussing postmetaphysical thinking and Habermas's debate with political and public theologians.[255]

In her essay "In the Shadow of Aristotle and Hegel," Benhabib draws parallels between communicative ethics and the traditions of social contract (from Rousseau to Rawls) and theories of moral autonomy (from Kant to Kohlberg),[256] where the former is

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253 McCarthy will take up this line of argument in explicit relation to religion in his recent essay, "The Burdens of Modernized Faith and Postmetaphysical Reason in Habermas's 'Unfinished Project of Enlightenment," in *Habermas and Religion*.

254 McCarthy, "Reason and Rationalization," 150.

255 Benhabib will echo McCarthy's claim that such a model is underdetermined, for once the post-conventional stage is reached and the formal procedures are satisfied, "we can no longer arbitrate between competing moral theories on the basis of these criteria ... At this point," she continues, "additional arguments are needed to help arbitrate among universalistic ethical theories." See Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 292.

256 Both Rawls' and Kohlberg's positions are said to represent "kindred projects of moral philosophy" that seek to address the problem of the individual and the collective simultaneously. See Benhabib, "In the

described as a procedure for finding valid principles of action through practical discourse. Put differently, this essay attempts to facilitate a collaborative search for the justification of moral and political principles in modern, plural societies and seeks to problematize the inheritance of these ideas that were generated by and are still tied to a patriarchal and Euro-Christian conceptual framework. Drawing on McCarthy's critique on the "know how" of moral actors at the post-conventional stage, Benhabib agrees with him that the substance of moral interpretation at the higher, post-conventional stages of reasoning allows for multiple vantage points and epistemological positions to be put on the table, all of which, she claims, must presuppose some set of norms and values (i.e., strong conceptions of the good).[257] Benhabib also takes a cue from Agnes Heller's critique of Habermas who, in her book *Beyond Justice* (1987), states the problem as follows:

> Contestants enter the discourse with different values, and they all try to justify their values (as right and true). They do so by resorting to values higher than those which they want to justify... If the participants do not share any supreme value, they will resort to different kinds of supreme values, and the discourse then must remain unsettled. However, if they share one supreme value, the discourse can be settled in one of two ways (or by a combination of these ways).[258]

For Heller as for Benhabib, there is a consequentialist implication in Habermas's failure distinguish sufficiently between justice and the good life. If the aim of (U) is to provide a cognitive test of norms and the rational establishment of those norms, Habermas fails, in Heller's estimation, to offer the appropriate guidelines that his theory intends. This, she argues, is because Habermas has accepted certain values such as freedom and respect for life as given and takes for granted that others will do so as well.[259] Heller grants that discourse ethics is a useful innovation in the socio-political realm (e.g., for processes of legislation) but does not see it as an alternative to Kant's Categorical Imperative**.** For her, the (U) principle can provide no positive guidance for moral questions in the here and now, but only place a "substantive limitation" on our intellectual intuitions – a condition, she believes, that is too minimal for moral theory.[260] Benhabib disagrees with Heller on this point and argues that such a limitation would be sufficient for moral theory as long as it is self-conscious of the historical horizon in which it is situated, claiming that communicative ethics "promotes a universalist and post-conventionalist perspective on all ethical relations: it has implications for familial

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Shadow of Aristotle and Hegel: Communicative Ethics and Current Controversies in Practical Philosophy," in *Situating the Self*, 24.

[257] As she puts it, "The formal structure of postconventional moral reasoning allows a number of substantive moral interpretations, and these interpretations always take place by presupposing a hermeneutic horizon of norms and values which have become aspects of a modern lifeworld.'" See Benhabib, "In the Shadow of Aristotle and Hegel," 30.

[258] Agnes Heller, *Beyond Justice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 239.

[259] Here the concrete positions of individuals are given a greater priority in discourse as an essential starting point for moving in the direction of reciprocity. See Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Moral Theory" in *Situating the Self*, 158.

[260] Heller, "The Discourse Ethics of Habermas: Critique and Appraisal," *Thesis Eleven*, February 1985 Vol. 10-11, No. 1: 5-17.

life no less than for democratic legislatures."[261] Her proposal and modification of Habermas's model runs as follows:

> What Habermas has previously named the conditions of an 'ideal speech situation,' and which in the essay "Discourse Ethics" are called the 'universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech,' entail strong ethical assumptions. They require of us: (1) that we recognize the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants in the moral conversation—I will call this *the principle of universal moral respect*; (2) these conditions further stipulate that within such conversations each has the same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of conversation, etc. Let me call this *the principle of egalitarian reciprocity*.[262]

These two principles—universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity—contain a normative content that Benhabib will claim is *prior* to moral argumentation, which she believes has consequences for Habermas's position in two important respects. First, it suggests a "thicker" conception of the good than Habermas is willing to admit given the substantial nature of these principles. Second, on account of this substantive (as opposed to neutral) dimension, it begs the questions as to whether or not such a procedure is circular or dogmatic? For Benhabib, discourse ethics is better conceived of as an "on-going moral conversation" that is grounded in the above mentioned principles, which has the effect, she claims, of clarifying its' political dimensions and makes the need for consensus redundant. This is because the aim of consensus—what all could agree to as morally permissible—places an impossible burden upon those engaged in communicative interaction, which Benhabib views as unnecessary since the goal should only be one of determining the grounds from which a moral conversation can be *sustained*.[263]

While Benhabib rejects the standard communitarian solution to political problems brought about by individualism, anomie, and alienation as a romantic regression that neglects the need for institutional solutions,[264] she takes seriously the communitarian emphasis on a sense of justice where the self is grounded within a strong moral and political community.[265] This, she maintains, can offer a "corrective to the excessive formalism of justice-centered and deontological theories" and the liberal priority of the right over the good.[266] Moreover, it is precisely this problem, she claims, that has allowed critics to bring charges of consequentialism against discourse ethics, since Habermas's universalization principle fails to adequately distinguish between negative and positive duties. In contrast to Habermas's framing of (U) along the lines of a formalistic, justice-oriented and deontological theory, Benhabib argues that the fairness of moral norms can

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[261] Benhabib, Ibid, 39.

[262] Ibid., 29.

[263] Ibid., 38.

[264] On this point Benhabib notes, "In their critique of the 'unencumbered self,' communitarians often fail to distinguish between the significance of constitutive communities for the formation of one's self-identity and a conventionalist or role-conformist attitude which would consist in an uncritical recognition of 'my station and its duties.'" See Benhabib, "Autonomy, Modernity and Community: Communitarianism and Critical Social Theory in Dialogue," *Situating the Self*, 74.

[265] See, for example, Alistair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1984); Michal Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (1982); and Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989).

[266] Benhabib, "Autonomy, Modernity and Community," 70.

only be established through creating a process of equal opportunity in practical conversations.[267] Concerned with the communitarian tendency to elevate community values to the point of moral conformism, Benhabib argues that communicative ethics can provide a richer and more concrete understanding of justice that can accommodate individual and community values by promoting "the ability and the willingness to assume reflexive role-distancing."[268] She frames this dilemma nicely in her earlier work, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, when she writes:

> Communicative ethics demands from its participants a willingness and ability to consider normative questions from a universalist standpoint and to regard every being as an equal regardless of the actual constellation of relations in real life. Even if we admit that such willingness and such ability emerge out of contingent circumstances, there is a dilemma here. The necessity of discursive argumentation arises when, through a conflict and crisis, social and political agents challenge an established background consensus.[269]

Benhabib's point here is simple enough to follow—namely, that the challenge of achieving consensus emerges most sharply at the level of concrete disagreements and not in the abstract realm of universalization. She continues, "Yet the very step of 'abstraction' that leads such agents to engage in discourse, namely, the virtualization of the constraints of action, can only take place when such agents are willing to suspend the motivating force and content of these real conflict situations."[270] The conflict here has something of a chicken and egg ring to it, for the question is raised as to how one might move in the direction of a universalization principle when the conflicts at hand are unclear? For this reason Benhabib wants to argue that, "Discourses arise when the intersubjectivity of ethical life is *endangered*; but the very project of discursive argumentation presupposes the ongoing validity of a *reconciled* intersubjectivity."[271] While Habermas will frame these dilemmas by distinguishing between discourses of justification from those of contextualization (application), Benhabib's basic point is that reasoning discourses cannot be abstracted from the context of the lifeworld without severely distorting their *form* and *content* when applied to a norm-oriented model or regulative idea.

The main issue for Benhabib, then, is not a question of whether communicative ethics should proceed as a theory of moral argumentation, but whether the substantive commitments that it entails are "presented as theoretical certainties whose status cannot be further questioned, or whether we can conceive of ethical discourse in such a radically reflexive fashion that even the presuppositions of discourse can themselves be challenged, called into question and debated."[272] She continues:

> Since practical discourses do not theoretically predefine the domain of moral debate and since individuals do not have to abstract from their everyday attachments and beliefs when they begin argumentation, we cannot preclude that it will be not only matters of justice but those of the good

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[267] See Ibid, 73.
[268] Ibid., 74.
[269] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 303.
[270] Ibid, 320-21.
[271] Ibid, 321.

[272] Benhabib, "Autonomy, Modernity and Community," 74.

> life as well that will become thematized in practical discourses or that the presuppositions of discourse themselves will be challenged. A mode of communicative ethics, which views moral theory as a theory of argumentation, need not restrict itself to the priority of justice. I see no reason as to why questions of the good life as well cannot become subject matters of practical discourses.[273]

Contrary to what Habermas seems to suggest, then, Benhabib claims that conceptions of the good life are issues upon which inter-subjective reflection is possible, just like conceptions of justice. In such cases, neither consensus nor legislation need be the goal, but rather finding a middle ground between more narrow and dialectical forms of contextualism and an a priori universalism.[274]

Putting a finer point on the differences between Habermas's and Benhabib's positions within moral and political theory and what is ultimately at stake for them for addressing broader issues of explanation and representation within the public sphere, it is important to underline that Benhabib locates her position as one that upholds general and universal principles of fairness and reciprocity in the framework of procedural ethics, while at the same time highlighting the question of difference:

> While agreeing that normative disputes can be settled rationally, and that fairness, reciprocity and some procedure of universalizability are constituents, that is, necessary conditions of the moral standpoint, interactive universalism regards difference as a starting point for reflection and action. In this sense, 'universality' is a regulative ideal that does not deny our embodied and embedded identity, but aims at developing moral attitudes and encouraging political transformations that can yield a point of view acceptable to all. Universality is not the ideal consensus of fictitiously defined selves, but the concrete process in politics and morals of the struggle of concrete, embodied selves, striving for autonomy.[275]

It worth pointing out here that Habermas will quote this same passage in his essay "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," (1988 [1992]) to be discussed in the next chapter, as evidence that Benhabib is "thoroughly in agreement" with him, and "remains faithful to the universalist intentions of Kant and Hegel."[276] Habermas questions her position, however, on the connection that she makes between justice and the good life as corresponding to "the sociological distinction between the public and private spheres."[277] Here Habermas is referring to the distinction that Benhabib draws between the "generalized" and the "concrete" other, where she looks at how feminine identities have been routinely marginalized and "privatized" within the history of Western political theory. As she puts it:

> I want to argue that the definition of the moral domain, as well as the ideal of moral autonomy, not only in Kohlberg's theory but in universalistic contractarian theories from Hobbes to Rawls, lead to a privatization of women's experience and to the exclusion of its consideration from a moral point of view. In this tradition, the moral self is viewed as a disembedded and disembodied being.

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[273] Ibid, 74.

[274] See Benhabib, "In Defense of Universalism, Yet Again! A Response to Critics of Situating the Self," *New German Critique*, No. 62 (Spring-Summer, 1994), 175.

[275] Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other," 153.

[276] Habermas, "Transcendence From Within, Transcendence in This World," in *Religion and Rationality*: *Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, trans, Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 85.

[277] Ibid., 85.

> … A universalistic moral theory restricted to the standpoint of the 'generalized other' falls into epistemic incoherencies that jeopardize its claim to adequately fulfill reversibility and universalizability.[278]

When referring to the "generalized other," Benhabib not only has theories of social contract in mind, but also the ways in which Habermas has inherited this tradition in his re-positioning of questions of justice over those of the good life, which, she claims, significantly abstracts from *concrete* traditions by starting from what is shared in common as a way to address the ideals of fairness and equal representation. She defines this domain as follows:

> The standpoint of the generalized other requires us to view each and every individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other. We assume that the other, like ourselves is a being who has concrete needs, desires and affects, but that what constitutes his or her moral dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common. Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of formal equality and reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from us what we can expect and assume from him or her. The norms of our interactions are primarily public and institutional ones.[279]

While Benhabib does not object to the general, overarching aims of this tradition, and endorses many of its dimensions, she argues that the presumptions that are made regarding what is considered "public" vs. what is "private" are historically fraught categories that have not been sufficiently untangled from patriarchal theories of justice and moral autonomy and have tended to exclude the experiences of embedded and embodied beings. Her challenge to these tendencies is what she calls the "concrete other":

> The standpoint of the concrete other, by contrast, requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality, and focus on individuality. We seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what she searches for, and what s/he desires. Out relation to the other is governed by the norms of equity and complementary reciprocity.[280]

What strikes me about this statement is not so much Benhabib's formulations of the "concrete other" as a somewhat bounded category in itself, (e.g., the rather strong, anthropological claim that she makes about "women's" morality as having a *basis* in care and nurturance) but rather the call to historicizing that her position recommends, which has the effect of prioritizing and/or reflecting upon different sets of questions and conceptual pairings, be it in matters of moral autonomy, political legitimacy or religion.[281] This tension plays out more clearly when Benhabib addresses Habermas's

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[278] Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other," 152.

[279] Ibid., 158-59.

[280] Ibid., 159.

[281] She makes this point rather clearly and concisely in relation moral theory: "Moral situations, like moral emotions and attitudes can only be individuated if they are evaluated in light of our knowledge of the history of the agents involved in them." Ibid.,163.

charge that she confuses questions of justice and the good with a "sociological distinction" between public and private realms in her essay "Models of Public Space."

In this essay, Benhabib upholds Habermas's theory of discourse ethics as a useful alternative to both liberal and agonistic models in the tradition of Hannah Arendt—the former being too neutral and the latter too majoritarian[282]—while maintaining the thrust of Arendt's critique when it comes to the distinction between the public and the private sphere and its connection to Habermas's priority of the right over the good. As she writes:

> But the discourse model, precisely because it proceeds from a fundamental norm of egalitarian reciprocity and precisely because it projects the democratization of all social norms, cannot preclude the democratization of familial norms and of norms governing the gender division of labor in the family as well. If in discourses the agenda of the conversation is radically open, if participants can bring any and all matters under critical scrutiny and questioning, then there is no way to predefine the nature of the issues discussed as being public ones of justice versus private ones of the good life. Distinctions such as between justice and the good life, norms and values, interests and needs are 'subsequent' and not prior to the process of discursive will formation.[283]

These arguments are instructive when thinking about discourses on religion since they highlight how on-going historical narratives that presume a certain natural boundary between different groups of people (in this case men and women) are inscribed within theories, concepts, institutions and language in ways that abstract from differences such that crucial issues of identity get glossed over or concealed. While I am not primarily interested in following Benhabib's arguments in her quest for a fallible and quasi-normative moral and political theory, her shift towards an emphasis on questions of difference within a discursive model of radical procedural ethics, can be useful, as she puts it, "for demystifying discourses of power and their implicit agendas."[284] Before turning to Habermas' clarifications on the distinction between discourses of justification and discourse of application, it will be useful to consider Wendy Brown's critique of "Habermasians," including Benhabib, in order to clarify what is at stake.

In her 2006 book *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Brown offers a critique of the liberal inheritance of the concept of tolerance, which she argues has been assimilated into normative discourse that often functions as a discursive strategy for describing certain group behaviours as rational or irrational, depending on how they measure up to a particular conception of tolerance. Within this discursive taxonomy (i.e., how it commonly functions in practical discourses) "culture" is often deemed to be rational, while "religion" is coded as irrational. Although Brown doesn't call out Habermas *directly*, but rather levels her charge against "Habermasians," lumping them in with Lockean, Kantian, Millian and Rawlsian perspectives, and with liberal theory more generally, her main concern, which she shares with Benhabib, is with how the "abstract nature" of deliberative rationality cuts itself off from "embodied locations" and "constitutive practices" in such a way that certain beliefs and practices come to be described as rationality's opposite in an a priori fashion. As she puts it:

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[282] Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition and Jürgen Habermas," in *Situating the Self*, 98.

[283] Benhabib, "Models of Public Space," 110.

[284] Ibid., 113.

> For deliberative rationality to be meaningful apart from 'culture' or 'subjectivity,' the conceit must be in play that the individual chooses what he or she thinks. This same choosing articulates the possibility of an optional relationship with culture, religion, and even ethnic belonging; it sustains as well the conceit that the rationality of the subject is independent of these things, which are named as contextual rather than constitutive elements.[285]

What is at stake for Brown is not some desire on her part to elevate so-called "culture" and/or "religion," but rather in asking what gets obscured when classifying the liberal subject as one whose ability to be "self-regulating" and "modestly free" is determined (I would say overly determined) by her willingness to affirm her individuality over and against that of the group, culture, or religion to which she belongs.[286] As an example of this problem amongst so-called "Habermasian" thinkers, Brown calls Benhabib to task for locating culture as "extrinsic" to the liberal subject in her 1996 book *The Claims of Culture*. The problem for Brown is that Benhabib's model of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity, along with two additional categories that she adds in this text (voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit and association), still "presumes the capacity to grasp and negotiate culture from the outside." While lauding her efforts to balance individual autonomy with the claims of culture in multicultural societies, Brown questions the boundaries that Benhabib describes as coming from a "noncultural place" and argues that she assumes a certain level moral autonomy to exist over and against "culture":

> Similarly, Benhabib speaks about limited minority cultural claims in terms of the 'rights' they have over their members: 'nomoi communities do not have the right to deprive their children of humankind's accumulated knowledge and civilizational achievements; … they do have a right to transmit to their children the fundamentals of their own ways of life alongside other forms of knowledge shared with humankind.' Again, the very language of rights implies an ability to isolate various parties—the culture and the individual, respective forms of cultural knowledge—that rests on an autonomous, pre-cultural, Kantian subject to whom such judgment and assertion is available.[287]

Part of the problem for Brown hinges on the conflation of tolerance with tolerant societies, thus conflating a theoretical concept with a sociological phenomenon and a political reality. Here the notion of "collective identity," which is often coded as "culture" or "religion," is used as a discursive tool to police the boundaries between culture/religion and secularism. Putting it concisely, Brown argues that the idea that culture/religion undermines "public" rationality reflects a problematic ideological assumption that liberal theory is somehow "a-cultural." While Brown clearly recognizes that Benhabib is grappling with how to square this circle she remains unconvinced in her success in achieving this aim:

> Thus even a deliberative democratic theorist such as Benhabib struggles to recognize cultural belonging and identity in excess of what is offered by the nation-state, and dismisses as 'institutionally unstable and analytically untenable' efforts to separate 'background culture' from

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[285] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 152.

[286] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 164.

[287] Ibid., 168-69.

> 'public political culture,' she also insists on a set of norms, metanorms, and principles to produce 'free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals' as the basis of democracy.[288]

What seems to be behind Brown's critique here is a concern that the normative thrust of Benhabib's moral and political theory fails to address the ways in which, "religion and culture are privatized and the cultural and religious dimensions of liberalism itself are disavowed." This move results, she claims, in a theoretical construction whereby "culture" and "religion" are seen as things that one has a "right" to rather than "as sites of power, politics, subject production, and norms."[289] While I do not aim to adjudicate the particulars of this critique in relation to the work of Benhabib, I draw attention to Brown's emphasis on the discursive uses of concepts such as tolerance, culture, and religion in order to highlight a problem that is under-theorized in Benhabib and excluded from Habermas's critical theory; namely, how well-meaning concepts often function to marginalize and obscure identities that fall outside of certain boundaries. While Habermas clearly does not, as Brown's critique suggest, situate culture as "extrinsic to the individual," one often gets the sense in his writings that the identities of the "background" culture of particular groups are somehow chosen or given and not also the product of complex processes of political, conceptual, and semantic strategies of domination, which function to assimilate otherness into a model that privileges certain groups and identities in an a priori fashion. In closing this chapter, I will briefly address this question in terms of how Habermas responds to his critics in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In his essay "Justice and Solidarity: On the Question Concerning 'Stage 6,'" Habermas addresses the problem raised by McCarthy on the "know how" of participants at the highest stages of morality and clarifies his position by stating that he does not see the highest moral stage as "natural" in the same way as stages one through four.[290] Here he takes up Kohlberg's strategy of defending deontological theories and supplements it with a principle of "equal respect for all," which stresses elements of justice and benevolence.[291] Without going into all the details of what is a rather complex argument, Habermas will make the claim in this essay that discourse ethics should not be conflated with Kohlberg's theory for establishing the "moral point of view." As he writes:

> Practical discourse can be understood as a process of reaching agreement which, through its form, that is, solely on the basis of unavoidable general presuppositions of argumentation, constrains all participants at the same time to ideal role taking. It transforms ideal role taking, which in Kohlberg was something to be anticipated privately and in isolation, into a public event, something practiced, ideally, by all together.[292]

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288 Ibid., 169.

289 Ibid., 169.

290 Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity: On the Question Concerning 'Stage 6,'" in *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Ethics and Politics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 32.

291 Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity," 35.

292 Ibid., 40-41.

Contrary to Kohlberg's "principle of benevolence," which highlights the importance of things like doing good to others and avoiding harm,[293] Habermas stresses that his communicative model is an attempt to create bridges between identifying with one's group and with the general welfare or common good.[294] One crucial difference for Habermas, then, is what he sees as the necessary shift from identifying equal treatment as a mode of benevolence to viewing it a mode of solidarity. As he writes, "This principle is rooted in the realization that each person must take responsibility for the other because as consociates all must have an interest in the integrity of their shared life context in the same way." These are idealizing presuppositions that Habermas claims must supplement any autonomous morality, including his theory of discourse ethics. Following this model, solidarity is understood as having moved beyond identifying with one, common ethnocentric group, toward the "idea of a general discursive will formation."[295] This, in turn, requires a relationship of mutual recognition carried out by individuals who orient their public interactions with others in relation to validity claims, though in such a way where existential and ethical questions are brought to bear:

> Both in its argumentative methods and its communicative presuppositions, the procedure of discourse has reference to an existential pre-understanding among participants regarding the most universal structures of a lifeworld that has been shared intersubjectively from the beginning.[296]

Acknowledging the potential for this procedure of discursive will formation to become "one-sided," Habermas stresses that universalization is "powerless" unless it is also orientated toward "a shared life context," where questions of reconciliation can be uncovered. Here we might pause and ask what might this context be, exactly? Habermas provides the example of a judge in a court of law, who represents a stand-in for the "post-conventional" legislator. Because she cannot orient her judgment to one, supreme mode of justification that she applies regardless of the context, (e.g., capital punishment without regard for whether a murder was committed in cold blood or in self defense [my example]) her orientation towards questions of judgement is divided in two: first, determining what principles are valid in this case; and, second, deciding how they should be applied in concrete circumstances.[297] It is only after the principles have been made clear and justified, however, that questions of application can be addressed.

Habermas's further clarifies this position in another essay written during this period on the distinction between discourses of justification and application. In "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments of Practical Reason," Habermas clarifies how he understands the different employments of practical reason, which he divides into questions of the purposive, the good, and the just, which correspond to pragmatic, ethical and moral issues. Practical reason, understood in this tripartite way, cannot be fully realized in discourses of application since they are concerned with

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293 Ibid., 45.

294 Ibid., 47.

295 Ibid., 47.

296 Ibid., 48.

297 Ibid., 50-1.

particular issues that are appropriate only within certain situations.[298] Whereas pragmatic discourses have a strategic goal and function, moral discourses are understood as strictly technical matters that help to clarify and define legitimate behavioural expectations. Habermas introduces the notion of ethical-existential discourses here, which he defines as follows:

> In ethical-existential discourses, reason and the will condition one another reciprocally, though the latter remains embedded in the life-historical context thematized. Participants in processes of self-clarification cannot distance themselves from the life histories and forms of life in which they actually find themselves. Moral-practical discourses, by contrast, require a break with all of the unquestioned truths of an established, concrete ethical life, in addition to distancing oneself from the contexts of life with which one's identity is inextricably interwoven.[299]

These distinctions on the different deployments of practical reason are meant to solve problems that Habermas finds within contemporary practical philosophy, including Aristotelian, utilitarian and Kantian varieties,[300] which he claims fail to establish a theory of justice *and* solidarity, which Habermas describes as "an intersubjective interpretation of the categorical imperative from Hegel's theory of recognition but without incurring the cost of a historical dissolution of morality in ethical life." (1) In sum, for Habermas, concrete principles are understood to be situated within the life-world of *particular* groups and therefore cannot ground discourse in an *a priori* fashion. Instead, they must be uncovered in discourses of application after basic principles of justification have been settled.

Conclusion

Discourse ethics and the debates that it helped to spur mark a crucial shift in Habermas's critical theoretical model. On the one hand, it attempts to answer the problem of judgment or evaluation for complex societies by re-imagining the relationship between "justice" and the "good," autonomy and solidarity, through a complex model that brings together social scientific insights, such as cognitive moral development, with contemporary philosophy, including meta-ethical problems and themes in political theory in the traditions of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. These strategies have several advantages,

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[298] As Habermas writes, "Pragmatic discourses take their orientation from *possible contexts* of application. They are related to the actual volitions of agents only through subjective goal determinations and preferences." See "On the Pragmatic, the Ethical, and the Moral Employments of Practical Reason," *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 11.

[299] Habermas, "On the Pragmatic," 12.

[300] As Habermas writes, "But in each of the three major philosophical traditions, just one of these interpretations has been thematized. For Kant practical reason is coextensive with morality; only in autonomy do reason (*Vernunft*) and the will attain unity. Empiricism assimilates practical reason to its pragmatic use; in Kantian terminology, it is reduced to the purposive exercise of the understanding (*Verstand*). And in the Aristotelian tradition, practical reason assumes the role of a faculty of judgement (*Urteilskraft*) that illuminates the life historical horizon of a customary ethos. In each case a different exercise is attributed to practical reason, as will become apparent when we consider the respective discourses in which they operate." See Habermas, "On the Pragmatic," 10.

not least of which is the space that they open up for a thoroughgoing conversation about how various concrete forms of ethics, pragmatic arguments, and socio-political discourses of justification can be productively combined, while not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. While Habermas does not stress the problem of religion in his early articulation of discourse ethics, his movement away from questions of historical materialism in the 1980s, including labor and interaction, and the emancipatory potential of the students' movement that he acknowledged in Germany in the 1960s, marks a return of sorts to the idea of the public sphere and the use of public reason. Having established his theory of communicative interaction in *TCA*, and drawing out its implications in the realm of ethics and political theory, Habermas creates space within his architectonic for the idea of deliberative democracy, where questions of justice, meaning, and motivation are understood to be generated through participatory contexts of communicative interaction.

Arguably the most important example of Habermas's shifting views on religion occurs in the midst of these debates, when he is asked to participate at a conference at the University of Chicago with (mostly) "public" and "political" theologians. Forced to switch from a *descriptive* approach to a *performative* mode of argumentation, Habermas defends his critique of religion through a re-iteration of the boundaries of post-metaphysical philosophy. While it is clear in this debate, which will be taken up in the next chapter, that Habermas still views religion through a largely existential framework that is of little apparent use for practical reasoning, his emphasis on discourse ethics in relation to questions of justice and solidarity, marks an opening toward the role of the informal public sphere of opinion- and will-formation as an increasingly important site of meaning and motivation. As the idea of the return of religion gains currency in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Habermas's discourse theory of morality will create further inroads in this direction. One central issue to notice at this stage is how the "other" is accommodated in Habermas's work in an increasingly open-yet-generalized sort of way. As Benhabib points out, Habermas does not pay close attention to what I would term "micro" identities, but is rather interested in thinking about procedural spaces whereby participants can work out their differences themselves. In the process, as Benhabib's criticisms suggest, he is unable to account for the ways in which "otherness" can be obscured, as highlighted in her critique on the place of women in moral and political theory. Likewise, Wendy Brown's critique draws attention to the discourse about religion and culture and how dominant discursive representations need to be critically interrogated in order to better understand how normative models often function to marginalize, exclude, or even condemn "others" whose identities are represented as falling outside of the liberal, rational norm. This problem will become evident in chapter five when I discuss both Habermas and Derrida's ideas on fundamentalism and toleration and in the conclusion where I contrast Habermas's theory with Bruce Lincoln's understand of discourse as a performance of myth and ritual in the interest of evoking sentiments of affinity and estrangement.

Chapter 3 - Postmetaphysical Thinking and Political Theology

The concept of postmetaphysical thinking can be seen in embryo form from the time of Habermas's first major theoretical work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, (1968) where he attempts to ground a philosophical anthropology in language, as discussed in chapter one. While his earlier critiques of positivism and his adventures in hermeneutics reveal a long-standing interest in trying to develop a formula to describe, explain, and demarcate the boundaries between different types of knowledge claims—which undergird his theories of universal/formal pragmatics, communicative action and discourse ethics—it was not until his book *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, translated in 1992 from the original *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, (1988) that the concept rises to the level of a staple heuristic within his larger conceptual toolbox.[301] Hereafter a series of conceptual "posts" will follow in Habermas's work, all of which can be generally described along the lines of his social evolutionary model, which suggests a development beyond a particular conceptual idea (e.g. postconventional morality signals a step beyond conventional).[302] In another example of one of these "posts," following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Habermas will begin to talk about a "postnational" constellation in the context of his political theory, which includes an orientation toward constitutional principles as a binding force for complex societies and a rethinking of the Kantian ideal of cosmopolitanism.[303] Similarly, after the events of 9/11, Habermas will begin to align his social theory with a "post-secular" orientation in light of his rethinking of secularization theory and the problems brought about by (neo-liberal) capitalism/globalization and the

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301 Eduardo Mendieta points out that Habermas appropriates the terms postmetaphysical and postsecular from his friend and colleague, German sociologist Klaus Eder. See Mendieta, "Appendix: Religion in Habermas's Work," *Habermas and Religion*, 404.

302 Habermas tends to use the terms "learning processes" and "modernization" now instead of social evolution. In my estimation, the newer terms indicate the processes of evolution *as* social development (e.g., in legal and political structures) along with the ideal of mutual perspective-taking (i.e, how laerning processes take place in the level of interaction). In this sense, "evolution" is always measured against the subject-positions and lifeworlds of others in order to test or check the strength of developmental trends and modify them as necessary. Habermas' shift toward using the term "postsecular" can be understood as a product of this way of thinking.

303 See, for example, Habermas, "Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace, With the Benefit of Two Hundred Years Hindshight" (1997); "The Kantian Project and the Divided West" (2006).

West's confrontation with "political Islam." While these later "posts" came about as a response to world events and attempt to re-orient how actors can and should conceive of the epistemic status of their shared social and political worlds, (i.e., what Habermas calls cognitive presuppositions) the idea of "postmetaphysical" thinking is one that has always been integral to Habermas's philosophy, though his articulation and defense of it—especially when engaging with theologians—has evolved with his theory in certain key ways. This chapter is an attempt to flesh out some of these developments.

The Idea of Postmetaphysical Thinking

The idea of postmetaphysical thinking can already been seen in earlier essays such as "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose," (1971) "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," (1981) and in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* (1985/1987) where Habermas sought to defend a particular conception of philosophy over and against competing trajectories, such as Richard Rorty's post-analytic pragmatism or Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction." Following Mendieta's periodization, the timeframe between 1982-2000 was when Habermas developed postmetaphsyical thinking and deliberative democracy as the outgrowth of the theory of communicative action. As Mendieta puts it:

> *TCA* had already announced that one of the goals of social theory should be to comprehend modernity; in this third period, Habermas turns to philosophy itself. If philosophy is reason reflecting on itself, especially of reason as it is embodied in social systems, then the task became to understand to what extent philosophy had either succeeded or failed to grasp modern societies as embodiments of successful or pathological processes of rationalization.[304]

It is for these (and other) reasons that Habermas classifies philosophy as a *platzhalter* or "place holder," that "no longer directs its own pieces" but must instead learn to mediate between distinct "cultures" that have become differentiated in modern societies, reflecting different aspects of human interaction—scientific-technical, moral-legal and aesthetic-expressive.[305] To put it crudely, following Habermas's formulae in *TCA*, as "religious" worldviews dissolve (i.e., as all-encompassing accounts of the natural world) problems are increasingly taken up in distinct domains of knowledge. As specialist knowledge increases within these domains (e.g., moral-legal), it becomes more and more detached from everyday life, creating ever-widening gaps between what we know and how we live. Habermas uses the term "place holder" in order to challenge the more antiquated view of philosophy as an "usher" that wants to show the sciences their proper place, as exemplified in Kant's philosophy.[306] Needless to say, the idea that philosophy can serve as a "judge" that is somehow over and above the limits of empirical knowledge or interpretations of "Being" can no longer hold.

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304 Mendieta, "Appendix," 398.

305 Habermas, "Metaphysics After Kant," in *Postmetaphyiscal Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans, William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 16. 306 As Habermas writes, "In championing the idea of a cognition *before* cognition, Kantian philosophy sets up a domain between itself and the sciences, arrogating authority to itself." See Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 2.

In his 1971 essay, Habermas aimed to develop "a philosophical thought in communication with the sciences"[307] (1983: 18) while his 1981 essay looked to deepen this relationship with the idea of philosophy as a "Stand-in" that draws upon the conceptual resources of procedural rationality in order to rethink its relationship with science. [308] Habermas re-iterates this position in "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking":

> Philosophy has to implicate itself in the fallibilistic self-understanding and procedural rationality of the empirical sciences; it may not lay claim to a privileged access to truth, or to a method, an object realm, or even just a style of intuition that is specifically its own. Only thus can philosophy contribute its best to a nonexclusive division of labor, namely, its persistent tenacity in posing questions universalistically and its procedure of rationally reconstructing the intuitive pre-theoretical knowledge of competently speaking, acting, and judging subjects … This dowry recommends philosophy as an indispensible partner in the collaboration of those who are concerned with a theory of rationality.[309]

As we have seen, Habermas scoffs at positivists who reject any alliance between philosophy and science and argues that it is precisely the hybrid discourses of philosophically oriented social scientists (e.g., Chomsky, Durkheim, Freud, Piaget, etc.) that have advanced knowledge by inserting "a genuinely philosophical idea like a detonator into a particular context of research.[310] By re-imagining philosophy as a "Stand-in" Habermas is cognizant of how his claim may be read to suggest that it has lost its place altogether, which is why he advocates for its secondary role as a mediating interpreter. This is important since the distinction between value spheres signals a gap between different interests and different claims to knowledge, begging the question, how can philosophy "go on being a unity on the level of culture?"[311] The gap between experts and the general public is made all the more precarious by the fact that these distinct value spheres are not only *differentiated*, and thus in many ways remain out of sight, but also because they are often seen to be in competition with one another, especially when the claims of traditional lifeworlds are at odds with modern ways of understanding (e.g., forms of sexual morality that advocate for abstinence while denying the validity of contraception as a preventative measure [my example]). Within this framework, philosophy's role becomes one of maintaining the "unity of reason" by creating links between everyday communication and expert cultures. While Habermas does not go into great detail as to how all of this might be achieved, (i.e., he is more interested in justifying the idea than applying it) the basic impulse is simple enough to grasp—namely, that cognitive, moral and aesthetic-expressive evaluations will always overlap, despite the fact that their boundaries are often crudely drawn and misunderstood. For this reason, these domains need to be rethought in their relationship to one another:

> As far as philosophy is concerned, it might do well to refurbish its link with the totality by taking on the role of interpreter on behalf of the lifeworld. It might then be able to help set in motion the interplay between the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive dimensions that have come to

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307 Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In," 18.

308 See Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas as Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 86-9.

309 Habermas, "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 38.

310 Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In," 15.

311 Ibid., 17.

> a standstill today, like a tangled mobile.[312]

These formulations have an obvious connection to questions and conceptions of "religion" since, for Habermas, religious communities represent particularly fragile life forms that are under threat from more scientistically oriented and pluralistic worldviews, modern law and division of labour, etc. For example, scientifically oriented worldviews tend to elevate the cognitive-instrumental domain over and above all others such that, "Questions of justice and questions of taste, as well as questions regarding the truthful presentation of self, are all excluded from the sphere of the rational."[313] By describing how other, non- "cognitive" domains reflect different modes of reason, Habermas aims to demonstrate philosophy's role in maintaining a connection to the *whole*. This connection is distinguished from metaphysical thinking, however, which claims to grasp the whole within a closed system of thought. Philosophy as "stand-in and interpreter" can only attempt to repair the "tangled mobile" of value spheres that modernity has set in place, though only with the "weak transcendentalism" of postmetaphysical thinking.

In the very first line of *PMT* Habermas asks, "How modern is the philosophy of the twentieth century?" while naming four "great movements" as harbingers of this modern spirit (4):

- Analytic philosophy
- Phenomenology
- Western Marxism and
- Structuralism

Habermas also notes four themes that have "seized" all of these movements, which are said to represent a break from *traditional* modes of thinking:[314]

- Postmetaphysical thinking
- The linguistic turn
- Situating reason, and
- Reversing the primacy of theory over practice

While Habermas happily acknowledges the various insights of these schools of thought, and incorporates them to varying degrees within his own philosophical apparatus, he is concerned that they have also created new prejudices, including scientism (in the case of analytic philosophy), an "ontological understanding of language," and a radical critique of reason (in the case of [post]-structuralism)[315] and a reduction of theories of practice to labor (in the case of Western Marxism). Treated in isolation, then, such perspectives "cover up the links between the symbolically structured lifeworld, communicative action,

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312 Habermas, 19.

313 Habermas, "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," 50. 314 Habermas, "The Horizon of Modernity is Shifting," 6. 315 Ibid., 8.

and discourse."[316] What is at stake for Habermas is a defense of his own philosophical position so that these "links" that he deems so important can be taken-up and put to practical use (i.e., for theories of democracy), including the problem of how we might go about clarifying "the public use of reason." It is within this theoretical context that his debate with political and public theologians takes place, which includes a rethinking of his earlier, more functionalist views on religion, as will be discussed in the final section. Before turning to these debates, it will be useful to lay out some of the parameters of this work of theoretical clarification in order to better situate how and where "religion" figures within his expanding theoretical matrix in the late 1980s.

In the first and most literal sense "postmetaphsycial" thinking describes a type of philosophy that has incorporated earlier critiques of metaphysics against such thinkers as Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, among many others.[317] Metaphysics is defined here as an inheritance from myth, where the question of origins is no longer woven into a narrative that dates back to some primordial beginning of time, but is instead transfigured into an abstract concept that is then upheld as a transcendent and all-encompassing account of the *whole* and becomes a blueprint and reference point for interpreting relationships within the material world.[318] What is so dangerous about this kind of thinking for Habermas is that it locates unity in some "object" that comes from outside of the world, which, as he puts it, "promises contact with the extra-ordinary" and elevates the contemplative life of the philosopher to a privileged place. Here, not surprisingly, the "world religions" are fingered as primary culprits of this totalizing tendency:

> Each of the great world religions stakes out a privileged and particularly demanding path to the attainment of individual salvation—e.g., the way to salvation of the wandering Buddhist monk or that of the Christian eremite. Philosophy recommends as its path to salvation the life dedicated to contemplation—the *bios theoretikos*.[319]

While it should be clear from this example that postmetaphysical philosophy rejects modes of thinking that point toward exemplary ways of living as models for *all* (e.g., as with virtue ethics and some varieties of communitarianism), what concerns Habermas here is in what he sees as a tendency within metaphysical thought to purify itself from the constraints of the material world, where contemplation becomes self-referential and limited to a set of coordinates that uphold a particular mode of life as "absolute and self-justifying."[320] Since philosophy "no longer directs its own pieces,"[321] however, it "must operate under conditions of rationality that it has not chosen."[322]

As previously discussed, philosophy is re-imagined by Habermas as dependent upon the empirical methods of the natural and social sciences, which it draws upon in order to explain the relationship between the objective, social, and subjective worlds.

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316 Ibid., 9.

317 Habermas, "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," 29.

318 Ibid., 29-30.

319 Ibid., 32.

320 Ibid., 33.

321 Habermas., "Meatphysics After Kant," 16.

322 Ibid., 18.

Habermas insists, however, that the sciences alone cannot answer fundamental questions about the human condition, which lends philosophy an interpretive role within and between "expert knowledge and everyday practice in need of orientation."[323] This corresponds to his emphasis on "situated reason," which points toward the necessary detranscendentalization of the subject who must become thoroughly historicized and individuated[324] if she is to grapple accurately (or at least adequately) with the demands of the modern world. This orientation can only come about through a shift in paradigm that opens itself up to grapping with processes of mutual understanding. In Habermas's words, "From the possibility of reaching understanding linguistically, we can read off a concept of situated reason that is given voice in validity claims that are both context-dependent and transcendent."[325] It is for this reason postmetaphysical thinking is described as a "weak transcendentalism," with no "skyhooks" or promises of salvation/redemption, that can only offer a procedure that approximates the validity of questions that arise within expert cultures and the lifeworld of everyday communication, aiding in their translation and facilitating interaction. It is at this point where "religion" enters the picture most explicitly, as a crucial supplement to the weaknesses of modern philosophy that is understood as a source of meaning and motivation. In an oft-quoted passage from "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," which Habermas reproduces in his debates with theologians, he writes the following:

> Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language that continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses.[326]

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323 Ibid., 17.

324 See Habermas, "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 149-204.

325 Habermas, "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of Its Voices," *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 139.

326 Habermas, "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," 51. Compare "As long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse, it will even coexist abstemiously with the former, neither supporting it nor combatting it" (Habermas 1992a: 145). The passage, in another translation, reads "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 to repress religion" (Habermas 1992b: 237). Most discussions of this passage citing it as something new in Habermas work omit that it reiterates a similar point made in 1963 in a review of Karl Löwith's work: "If there is something everlasting in history, then it is at most a knowledge of […] anthropological measurelessness, a knowledge of the irrepressibility of the luxurious element in human beings…" This passage follows after the comment that "Secularization is […] admittedly the progressive critical appropriation of traditions which are the sole source for the l*ogos* of a humanity that is to be realized through the historical mediation of nature with the human world" (1983: 93). His remarks about the need for translation are also found in the essay "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique" (1983). These comments are expanded upon in a different context in the more recent "Religion in the Public Sphere" (2008). Quoted in MacKendrick and Sheedy, "The Future of Religious History in Habermas' Critical Theory of Religion," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (forthcoming).

At least two things are interesting to note about this passage. First, "religion" is paired with "religious language," marking a conceptual link between confessional affiliation and the types of language claims that arise therein—claims, we can only assume, that touch upon those undifferentiated utopian impulses that have fascinated Habermas since the earliest days of his academic writing. Second, Habermas leaves room for the possibility that philosophical discourses and, I might add, the accompanying political shifts that would need to occur, might still be able to overcome "religion," recalling the Hegelian notion of "sublation" (*Aufheben*). It is with this sceptical gesture, both opening with one hand, while resisting with the other, that Habermas will take up the question of religion in the public sphere in conversation with public/political theology.

Some Brief Remarks on the Contours of Political Theology

In her book *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed,* Elizabeth Philips begins by defining political theology as follows:

> Theology is broadly understood as discourse about God, and human persons as they relate to God. The political is broadly understood as the use of structural power to organize a society or community of people… Political theology is, then, the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God's ways with the world.[327]

In a similar vein, in their introduction to the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, from which Philips takes her lead, Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh note that for some:

> [T]heology and politics are essentially similar activities; both are constituted in the production of metaphysical images around which communities are organized. … The task then might become one of exposing the false theologies underlying supposedly 'secular' politics and promoting the true politics implicit in a true theology.[328]

In these two passages, political theology is imagined as both a mode of analysis and as an immanent critique of the particular social arrangements in which it finds itself, and is assigned the task of relating the ideas that it generates (its' theories) to discourses within confessional communities (to practice). In this sense, talk about God is not just about the personal or private lives of individuals, but is also about the way that people should act in the public realm. Political theology therefore reflects not only the *preferences* of particular theologians to engage with political questions, but is also a performative engagement and an affirmation that all theology is unavoidably *political*. Marsha Hewitt nicely captures this sentiment when she writes:

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327 Elizabeth Philips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012), 2.

328 Peter Scott and William C. Cavanaugh, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2.

> The idea that theology is apolitical is blind to the inner contradiction between the repressive and emancipatory impulses within theology that become visible through critical self-reflection. It ignores the fact that theology, like all cultural forms and theories, is mediated through human action and experience, generating its own forms of social organization and power hierarchies, and is thus inevitably political.[329]

Whereas Philips emphasizes the indebtedness of political theology to certain "interpretations of God," Scott and Cavanaugh draw attention to the fact that both of these terms are mutually constitutive of one another, suggesting that politics also trades in metaphysical assumptions about reality, while theology attempts to work out a normative understanding of things as "true," e.g., as being in line with "God's will" or the natural order, etc. For her part, Hewitt takes a step beyond these first-order descriptions by providing a re-description of theology as a category like all other "cultural forms and theories," thus situating it as something that is not distinct from other ideological or theoretical claims to truth and/or re-presentation. For this reason Hewitt argues that political theology also bears a trace of its own historical origins, which she defines as "the theological justification of the hegemony of a particular political order and its supporting ideology."[330]

If we turn to Habermas's position, which I will develop more fully in the next section, we find that theology represents both a distinct cultural form, in Hewitt's sense of the term, as well an important source of "sematic potential," as we saw in chapter one, where the task becomes one of translating "religious" or "sacred" ideas into "profane" concepts, which is indebted in no small measure to Kantian ideas about hope, and Hegelian-Marxian notions of secularization *as a sublation* (*Aufheben*), which is nicely distilled in Habermas's phrase, "the linguistification of the sacred." In this sense, theology is considered a valuable resource for philosophy to the extent that it can participate in and contribute to this process, while still retaining its own autonomy. Herein lies the dilemma. As we will see, Habermas does not hold out much hope for theology being able to contribute to political and philosophical problems at this stage in his thinking and is wary of its more conservative forms, as will become evident in subsequent chapters, especially as it relates to so-called "fundamentalism" and the legacy of Carl Schmitt. Before turning to this debate, a brief background sketch of the kinds of political theologies that Habermas engages with will be instructive in helping to frame some of the broader aims and divisions within this tradition and to situate Habermas's own position as it is shaped in the context of debate.

Philips begins her book by tracing Political Theology's early uses in ancient Rome by the Stoics in reference to the gods who were worshipped in the polis,[331] to more modern "secularized" versions such as Robert Bellah's notion of "civil religion" (e.g., symbols, rituals and beliefs that serve the function of a "quasi-religion" for the nation-state).[332] While emphasizing various iterations (e.g., Protestant, Catholic, liberal, post-liberal, liberation, feminist, queer, etc.) as well as foundational figures (e.g., Aristotle,

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329 Marsha Aileen Hewitt, "Critical Theory," *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 455.

330 Hewitt, "Critical Theory," 456.

331 Philips, *Political Theology*, 4.

332 Philips, Ibid., 6.

Augustine, Aquinas) and modern paragons, (e.g., Barth, Niebuhr, Guiterrez, Radford-Ruether, Milbank) her interest lies mostly with modern incarnations and its "political" associations with liberal and liberation traditions in Western Europe and the United States. Much like with Habermas's account, little attention is paid in Philips' book to iterations from the "developing world" or to variations coming out of non-Christian traditions, to say nothing of more "conservative" varieties, which tend to be classified as "traditional," "exclusivist," or "fundamentalist."

Philips points out that Political Theology "proper," as a movement so-named in 1960s Germany, got its start with thinkers like Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle, who attempted "to call into question the privatization of bourgeois Christianity and re-empower the church to become 'the herald of an eschatological future that always calls into question the status quo, destabilizing the present in the name of a peace, justice, and freedom to come.'"[333] Inspired by German critical theory and its emphasis on uncovering social interests, ideology, and the relationship between theory and practice,[334] along with a desire to come to terms with the Nazi past,[335] Philips notes how these thinkers wanted to move away from the kind of transcendental theology that was inspired by Heidegger's philosophy—a position that typically took "faith" out of its social and historical setting and focused on existential questions of the "private" individual.[336] She also points out that lesser known theologians like Sölle tried to develop a "first world" liberation theology, which was criticized for lacking any "liberative" force due its close ties to the academy, and relative distance from conversations and social activities among bishops, priests, and grassroots communities.[337] One consequence of such divisions was an academic isolation that was slow to adapt to changes happening within the grassroots, a lack that feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza sought to address in their work. This tension is also illustrated in Hewitt's description when she writes:

> [P]olitical theology insists on being a critical theology that is mediated by the public sphere, which in turn demands political action in the world. Politics in this sense refers not to a struggle for power and its distribution but rather to a "collective shaping of norms and values."[338]

Here "political theology"—at least in relation to the tradition of German critical theory—is understood as an engagement that aims to help shape normative questions regarding values in society, which, in turn, has an influence on social action, though it does not necessarily engage with these kinds of questions directly (i.e., it is often more theoretical and abstract, than practical or concrete).

Turning to more "conservative" iterations Philips notes how "Public Theologians" like David Tracy rail against sectarianism within Christian communities and lament the "loss of social moral consensus," which suggests that political theology must engage with

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333 Ibid., 42.

334 Ibid., 43.

335 Ibid., 42.

336 Ibid., 43.

337 Ibid., 45.

338 Hewitt, "Critical Theory," 460.

the activities of civil society more directly. As Philips observes, quoting public theologian Max Stackhouse:

> [I]nstead of focusing on the centralized state as the primary agent of the transformation of societies, Public Theologians seek to enable Christian 'principles and purposes' to 'work their way through the convictions of the people and the policies of the multiple institutions of civil society where the people live and work and play, that make up the primary public realm.[339]

Public theology is imagined here as a modern iteration that arose in reaction to the problems of meaning within plural societies of the Euro-West. By contrast, "political" theologies were more closely tied to the legacies of historical catastrophes like Auschwitz, while "liberation" theology sought an orientation in the lived experiences of the poor and marginalized and viewed itself as an intellectual branch in the service of various struggles for recognition among poor and marginalized groups. Philips further observes how more liberative theologies have often been subsumed into identity politics, as with feminist and queer theologies,[340] while "Post-liberal" theology[341] has contested Public Theology's adherence to the public/private divide and offered a more explicit challenge to the distinction between the "sacred/secular."[342] Lastly, and on the margins of these various positions, Philips points to the work of Macella Althaus-Reid, who aimed to align liberation theology with postcolonial, gender, and queer theory, while taking a hands-on and "ground-up" approach:

> She radicalized the claim of Liberation Theology that theology should begin with, among and from the perspective of the poor by seeking theological insight from socially, economically and sexually marginalized sources such as the graffiti on the cathedral walls and the transvestite nightclubs of Buenos Aires.[343]

While Habermas boasts several parallels with these various dimensions of "political theology," his orientation tends toward more abstract and philosophical theory and is less engaged with what we might calls issues of "praxis/practice." This emphasis, it will be argued, re-inscribes some of the problems raised in Seyla Benhabib's critique of Habermas, which, as I will come to suggest, has implications for how he imagines "religion," both here and in his later writings. Needless to say, it is not a moot point that Habermas's engagements with public and political theologians—engagements that will come to shape the kind of concepts and ideas that he takes up, such as redemption, messianism, etc.—do not deal much with feminist, queer or related questions of alterity, to say nothing of various other traditions and worldviews. This is not to suggest an

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339 Philips, *Political Theology*, 48.

340 Philips, Ibid., 61-2.

341 It is interesting to note here that John Milbank, whose work is often seen as a central representative of Post-liberal theology, has an essay in the 2013 text, *Habermas and Religion*, with a reply from Habermas himself, to be discuss in the final chapter. See John Milbank, "What Lacks is Feeling: Hume versus Kant and Habermas" in *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013), 322-346.

342 Philips, Ibid., 52.

343 Ibid., 138.

unrealistic constraint upon Habermas's attempts at theorizing, however, but merely to point out that the kind of questions that he asks and reads back into his theory of religion are shaped by particular concerns of theologians that do not necessarily constitute the range of appropriations and identity formations that often fall under the umbrella of "religion."

Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology

While Habermas's earlier philosophical essays on the topic of religion dealt primarily with the concept of *Aufheben* (with salvaging and translating concepts in order to preserve their utopian ideals and emancipatory possibilities) and while he did not engage in direct conversation with theologians until 1988, his compilation of and introduction to the volume *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age*," (1979 [1985]) offers a useful comparative lens to consider in relation to his later debates with public and political theologians.

Observations was organized by Habermas in 1978 in commemoration of the 1,000th volume of *edition suhrkamp* (e.s). The name that was chosen for this edition was in reference to the 1,000th volume of the Goeschen Collection, published in 1931 under the title *The Spiritual Situation of the Age*, which was authored by Karl Jaspers. In his call for papers, Habermas notes that the title of this particular volume will appear in italics in order to mark a distance from the "absolute perspective of the great philosopher" and invite multiple authors to reflect upon this idea in the social and political context of 1970s Germany.[344] As Habermas notes in his introduction, two of the thirteen essays contained in *Observations* relate directly to the political-intellectual context of then-present day Germany, while the other contributions grapple with the idea of "life world" or everyday communication and the increased significance of "culture," understood as distinct spheres that are being protected against rapid economic development and bureaucratization.[345] Crucially, for Habermas, and in-line with similar problems that he addressed in *Legitimation Crisis* from a more sociological perspective, is the evident lack of any common context to which these authors can refer to, which was not the case in the 1960s when various protest movements served as a "reference system of aims, themes, and outlooks, in terms of which ideological systems parted ways."[346] In the environment of the late 1970s, Habermas finds an increasingly atomized culture that lacks critical reference points upon which to tether its ideals.[347] Symptoms of this state of

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344 Habermas (ed.), *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age*," trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 1.

345 Habermas, "Introduction," in *Observations*, 7.

346 Ibid.

347 It is interesting to note in this context that, according to Habermas references, the remenants of a once productive protest movement of the 1960s have fragmented "along complementary paths into irrelevance, be it the path to party Communism and neo- Stalinism or the path to the counterculture." See Ibid., 9. It is worth pondering here how Habermas's views on the so-called "counterculture" have permeated his views on certain social movements, including "New Age" religious movements, which he will later characterizes as regressive.

anomie include the rise of neo-conservativism, which follow Carl Schmitt's distaste for the "moralization of politics"; a reversion to institutionalism and the "love of order," as espoused by Arnold Gehlen;[348] and a neo-Hegelian reversion to positivism.[349] Noting a need to shift from these "behavioral syndromes" to the actual and underlying causes, Habermas points to contemporary problems such as environmental decay, urban sprawl and industrialization,[350] and calls for a renewed understanding of modernity through a "nontruncated rationality." As he puts it:

> We must make clear that in the posttraditional understandings of law and morality, in the release of subjectivity, in the liberation of spontaneity, in what sociology since Durkheim has termed "institutional individualism," there is established a fragile autonomy (*Eigensinn*) of moral practical and aesthetic-expressive rationality. Max Weber called this the inner logic of differentiated value spheres. Whoever is willing to sacrifice this autonomy to a combination of a one-sided rationality and a vapid traditionalism risks costly regressions.[351]

Here the "fragile autonomy" that Habermas refers to, brought about by rapid forms of economic and administrative rationality, is threated by the *colonization of the lifeworld*, which he views as a space that needs to be defended since it creates "possibilities that enable individuals to find themselves, to deal with their personal conflicts, and to solve their common problems communally by means of collective will-formation."[352] From this we might infer that the "spiritual situation of the age" is nothing short of a crisis in meaning as new realities create social pathologies and continue to repeat past mistakes as new challenges arise. Interestingly, Habermas mentions only a handful of the contributors to this volume in his introduction, among them two theologians, Dorothee Sölle and Johann Baptist Metz, whose positions he affirms without much elaboration. What is of particular interest here is that Habermas does not engage with theological or "religious" aspects of their claims, but rather affirms their positions as productive diagnoses of the contemporary crisis in meaning (in Germany). In the case of Sölle, Habermas lauds her description of "the consumerist redefinition of personal life spheres,"[353] while Metz's is upheld, in the tradition of Benjamin, as correctly recognizing the "spiritual situation" as one of *noncontemporaneity*—defined as an inability to recreate the memories and hopes of the past and bring them in line with the present. Jürgen Moltmann, another theologian who contributed to this volume in an essay entitled "Theology in Germany Today,"[354] is not mentioned by Habermas at all. More than mere oversight or the need for concision, it seems evident here that Habermas's relationship to theological or "religious language" is at this point only one of a muted respect for those who are able to successfully integrate emancipatory aims into a de-centered theological worldview for use within their *own* communities. All other "God talk" (my term) must be translated into secular language if it is to have any productive meaning for *all*. The difference between Habermas's view

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348 Ibid., 12.

349 Ibid., 13.

350 Ibid., 18.

351 Ibid., 15.

352 Ibid., 20.

353 Ibid., 19.

354 Jürgen Moltmann, "Theology in Germany Today," *Observations*, 181-206.

then and his view today is nicely encapsulated in two observations from Sölle's essay, "Though Shalt Have No Other Jeans Before Me." Speaking about the "essence" of an unconditional worldview and a "nonderivative meaningfulness of human life," she writes:

> This essence found historical expression in the language of religion. Jaspers's entire analysis is imbued with a sense of grief regarding lost religions. It is a philosophy after the death of God, which aims to supersede and translate into existential terms that which was once designated by the word 'God.' Religion was a specific historical form of this longing for absoluteness; in a postreligious age we must find another language to express the nature of unconditionedness, one that gives human life a sense of meaning.[355]

In the first part of her statement, Sölle puts forward a position that appears to be more or less in-line with Habermas's own thinking at the time, although she takes it one step further, arguing that such a philosophy of existence helps to show "the need for a nonfunctionalist foundation of life but cannot do much beyond that." What is at stake for Sölle is that "we lack a language able to convey in comprehensible fashion something about life's assumed meaningfulness, about the human capacity for truth, about the unconditionedness and totality of existence."[356] She explains this point further in her ultimate condemnation against the "new religion [of] consumerism":[357]

> Therefore I regard consumerism as an attack on my dignity and do not by any means consider the word "genocide" employed by Pasolini an exaggerated description of what occurs on a daily basis with consumerism. But the use of such terms presupposes that aforementioned emphatic understanding of life, which relies on the framework of heaven and hell.[358]

What is interesting to note here is that while Habermas would not elevate such concepts to the level that Sölle does in her role as a theologian, his most recent work is in many ways a return to precisely this question, with a strong inclination toward grappling with such ineffable language as a way to express "an awareness of what's missing"—and this time not only for fragile life worlds, but for *all*. At this stage in his work, however, and a decade on in his debate with political and public theologians, the usefulness of such language for him remains confined to a much smaller domain.

Transcendence from "Within"

In his provocatively titled essay, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," which was presented at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, October 7-9, 1988, and first published in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*,[359]

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355 Dorothee Sölle, "Though Shalt Have No Other Jeans Before Me," *Observations*, 159.

356 Sölle, 163.

357 Ibid., 159.

358 Ibid., 167.

359 Here I will be referencing a more recent book where this essay appears, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," in *Religion and Rationality:*

(1992) Habermas responds to a number of interlocutors—theologians and philosophers—including philosopher Fred Dallmayr, and sociologist Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Matthew Lamb, Helmut Peukert, Charles Davis, David Tracy, and Robert Wuthnow, among others. The reason behind Habermas's acceptance of this invitation is rather telling of his overall position on the question of religion *as a discourse* in the public domain. As he states at the beginning of this essay:

> Up until now, I have held back from a discussion with theologians; I would also prefer to continue to remain silent. A silence on the grounds of embarrassment would also be justified, for I am not really familiar with the theological discussion, and only reluctantly move about in an insufficiently reconnoitered terrain. On the other hand, for decades theologians both in Germany and in the United States have included me in their discussions. They have referred in general to the tradition of critical theory, and have reacted to my writings. In this situation, silence would be a false response: the person who is addressed and remains silent, clothes himself or herself in an aura of indeterminate significance and imposes silence.[360]

These prefatory remarks are interesting for a whole host of reasons, though two stand out in particular. First, Habermas's acknowledgement that he is an outsider in theological debates and his preference to remain silent highlights not only his lack of training and interaction within this particular theoretical domain, but also reinforces his understanding of "religious language" as akin to literary expressions that can only have currency within particular communities or lifeworlds and must therefore be "translated" into "secular" language if it is to rise to the level of communicative reason. Having not engaged very much with theological discourse throughout his career, while assuming a rather functionalist description of religion in his work up and until this time, Habermas's interpretations have had to rely on select sociological, anthropological, and philosophical models that are both cross-cultural and generalized (as opposed to concrete) and thus have not accounted much for differences and variations within distinction traditions. Second, by indicating that silence on his part would be reactionary, Habermas is evoking the specter of Heidegger, whom he mentions in very the next sentence,[361] thus signaling this essay as an attempt to clarify and refine some of these earlier omissions. Moreover, this engagement marks Habermas's first sustained foray into questions of religion in/and the public sphere and is revealing of the kind of questions, concepts, and conversation partners that he will continue to debate with and who will, in turn, shape his own directions, ideas, and concerns.

It should not come as a surprise that many theologians were and remain intrigued with Habermas's theory of communicative action since it resists reducing religious identities to the waste bin of history (a position often implied if not stated in the analytic philosophy of religion) and secures an important role for such discourses within the public domain. In short, Habermas's treatment of religion, then as now, invites a critical

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Essays on Reason, God and Modernity, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 67-94.

360 Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," *Religion and Rationality*, 67.

361 As he writes, "For this, Heidegger is one example among many. Because of this authoritarian character, Sartre has rightly called silence 'reactionary.'" See Habermas, "Transcendence," 67.

engagement and provides space for theological scholars to take up his ideas in a productive fashion.[362] On the other hand, as noted by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza in his introduction to *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, Habermas's idea of discourse ethics is seen as a challenge to theologians to step out of their own parochial subject positions and revise their positions in line with the demands of a plural conception of reason. As he puts it:

> Habermas's discourse ethic provides a model for understanding the role of the tradition of moral discourse and the public task of political theology. A communicative conception of rationality impels a political theology to base its political and moral appeals not simply upon the authority of a religious tradition, but rather upon open discourse within the community and in relation to the discourses of other communities within the public realm. Habermas's communicative conception of reason should inhibit political and liberation theologies from basing their ethical political judgments upon abstract appeals to natural law, divine command, eschatological proviso, or apocalyptic interruption. A political and liberation theology sensitive to a communicative conception of rationality must be willing to submit its religious claims and their political implications to the challenge of public discourse.[363]

Theologians such as Charles Davis, Helmut Peukert, and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledge their appreciation for Habermas's work inasmuch as it has forced them to reconsider their own discourses, while upholding a strong point of affinity between them with the idea of communicative interaction. This not only provides them with a tool to modernize their own positions, then, but also a weapon to combat more rationalist and instrumental interpretations of religion. Such theologians depart from Habermas, not surprisingly, when it comes to questions regarding the "nature" and role of religion, especially when it comes to his description of the evolution of religion, along with the contours of the public/private divide common in liberal democracies.[364]

Davis, for example, wants to deprivatize theology by arguing that the "rational" and the "existential" are interwoven and that the idea of "private faith" is not something that can be sustained.[365] While arguing that theology can only do so by entering into public discussion, Davis also wants to uphold the idea of a "mystical" realm, "where that person's intimate being opens out on to a reality that transcends history, the temporal order, and society; where, therefore, time is intersected by eternity." Such transcendence, Davis continues, with a nod to Max Horkheimer, constitutes the "deepest sources and ground in politics," without which, he fears, social systems will be left prey to scientific control.[366]

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362 See Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action* (1984); Nicholas Adams, *Habermas and Theology* (2006); and Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (2011).

363 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: A Critical Reception for a Practical Public Theology," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 4.

364 Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction," 8.

365 Charles Davis, "Pluralism, Privacy, and the Interior Self," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 168.

366 Davis, "Pluralism," 170.

Peukert, for his part, affirms the position of a critical theology that is a self-reflective and self-questioning "political theology," a "theology of liberation" or a "theology of the public realm."[367] Like Davis, Peukert also references Horkheimer as a way to keep the idea of "God" in play, in particular the notion of theodicy as a question that must remain open.[368] Here he claims that such a position can still remain postmetaphysical by drawing attention to experiences which cannot simply be reduced to a mythical consciousness."[369] More than this, however, Peukert wants to re-introduce a Christian hermeneutic dimension to the theory of communicative action as a mode of social solidarity. As he writes:

> I believe that a hermeneutics both of the interpretation of the praxis and preaching of the historical Jesus and of speech about resurrection (if this is not simply to be presented as something miraculous) can only be developed from a prior analysis of the dialectic of finite, temporal, and intersubjective action. […] Then, however, a fundamental-theological hermeneutics of the reality of resurrection can make the resurrection of Jesus understandable as an event that is not completely isolated from us, but rather an event which first makes possible an existence in unconditional and unlimited solidarity and which is the ground of that ecstatic joy which belongs to the heart of Christianity. […] Then communicative action, in which human beings drawing from this experience expect from each other an existence in illimitable solidarity, is constitutive for Christian existence which works in a concrete society for its transformation.[370]

Such claims will be met by Habermas with a partial-agreement, while holding firm to the limits of postmetaphyical reason, which he will elaborate upon here as a form of "methodical atheism," a position that, he maintains, represents the only horizon upon which shared ideas can find any common ground.

Habermas lays out his reply in four steps: 1) determining the shared premises upon which theologians and philosophers speak to one another, which he locates along the lines of "a self-critical reflection of modernity"; 2) attempting to understand the truth claims of theological discourse; 3) taking up key objections from the theological side, and; 4) taking up the critiques of non-theologians in this debate.[371] It is interesting to note that Habermas begins his reply by acknowledging that it is much easier to address religion along sociological lines, which assesses its object of study from the perspective of an observer. When one makes the shift to a "performative stance" as a participant in "religious discourse," the questions become more challenging.[372] In a sense, we might note an opening here and a transition from the "lingusitifcation of the sacred" to an active engagement with religious or theological discourses under the influence of discourse

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367 Helmut Peukert, "Enlightenment and Theology as Unfinished Projects," *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 45.

368 Peukert, "Enlightenment," 55.

369 Peukert evokes Adorno here, writing: "Along these lines I understand Adorno's sentences in the *Negative Dialectics*: 'What demythologization would not affect...is...the experience that if thought is not decapitated, it will flow into transcendence, down to the idea of a world that would not only abolish extant suffering but revoke the suffering that is irrevocably past,'" Peukert, Ibid., 60.

370 Ibid., 61.

371 Habermas, "Transcendence," 67.

372 Ibid., 68.

ethics.

As we have seen, Habermas's philosophy of religion owes a considerable debt to the German Idealist conception of *Aufheben*, where the idea of preserving the "practical contents of the Christian tradition"[373] is understood to be the central task to be carried out by rational and materialist philosophers, a sentiment that is nicely captured in the title of Kant's popular work, "religion within the limits of reason alone." One consequence of this sublation of religious concepts is that the "substance of its piety," as Habermas puts it, is cast aside. In its place, philosophy adopts a mode of "methodical atheism," by which he means an orientation toward historical materialism, though one that stops short of a rejection or destruction, so to speak, through affirming a sort of agnostic sensibility:

> Clearly the Young Hegelians did not recognize with equal acuity that along with fundamental metaphysical concepts, a metaphysically affirmed atheism is also no longer tenable. In whatever form materialism may appear, within the horizon of a scientific, fallibilistic mode of thinking it is a hypothesis which at best can claim plausibility for the present moment.[374]

By rejecting a "metaphysically affirmed atheism" Habermas is suggesting that while such a position may have been transformative under certain regimes of knowledge and in certain times and places, its philosophical and political manifestations in the present tend to find expression in a "militant laicism" that is antagonistic toward religious worldviews, thus severing the bonds of communicative praxis. As a counterpoint, Habermas appreciatively observes that it was theologians above all else that were able to offer morally responsible political answers in the wake of post-war Germany, and aid in the process of removing the Church's alliance with state power. As he puts it:

> They sought renewal instead of restoration and to establish universal standards of judgment in the public political realm. With this exemplary witness and widely effective change of mentality there arose the model of a religious engagement which broke away from the conventionality and interiority of a merely private confession. With an undogmatic understanding of transcendence and faith, this engagement took seriously this-worldly goals of human dignity and social emancipation. It joined a multivocal arena with other forces pressing for radical democratization.[375]

While the first part of this statement seems to offer little more than a pat on the back to those theologians who were able to orient themselves in the direction of a more post-conventional sensibility, the latter half is suggestive of a pace-setting role where critical theologies were able to point toward a model for German society as a whole, which Habermas describes as a form of "renewal." Here he acknowledges his affinity with such modes of critical theology, which he maintains can create bridges to "secular languages" and aid in the collective expression of "moral intuitions."

Habermas finds common ground with Schüssler Fiorenza, who suggests something along the lines of a Rawlsian "thick concept of the good," which he (Schüssler Fiorenza) describes as a "dialect between universalizable principles of justice and the reconstructive hermeneutic of normative tradition," where churches are understood as

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373 Ibid., 68.

374 Ibid., 69.

375 Ibid.

"communities of interpretation" that contribute to public discussion.[376] Reflecting on this idea, Habermas observes that when theology is pushed into the neighbourhood of other discourses in political and social theory, it often aligns itself "without restraint."[377] Likewise, Habermas finds affinity with David Tracy's "correlational methods" for public theologies, where theological discourses are brought to bear against arguments in philosophy and social theory, along with Gary Simpson's suggestion that lifeworlds cannot "immunize themselves against the demands for an argumentative justification."[378] Before turning to examine the truth claims of theological discourse, Habermas poses the following provocative question:

> If this, however, is the common ground of theology, science, and philosophy, what then still constitutes the distinctiveness of theological discourse? What separates the internal perspective of theology from the external perspective of those who enter into a dialogue with theology? It cannot be the relation to religious discourse in general, but only the nature of reference to the discourse conducted within each particular religious community.[379]

It would seem that Habermas's main concern here is in trying to gage what role theological discourse can play in informing public and political debates beyond merely expressing a parochial point of view. While appreciative of such critical theologies and their willingness to take up discourses within the human sciences, he wonders how they can avoid getting taken over and losing their own unique status once they enter into a discourse of argumentative justification?[380] What appears to separate philosophy from theology, then, is its reference to "religious experience." Since religious discourse takes place within "communities of the faithful" with specific norms and dogmas as common points of reference, and since it has links to a common ritual praxis, it remains bound to an experiential realm that loses its' internal unity once it steps outside of this closed domain.[381] For this reason, Habermas observes:

> Philosophy cannot appropriate what is talked about in religious discourses *as* religious experiences. These experiences could only be added to the fund of philosophy's resources, recognized as philosophy's own basis of experience, if philosophy identifies these experiences using a description that is no longer borrowed from the language of a specific religious tradition, but from the universe of argumentative discourse that is uncoupled from the event of revelation.[382]

Part of the problem here is that even when theology makes use of "religious experience"

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376 Ibid., 70. Here Habermas repeats a variation of his previous claim: "Even viewed from outside, it could turn out that monotheistic traditions have at their disposal a language whose semantic potential is not yet exhausted, that shows itself to be superior in its power to disclose the world and to form identity, in its capability for renewal, its differentiation, and its range." Ibid., 71.

377 Ibid., 71.

378 Ibid., 72.

379 Ibid.

380 Ibid., 73.

381 Ibid., 74.

382 Ibid., 74-5.

in an analogical way, where it can actually speak *with* philosophy, it effectively no longer acknowledges these experiences "as its own basis." For Habermas, "religious experience" is akin to literary expressions, which he classifies as "a mode of presentation that is no longer directly measured by truth claims."[383] Moreover, Habermas is concerned that his theological conversations partners, such as Tracy and Peukert, who claim to want to submit theology to scientific argument, don't seem to appreciate what "methodical atheism" really entails. The problem is summed up by Habermas as a fundamental challenge for any theology that claims to want to enter into the domain of postmetaphsyical philosophy. Since theology depends upon the "truth" of metaphysics in order to secure its own validity it risks losing its unique status once this boundary has been crossed:

> If a functionalist description is permitted, then it could be said that faith is protected against a radical problematization by its being rooted in cult. This problematization unavoidably occurs when the ontic, normative, and expressive aspects of validity, which must remain fused together in the conception of the creator and redeemer God, of theodicy, and of the event of salvation, are separated analytically from one another.[384]

Bringing all this together, *theology* does not present a serious danger to its own self-understanding so long as it continues to fuse ontological with normative and expressive validity claims, which it relies upon in order to provide a *strong* transcendental account of the whole. While theology distinguishes itself from "religious" discourse by its own second-order acts of explanation of ritual praxis (e.g., by reinterpreting sacraments like baptism), Habermas argues that if it wants to engage on the level of postmetaphysical thinking it must translate any "truth claim" into the language of a "scientific expert culture" and thereby renounce the idea of "religious experiences *as* religious."[385] To put it crudely, if theology wants to ride with the big kids it has to take off its training wheels.

Interestingly, Habermas characterizes modern theology along two distinct premises: the "Protestant path" (one that appeals to faith) and "enlightened Catholicism," both of which, he claims, have been able to successfully distance themselves from the "language games" of religious discourses without undermining their own identities. Habermas admits that taking the further step toward "methodical atheism" is not yet well tested and he remains sceptical as to whether theology can take up this charge while keeping the religious language game in tact. Citing the work of Jens Glebe-Møller as an illustrative example, Habermas finds affinity with his attempt (also shared by Peukert) to hold onto an idea of solidarity as a communicative fellowship that extends beyond one's own lifeworld and even beyond death.[386] Unlike Peukert, however, for Glebe-Møller the idea that God is the only one who can rescue a fallen humanity is impossible to sustain, leading him to conclude that a metaphoric understanding of religious discourse is the only viable way forward, with a nod to Habermas's theory of communication interaction as the best method for achieving solidarity. This, as Habermas rightly observes, is hardly a ground upon which most theologians would be willing to tread.

Habermas concedes Peukert and Tracy's concern that he provided a "one-sided,

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383 Ibid., 75.

384 Ibid.

385 Ibid., 75-6.

386 Ibid., 77.

functionalist description" of religion in *TCA*, by acknowledging that even in traditional societies the "world religions do *not* function *exclusively* as a legitimation of government authority" and concedes with Peukert's point that they often manifest as protest movements and as important means by which people relate to "reality as a whole." Furthermore, and in one of his most interesting concessions, Habermas notes the following points, which are worth quoting in full:

> I would also admit that I subsumed rather too hastily the development of religion in modernity with Max Weber under the 'privatization of the power of faith' and suggested too quickly an affirmative answer to the question as to 'whether then from religious truths, after the religious world views have collapsed, nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of a universalistic ethics of responsibility can be salvaged, and this means: can be accepted for good reasons, on the basis of insight.' This question has to *remain open* from the view of the social scientist who proceeds reconstructively and who is careful not simply to project developing trends forward in a straight line. It must also remain open from the viewpoint of the philosopher who appropriates tradition and who in a perfomative stance has the experience that intuitions which had long been articulated in religious language can neither be rejected nor simply retrieved rationally—as I have shown with the example of the concept of individuality.[387]

Here we find a clear gesture that suggests a careful distancing from the classical secularization model, which, as we have seen, held that on-going and progressive trends in the differentiation between ecclesiastic institutions and the state, along with the decline in religious affiliation would continue along a fairly consistent path within modern societies. While Habermas had long maintained the notion of preserving the "semantic potential" of religious discourses, his admission here of an overzealous response in his earlier writing and of a social scientific duty to "remain open" marks a significant reconsideration that will eventually culminate in his adoption of the idea of the "postsecular." For the time being, however, his emphasis will be on defending the claims of postmeaphysical thinking and of defining the limits of the public use of reason, an idea that he will take up and expand in his debate with John Rawls.

Conclusion

From his theory of religion in *TCA* to his philosophical reconsiderations in *PMT*, Habermas maintains that religious and theological discourses are inheritances from "myth" and rely upon metaphysical ways of thinking that reach their limit when measured against the stricter requirements of postmetaphysical reason. It is important to observe that Habermas did not seek out a conversation with theologians, although his long-standing commitment to defending his ideas in public combined with his comprehensive theory of religion and ethics had certainly left him open to critique from multiple sides. Given the influence of his work and his appreciation for certain strains in "religious" thought, as discussed in chapter one, as well as his affinities with certain "existential" thinkers such as Karl Jaspers and Walter Benjamin, it is not surprising that Habermas would also find affinities with like-minded theologians. Operating in a "performative stance" at the University of Chicago marked not only Habermas's first critical engagement with theologians but also served as a testing ground for his model of

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387 Ibid., 79.

discourse ethics, where questions of truth, rightness, and sincerity were put to the test, in a manner of speaking. While Habermas may be correct about the challenges for theologians to take up a "methodical atheism" his position remains problematic for at least two reasons.

First, his understanding of religious discourse as a fusion of the "ontic, normative and expressive aspects of validity," grants power to the first-order claims of a select number of insiders' whose advanced understanding of their own traditions and critical engagement *as participants within them* does not represent or "stand-in" for all religious communities and/or discourses as a whole. The attempts to square a circle by some theologians may have little truck with a good number of self-identifying Catholics and Protestants, to say nothing of Jews, Buddhist or Muslims, etc. The difference here can be expressed as one between orthodoxies and orthopraxis, where a gap between idea and performance will always be in play, sometimes even constituting a chasm, depending on the person or group in question. Moreover, the ideal of advanced theological criticism, while fruitful as a thought experiment and, perhaps, as a regulative ideal for communities of the faithful, relies too heavily upon a rational orientation toward texts, dogmas, and concepts that do not reflect the identity formation of majorities of the "religious" around the world, whose embodied and embedded practices cannot be explained a priori as *mere cult*, nor easily assimilated into a model of public reason. While Habermas can be lauded for engaging such a broad range of ideas and debates, he has tended to measure the concept of "religion" as a whole against conversations that he has with well educated, (mostly) white males, with (mostly) progressive political views, and a keen interest in continuing the project of pluralism within the context of Western philosophy.

A second and related problem is one that was briefly addressed in my discussion of political theology on the manner in which theology is being considered. Clearly Habermas is not engaging with liberation and postcolonial theologies that take the struggles of the poor and of formerly (and perhaps presently) subjugated peoples as their main point of departure. This criticism is not meant to invalidate Habermas's points regarding the limits of postmetaphysical reason within its own conceptual domain, but rather to point out that the questions and concerns being raised would likely have been different had he engaged with such theologies and lead to different conclusions about the role and self-understanding of "religion" and "theology," especially among those who elevate practice over theory. This criticism parallels Seyla Benhabib's distinction between the generalized and the concrete other, where it is not only a question of finding the right balance between justification and application in order to discern the moral point of view, but of paying closer attention to the micro-sociological dimensions of difference within the claims of cultural groups so as to avoid a reductionistic account of "religion" along the lines of a top-down "intellectualist" model that is familiar in the philosophy of religion. In the next chapter, turning to questions political theory, "comprehensive doctrines," and the public use of reason, Habermas will expand these ideas as the question of religion moves closer to centre stage.

Chapter 4 - Deliberative Democracy, Rawls, and the Use of Public Reason

The last chapter took up themes in postmetaphysical thinking as they were developed in the 1980s and looked at how Habermas defended his position in conversation with public and political theologians. As discussed in previous chapters, prior to the most current phase in his work, (roughly 2001-present) Habermas tended to classify religion along the lines of a conventional morality, as with Lawrence Kohlberg's model of moral development, and as a regression behind the linguistic turn in philosophy. According to these models, religion was largely filtered through intellectualist claims about "belief" and "truth" commonly taken up in the (Western) philosophy of religion, (esp. the Anglo-American varieties stemming from David Hume) while at the same time valued for its "binding/bonding effect" on the level of the lifeworld (i.e., for keeping distinct communities together on the basis of shared understanding and shared meaning). Under this model, even progressive religious communities were not viewed as sites of emancipation[388] *on the level of society,* but rather described as communities of practice that sometimes served as allies in political causes.[389] While religious communities were acknowledged as rightful participants in moral-practical discourses, Habermas was reluctant to grant the use of "religious language" any public/political value apart from its potential "semantic content"—to be translated in order to preserve its emancipatory ideas for postmetaphysical reason. In his debate with theologians, Habermas was forced to concede that he had previously adhered to a "one-sided, functionalist description"[390] when it came to the role of religious communities in modern societies and acknowledged that such groups had in fact played and continue to play an active role in shaping "public consciousness." One question that was touched upon but undeveloped in this exchange is what *type* of consciousness or intuitions do religious communities help to raise and how might an engagement with these questions on the level of political society alter their status within the public sphere?

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[388] It should be noted that Habermas no longer uses the term "emancipation" but talks instead of resources for meaning and motivation.

[389] As Habermas notes in "Transcendence," for example, "it was above all, theologians such as Gollwitzer and Iwand who had given morally responsible answers to the political questions that challenged us after the war." Ibid, 69.

[390] Ibid, 79.

With Habermas's shift toward a theory of deliberative democracy the question of religion comes to factor more prominently in his work as it is no longer seen in terms of a stage in human development but as a decisive discourse that plays an active role in shaping modern, plural societies. Whereas in his social theory Habermas had attempted to *describe* and *explain* religion as a socio-historical phenomenon that was on the wane, he will now begin a process of grappling with the status and role of religion within the contemporary (Western, liberal) public sphere and attempt to situate it within a legal, constitutional, and discursive framework.[391] In addition, while his earlier texts had sought to evaluate religious claims for both their truth content or "semantic potential," in the third and fourth phases of his work Habermas opens up a much larger project of devising a normative model for evaluating religions based on certain "cognitive presuppositions" for both religious and secular citizens alike. In this crucial move, the status of religion shifts from being a problem of accommodation for state laws and religious citizens to an issue of collective opinion- and will-formation, where all citizens are encouraged to engage in acts of "translation" in order to enhance mutual understanding and unearth potential sources of meaning that lay hidden in "religious language." Perhaps more than any other single intellectual exchange that Habermas has had over his long career, his debate with American political philosopher John Rawls contributes to his changing view of religion by shifting the focus to its role and status within the public sphere.

The debate between Habermas and Rawls, which took place during the mid-to-late 1990s, centred around their competing "frameworks of justification," to borrow a phrase from Todd Hedrick, including the boundaries between "philosophical" and "political" justifications, political liberalism and popular sovereignty, and, mostly notably for my interests, the idea of public reason. The question of religion was central in these debates inasmuch as it represented both a limit case for testing the boundaries between private and public reasons and through its status as a *type* of comprehensive doctrine par excellence that was distinguished from other doctrines, such as utilitarianism and Kantian constructivism. Beyond Rawls's death in 2002, questions of justice, political liberalism, and religion have only heightened in political and social theory, especially as the status of "secularism" has been called into question. In this sense, the debate between Habermas and Rawls was a ahead of its time and continues to offer many conceptual touch points as witnessed by the recent Festschrift, *Habermas and Rawls: Disputing the Political* (2011).

While there are many interesting facets to this debate, which also bear considerably on questions central to moral and political theory, including the dynamics of deliberative democracy and the articulation of a "post-modern" and "post-secular" ethics, what interests me here and what, to my knowledge, has not been addressed in the scholarly literature, is how both Habermas and Rawls's theories serve as a model for "public religion" and thus constitute attempts to mould particular formations of the religious (and therefore of the secular) within modern societies. Here we might ask what kind of "religious citizens" do they envision and what do such conceptions in turn, do to their respective definitions of religion and the positive role that ought to play in the development of modern liberal societies?[392] Habermas does not address these questions

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[391] This framework corresponds to Habermas's long-held idea of the public sphere as a site of opinion- and will- formation.

[392] Theories such as Rawls's "justice as fairness" and Habermas's notion of the 'moral point of view' and of "popular sovereignty" aim to be prescriptive for societies as a whole, including religious communities

in his debate with Rawls in the 1990s, as religious communities and religious language are still viewed primarily as a problem (rather than part of the solution) inasmuch as that they represent a challenge for social integration in plural societies, and for the idea of the public use of reason. What is significant about this exchange for my interests is that it forces Habermas to rethink the idea of public reason with religion in mind. On the one hand, this has the effect of elevating "religious comprehensive doctrines" to the status of broad public significance, marking them as an essential test case for how liberal democracies deal with pluralism and difference. On the other hand, as religious communities and religious language comes to be seen by Habermas as playing a constitutive role in the collective identity and will-formation for citizens of constitutional states, "religion" acquires an elevated level of importance in his theory. While this shift marks a necessary and important development in political theory and theories of secularization, (e.g., because it seeks to create a discursive space for "religious" concepts and communities to participate and have a stake in the game, so to speak, while also addressing the communicative discord with certain "secularist" communities who refuse to take those who identify as religious seriously) at least two significant concerns persist, which have not, to my knowledge, been addressed in the scholarly literature. First, by bringing his postmetaphysical theory of religion into the realm of the "political" and tying it to an idea of public reason, Habermas presents a social evolutionary model of "ideal religion" that functions as a bar upon which all "religions" are to be measured against. In this sense the "political" comes to condition "religion" and vice versa. A second and related problem that follows from this approach is that by measuring religious identities in terms of their compatibility with a norm-oriented democratic ideal, Habermas neglects (or at least subordinates) the question of what religion "is" (e.g., its classification, iterations, definitional status in different contexts, etc.) for what it "ought" to be. One consequence of this is that the ideals of what religion ought to be may come to shape what it "is," at least in the eyes of some, which leaves his model unable to adequately account for how the performance of religious identities are always caught up in complex chains of signification, where those that exist outside of the liberal norm are frequently misrecognized and misunderstood in an a priori fashion. This problem will become evident in Habermas's classification of "fundamentalism" in the final chapter. Moreover, without a more nuanced theoretical-explanatory model of religion, Habermas runs the risk of re-inscribing simplistic binaries about religion in favour of political expediency.

In what follows, I will first begin with a brief overview of Rawls's work, touching on major themes and interests that he has explored throughout his career. Next, I will touch on Habermas's renewed interest in the public sphere following the English language publication of his book *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* in 1989, along with a brief summary of some of the themes taken up in *Between Facts and Norms*. This will set the stage for a discussion on Habermas and Rawls, which began in 1995 and continues to this day, most recently in the volume *Habermas and Rawls:*

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within those societies. Because they are based upon actual existing conditions within modern, democratic states (however idealized and counter-factual), they reflect an understanding of religion that is *pragmatic*, based largely on insiders' self-descriptions inasmuch as they utilize "religious language" or "comprehensive doctrines" in public. This is *their* primary data for religion in the public sphere since they are interested in its practical effects on pubic reason. By participating in the creation of a normative meta-theory for modern democratic societies writ large, their ideas—to the extent that they are successful, that is—have an impact on how religious communities may come to identify themselves.

Disputing the Political, (2011) where a number of scholars revisit their debate, with a reply by Habermas. Last, I will address some important changes in Habermas's work on the question of religion in the public sphere since the mid-2000s, including a response that was elicited by several scholars in the wake of Habermas's essay "Religion in the Public Sphere," in the *European Journal of Philosophy*.

John Rawls: A Brief Sketch

Rawls's influence in political theory over the last 50-odd years is hard to over-estimate, at least in the Anglo-American tradition and among thinkers interested in theories of democracy, human rights, and justice more generally. As Samuel Freeman observes in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, first published in 2003:

> His primary work, *Theory of Justice*, has been translated into twenty-seven languages. Only ten years after Theory was published, a bibliography of articles on Rawls listed more than 2,500 entries. This extensive commentary indicates the widespread influence of Rawls's ideas as well as the intellectual controversy his ideas stimulate.[393]

Indeed, we can find affinities with Rawls in Habermas's own work dating as far back as *Legitimation Crisis*, (1973 [1975]) (e.g., Habermas's earliest statement of a contractarian approach) while Rawls's well-known theoretical device, the "original position," factors as a significant point of comparison in his seminal essay "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Justification," which Habermas locates in the Kantian tradition of the search for impartiality on moral questions.[394]

More broadly, Rawls's work can be said to provide one of the main sources of inspiration for so-called communitarian philosophy, starting with Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, (1982) where the rights-based focus of Kantian ethics (deontology) is contrasted with the heirs of Aristotle and Hegel, which emphasize the grounding of the self within communities of shared meaning.[395] These perennial debates have tended to play out most pointedly in the liberal democratic tradition, with a foundation in the Euro-Western world, and are often classified, as I discussed in chapter two, as theories that tend to prioritize a conception the "right" or the "good," the "universal" or the "particular" in some ordered hierarchy. Family disputes aside, (which can sometimes be hostile) it is widely agreed that Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) (hereafter *TJ*) marks a paradigmatic shift away from utilitarian models in liberal thought toward a re-constitution of political values (e.g., basic principles) within modern political theory. Likewise, Rawls's influence is evident in debates in communicative ethics and deliberative democracy, along with more legal-oriented discussions surrounding

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393 Samuel Freeman, "Introduction: John Rawls-An Overview," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

394 See Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," in *MCCA*, 66. Later on in this text, Rawls is discussed critically as a thinker whose "reflective equilibrium" fails to address the problem of justifying the moral principle. Ibid., 79.

395 See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (1989); *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991); Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, "Rawls and Communitarianism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*.

constitutionalism and the rule of law, including discourses on human rights.[396] Rawls's influence has also garnered a strong response from feminist political theorists, who have criticized his conception of the public political self as being built upon a patriarchal foundation of an egoistic moral actor who is dissociated from familial relations.[397] With the publication of *Political Liberalism*, (1993) (hereafter *PL*) further questions have been brought the fore, such as the distinction between political and philosophical ideas, the place of religion in public debate and, perhaps most notably, the idea of public reason.

A Theory of Justice begins with the idea of justice as fairness and extends toward developing principles of justice and the original position (part one); institutional requirements such as equal liberty, distributive shares and duties and obligations of citizens (part two); followed by a final section on ends, dealing with theories of the good, rationality and authority, among many other topics, and concludes with some remarks on the problem of justification.[398] More generally, *TJ* is concerned with a systematic thinking about the purposes and aims of government, including questions of order, the feasibility of basic social structures and the problems of liberty and equality. When considering its broader influence, as Chandran Kukathas and Philip Petitt point out, "It marks a return to the ground-level study of desirability, in particular the study of what is desirable at the level of social and political organization."[399] Not unlike Habermas's main theoretical concerns in the second phase of his work, this question of desirability links questions of justification (e.g., of norms, principles, rationality, etc.) to question of application in the context of real, existing societies. Like Habermas's theory of communicative reason, *TJ* represents an *ideal theory* that seeks to solve the problem of what a "well-ordered society" ought to look like.

Part one of *TJ* lays out the basic structure via Rawls's two principles, which are central to his theory and are worth quoting here in full:

> **First:** each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.
> **Second:** social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.[400]

These two principles, understood as social primary goods that are necessary for the foundation of justice, were initially constructed as the result of rational choice under the controlled conditions of the original position.[401] This idea, in a nutshell, suggests that rational actors should imagine themselves under a "veil of ignorance," where they are

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[396] See Frank I. Michelman, "Rawls on Constitutionalism and Constitutional Law," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*; John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (2001); The Belgrade Circle (eds.), *The Politics of Human Rights* (1999).

[397] See Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other"; Martha Nussbaum, "Rawls and Feminism in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls.*

[398] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1999.

[399] See Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3.

[400] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 53.

[401] See Rawls, Ibid., 102-72.

deprived of all information regarding their own natural abilities, position, wealth, gender, etc., and are then asked to construct the basic set up and distribution of goods that they would want for a well-ordered society.[402] Not knowing where they would fair in the pecking order, this thought-experiment is meant to highlight the idea of fairness by encouraging social actors to recognize the arbitrariness of privilege by virtue of being born into certain conditions. Conceived of in the social contract tradition of Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, Rawls's aim in *TJ*, in short, was to develop a more robust, systematic account of justice, initially conceived of as "Kantian in nature."[403]

Critic Steven Lukes points out that there was a Eurocentric bias in Rawls's conception of the original position, arguing that "the motivation, beliefs and indeed the very rationality of Rawls's 'individuals' are recognizably those of some modern, Western, liberal, individualistic men."[404] Without going into the specifics of Lukes's concerns, this type of critique speaks to some of the reasons behind Rawls's gradual modification of his work leading up to *PL*, most notably found in essays such as "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," (1985) "The Idea of Overlapping Consensus," (1987) and "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good" (1988). One thing to note about these essays is Rawls's clarification that his theory of justice was meant to be "political" and not "metaphysical," by which he means to distinguish his philosophy as being grounded in the basic structures of liberal democratic societies and not representative for all societies at all times—hence, not "metaphysical." As he writes in his essay, "The Idea of Overlapping Consensus," both Kant and Mill present versions of liberalism that amount to compressive moral doctrines:

> [in] general in that they apply to a wide range of subjects, and comprehensive doctrines in that they include conceptions of what is of value in human life, ideals of personal virtue and character that are to inform our thought and conduct as a whole. Here we have in mind Kant's ideal of autonomy and his connecting it with the values of the Enlightenment, and Mill's ideal of individuality and his connecting it with the values of modernity. These two doctrines comprehend far more than the political. … They are not a practical public basis of a political conception of justice, and I suspect that same is true of many liberalisms beside those of Kant and Mill.[405]

These shifts in Rawls's work are often referred to as a rethinking of "Kantian constructivism,"[406] which, in the most general sense, signals an attempt to discover what is "reasonable" through the construction of a procedural theory (e.g., of justice, morality, politics, etc.) that aims toward fairness and inclusion in order to secure a just outcome acceptable to all (or at least most) rational social actors.[407] Given the presumed capacity for reason among (most) social actors, this idea assumes that (most) are capable of constructing, accepting and following an objective procedure and engaging in practical

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402 Ibid., 126-7.

403 Ibid., xviii.

404 See Lukes, "No Archimedean Point," in *Essays in Social Theory* (London: MacMillian, 1977), 189.

405 Rawls, "The Idea of Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), 6.

406 See Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 88 (1988): 515-72.

407 For a discussion on this idea in Rawls's work, see Onora O'Neill, "Constructivism in Rawls and Kant," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, 347-367.

reason. Whereas Kant (not unlike Habermas) sought to extend this ideal to the world as a whole with his notion of cosmopolitanism,[408] Rawls gradually shifted his focus toward the construction of the idea of public reason, conceived of as dependent upon certain duties and preconditions in a well-ordered, bounded, (i.e., by borders and a constitution) democratic society.

In his last major work *Political Liberalism*, (1993) Rawls devises a construction of political philosophy as *practical* rather than *philosophical*, concerned more with addressing "the fact of reasonable pluralism" than with establishing a comprehensive doctrine of his own. As he states in his introduction, "In *Theory* a moral doctrine of justice general in scope is not distinguished from a strictly political conception of justice. Nothing is made of the contrast between comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines and conceptions limited to the domain of the political.[409] In *PL* the construction of principles of political justice are characterized by their ability to accommodate a variety of "reasonable" doctrines in order to establish a basis for neutrality and impartiality in the interest of social stability and cooperation. The aim here, in a nutshell, is to avoid the claim that a theory of justice can somehow transcend competing comprehensive doctrines and to establish the idea of just a society based on values of freedom and equality for all citizens. Rawls also develops a concept of political reasonableness, which builds on his two principles of "basic equal liberties."[410] The central idea here is that since comprehensive worldviews require different "burdens of judgment," citizens will inevitably uphold a variety of positions that could be considered as *reasonable*.[411] Since, however, reasonable persons will also understand the need to cooperate with others with different views on terms that all can accept, a "criterion of reciprocity" is required in order to provide a common or mutual foundation.[412] This foundation is at the core of the idea of public reason. In order for this idea to be "freestanding," and not reliant on any strong, comprehensive, moral, religious, or philosophical conception of the good, political liberalism seeks to affirm all reasonable doctrines as legitimate expressions of public reason, which are encouraged to align with basic principles in order to secure what Rawls refers to as an "overlapping consensus." One of these basic principles is the *liberal principle of legitimacy*:

> Our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason.[413]

Crucially, this principle of legitimacy is based on a moral duty, what Rawls's calls the duty of civility:

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408 See Kant, "What is Enlightenment" in *Basic Writings of Kant* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 133-142; "To Eternal Peace," Ibid., 433-476.

409 Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xvii.

410 See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 291, for a slightly revised version of his earlier formulation.

411 Rawls, Ibid., 54-58.

412 Ibid., 81-2.

413 Ibid., 137.

> *The duty of civility*—to be able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and politics they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason.[414]

While there is of course much more to Rawls's conception of political liberalism, for my purposes here it is enough to point out that the idea of public reason, which presumes certain basic principles and duties, is an attempt to articulate the conditions under which all reasonable persons might accept and endorse the laws and the constitution for the same "political" reasons. Arguably the central problem in Rawls's thesis, and what will become a focal point in his follow-up essay, "The Idea of Public Reasons Revisited," is the question of religion in the public sphere. As he puts in the introduction to the paperback edition of *PL*:

> In sum, PL considers whether in the circumstances of a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, a well-ordered and stable democratic government is possible, and indeed even how it is to be conceived as coherent.[415]

While this general concern is shared by Habermas, it will come to represent one of the main points of contention in their debate.

Between Facts and Norms: Or, Habermas's Political Turn

In a significant way Habermas's political theory represents an extension of his *Theory of Communicative Action*, "Discourse Ethics," and *Postmetaphysical Thinking* transferred to the domain of legal, political, and institutional arrangements in modern democratic societies. As Matthew Specter notes in his intellectual biography, (2010) Habermas began writing *Between Facts and Norms* (hereafter *BFN*) in 1985 and completed it 1991, making it more or less concurrent with these other innovations in his philosophy and social theory.[416] *BFN* also marks Habermas's definitive contribution to the idea of "deliberative democracy," an idea that, while not coined by Habermas himself, has clear affinities with the ideas he laid out as early as *Structural Transformations* (1962) and with his theory of communicative rationality. The origins of the concept, as James Bohman and William Rehg note in their volume *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, (1997) goes back to an essay by Joseph Bessette in 1980, in response to the widespread influence of *elitist theory* and economic theories of democracy prior to 1970.[417] In a nutshell, these theories held that the masses were largely uninformed and easily manipulable and, as a consequence, focused their analytic attention on things like consumption patterns, rational choice, and how to achieve a strategic balance of competing interests, while leaving little room for the role of

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414 Ibid., 217.

415 Ibid., xxxix.

416 See Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, 171.

417 Here they note the work of Joseph Schumpeter and his disciples as a representative example of the former and the work of Anthony Downs, Kenneth Arrows and Duncan Black as examples of the latter. See Bohman and Rehg, "Introduction," in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, eds. James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), x-xi.

an engaged-citizenry.[418] Notwithstanding the work of thinkers like John Dewey and, later, Hannah Arendt, whose agonistic theory has seen somewhat of a renaissance in recent decades,[419] the deliberative model so-named is in many ways indebted to Rawls's innovative ideas starting with *TJ* and finds expression in the "liberalism-communitarian" debates of the 1980s. As Specter obverses, part of Habermas's motivation in writing *BFN* was to help move along this debate, along with addressing significant shifts in German political culture both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[420]

At the heart of Habermas's project for a revised deliberative political theory is the claim that the ideal of democracy and the rule of law are "internally connected," thus taking what he sees to be the strengths of the republican model, with its emphasis on popular sovereignty, and the strengths of the liberal model, with its emphasis on rights and the rule of (positive) law.[421] Whereas the republic model, *sensu stricto*, is understood to be too dependent upon a particular conception of virtue and thus a "thick" vision of the state as an "ethical community," the liberal model is deemed to be too "thin," conceiving of the state, according to some variations, as little more than "the guardian of market society."[422] Putting all of this into a broader historical and philosophical context, Habermas locates his position in relation to a variety of influential political ideologies that he considers too "concrete" and thus in need of significant revision. Commenting on Marx and Engels, for example, he notes that:

> … they read Rousseau and Hegel too much through the eyes of Aristotle. … [T]heir idea of a liberated society was too concrete. They conceived socialism as a historically privileged form of concrete ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] … [rather than] the set of necessary conditions for emancipated forms of life about which participants themselves would have to reach an understanding.[423]

For Habermas, in short, the "necessary conditions" for an emancipated society could only be realized through a re-thinking of the relationship between institutional and non-institutional spaces, (i.e., parliaments and public spheres) so that the central ideas of the liberal and republican models (human rights and popular sovereignty) could be preserved and transformed through deliberative "rules of procedure." As Habermas puts it:

> [Proceduralism] … relieves citizens of the Rousseauian expectation of virtue—the orientation to the common good only needs to be extracted in small increments insofar as practical reason withdraws from the hearts and heads of collective or individual actors into the procedures and forms of communication of political opinion and will formation.[424]

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[418] Bohman and Rehg, *Deliberative Democracy*, xi.

[419] See biographies by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt, For the Love of the World* (1982); and Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (2003); *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt* (2010).

[420] Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, 173.

[421] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), xxiv, 84-104.

[422] See Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," in *Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, trans. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 246.

[423] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 478.

[424] Habermas, "Reply to Symposium Participants," 1481-2. Quoted in Specter, *Habermas*, 178.

It should be evident from the lines quoted above that Habermas's "discourse theory of law and democracy,"[425] builds on ideas already contained in discourse ethics, where truth claims and their potential validity are transferred from metaphysical models (i.e., in the "strong" transcendental sense of the term)[426] to the design of the procedure itself. As René von Schomberg and Kenneth Baynes point out in their introduction to a compendium of essays on *BFN*, this idea of proceduralism appears repeatedly throughout its' pages: in his notion of a "proceduralist legal paradigm";[427] "a procedural understanding of the constitution";[428] a "proceduralist view of constitutional adjudication," a "proceduralist understanding of law";[429] a "procedural theory of politics";[430] and a "procedural interpretation of popular sovereignty."[431]

BFN is divided into a nine chapters, including a post-script and two appendices, and covers a range of issues, such as questions of legal validity, debates in the sociology of law and the philosophy of justice, basic rights, principles, and the constitutional state, along with a discussion on civil society and the political public sphere (chapter 8), among many other topics. While rehearsing the details of this project is well beyond the scope of this study, the basic parameters are nonetheless important to outline in order to situate Habermas's revised understanding of deliberation and the use of discursive rationality in the public sphere. The fundamental problem, as Habermas sees it, can be stated as follows: given the complexity of legal frameworks and the functional requirements of state institutions, (i.e., bureaucracies) along with the force of powerful corporate and commercial interests in shaping the aims and direction of democratic states, there is a need for a higher level of information and communication flows between formal structures (e.g., legal and institutional) and civil society. Habermas frames this tension as one of striking a balance between private and public autonomy, where citizens are understood to be both addressees and authors of the law at one and the same time.[432] In order to establish the proper relationship between these categories and set them on the right path, so to speak, Habermas puts forward a "system of rights" and a revised understanding of two discursive domains—the strong and the weak public sphere, which are also referred to as the "core" and the "periphery."[433]

The basic "system of rights" that are grounded in the formal (strong) public sphere provide the general conditions for institutionalizing democratic procedures and aim to uphold the principles of equality, reciprocity, and inclusion. The first three rights

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425 This phrase is taken from the subheading of *BFN*, "Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy."

426 On the idea of a "weak" transcendentalism, see Habermas, "Communicative Action and the Detranscendentalized 'Use of Reason,'" in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 24-76.

427 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 409.

428 Habermas, Ibid., 246.

429 Ibid., 409.

430 Ibid., 273.

431 See Rene von Schomberg and Kenneth Baynes eds., *Discourse and Democracy*, 4. See also, Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," *Between Facts and Norms*, 463-90; "Three Normative Models of Democracy," in *Inclusion of the Other*, 239-51.

432 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 104.

433 See Habermas, Ibid., 345-8; 380-3.

correspond to private autonomy and equality under law and include basic negative liberties, membership and due process rights, and rights to political participation. The fourth right stresses that citizens should have means to participate in political processes that help to shape the law, while the fifth category, social welfare rights, aims to secure a basis for minimal material conditions, without which citizens' ability to exercise their rights in the first place would be significantly diminished.[434]

While a rights-based model is understood by Habermas as establishing the necessary preconditions for a well-functioning society, his idea of deliberative democracy finds its normative basis in the concept of *popular sovereignty*, where the legitimacy of political states and institutions are understood to come from the "communicative power" of an engaged citizenry.[435] Habermas's aim here is to construct a post-conventional model that reflects generalizable interests, which he devises, as noted above, along the lines of a "weak" and a "strong" public sphere. The weak public spheres (note the plural) are reflected in the many open-ended forums of opinion and will-formation that one finds in any society that is not under strict authoritarian rule, while the "strong" public sphere consists of parliamentary bodies and official lawmaking procedures.[436] For Habermas, the idea of deliberative democracy gets its teeth in the priority that he grants to the role of civil society, where the weak public spheres serve as spaces for competing values, interests and identities to emerge and become productively linked to formal decision-making structures and parliaments of the creation of laws. Habermas lays out this problem in rather plain language in an interview about *BFN*, when he states:

> Only a democracy that is understood in terms of communications theory is feasible under the conditions of complex societies. In this instance, the relationship between center and periphery must be reversed: in my model the forms of communication in civil society, which grow out of an intact private sphere, along with the communicative stream of a vital public sphere embedded in a liberal political culture, are what chiefly bear the burden of normative expectations.[437]

In an attempt to rethink this relationship between core and periphery, Habermas revises his earlier discourse principle (D) as laid out in "Discourse Ethics," as one that can and should be understood as distinct from his moral principle of universality (U). Accordingly, (D) is now described as:

> Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses.[438]

Habermas goes on to describe "action norms" as akin to "behavioral expectations" and "rational discourse" as any attempt to reach an understanding over problematic validity claims.[439] This general rule is differentiated from the "moral principle," which aims to justify norms, as well as from the "principle of democracy," which results when those

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434 Ibid., 122-3.

435 Ibid., 153-54.

436 Ibid., 307-8; 360-65.

437 See Habermas, "A Conversation about Questions of Political Theory" in *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, trans. Steven Rendall (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 133-34.

438 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 107.

439 Ibid., 107.

action norms agreed upon in rational discourses (D) are stated in legal form.[440] The latter reads as follows:

> Specifically, the democratic principle states that only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent (*Zustimmung*) of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.[441]

One reason for these revisions, as Finlayson and Freyenhagen point out, is because "Discourse Ethics was taken to be a political theory and a theory of democratic legitimacy in disguise."[442] As noted in chapter two, Habermas sought to make a clearer distinction between morality (e.g., as relating to universal norms) and ethics (e.g., relating to competing conceptions of the good) throughout the 1980's, especially in his book-length argument clarifying his theory of discourse ethics, *Justification and Application*. We need not get held up by the technical nature of his "discourse theory of law and democracy," as its scope is well beyond my aim here and could easily constitute a dissertation in its own right. It is enough to point out here that these rules of Habermas's discourse theory of democracy aim to establish conceptual parameters in order to distinguish what counts as a fair procedure and what distinguishes publicly acceptable discourse from questions of morality and from questions of law. The take-away point here is that Habermas will claim that democratic legitimacy, grounded in processes of opinion- and will-formation in the weak public spheres, cannot be limited to questions of the "moral domain," but must also include pragmatic and ethical points of view that can be taken up in relation to moral principles.[443]

Habermas will reiterate this general position in his debate with Rawls, as they come to an impasse over the question of how to best represent so-called "background cultures" and their corresponding "comprehensive doctrines." Rawls, for his part, does not strongly differentiate between religious and nonreligious doctrines, at least not those that are deemed "reasonable," since both are comprehensive in the philosophical sense and thus need to be distinguished from a theory that is more strictly "political." Habermas, for his part, will eventually go further than Rawls in his inclusion of religious doctrines under the purview of public reason, while at the same time distinguishing it sharply from other ethical and philosophical worldviews. While the implications of Habermas's revised understanding of religion will be dealt with most pointedly in chapter five, his debate with Rawls is pivotal in convincing him to revise his understanding of religion in the public sphere, which, in turn, will inform his more enduring interest in this latest phase of his work—a genealogy of religion and philosophy in attempt to salvage meaning and motivation for modern societies that are caught between the aporias of "faith and knowledge," "naturalism and religion," with only a post-metaphysical ground upon which to ground its basis of justification.

The Habermas-Rawls Debate

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[440] Ibid., 108.

[441] Ibid., 110.

[442] See Finlayson and Freyenhagen, *Habermas and Rawls*: *Disputing the Political*, 4. See also, Wellmer (1991); Ferrara (1985); Benhabib (1994); and Heller (1984-85).

[443] Ibid., 166-68.

The debate between Rawls and Habermas first took place in 1995 in *The Journal of Philosophy*, starting with Habermas's essay, "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism" and Rawls's reply, "Political Liberalism: Reply to Habermas," and was followed-up in a reply by Habermas entitled, "'Reasonable ' versus 'True' or the Morality of Worldviews," and some further reflections by Rawls in "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" (1997). An earlier discussion was also set in motion by remarks Habermas made in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* on Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, which was taken up by critics sympathetic to Habermas's position as a point of comparison with discourse ethics.[444]

More recently, in *Habermas and Rawls: Disputing the Political*, (2011) James Gordon Finlayson and Fabian Freyenhagen observe that both thinkers were more concerned with defending their own projects during the 1995 exchange than with engaging critically with the other's point of view. They also note, however, that the exchange forced them to offer important clarifications of their recent projects (*Political Liberalism* and *Between Facts and Norms,* respectively); in the case of Rawls, to refine his notion of public justification; in the case of Habermas, to develop a different and more receptive view on the "advantages of religious discourse for social integration."[445] In their introduction to this text, Finlayson and Freyenhagen lay out the stakes of this exchange as follows:

> What is the task of political philosophy, and how does one best realize its goals? How is political justification possible, given the facts of reasonable pluralism, social complexity and globalization? What is democratic legitimacy? What is the relation of morality to democratic legitimacy, both in political theory and practice? What is the place of religion in contemporary political society? What is the political status and function of human rights? What implications do Habermas and Rawls's respective conceptions of legitimacy have for the international political arena?[446]

Apart from whether Habermas and Rawls's respective models might offer productive solutions for problems such as religious accommodation, conflict mediation, and collective identity formation for modern plural societies, it is also the case, as I point out in the introduction above, that their prescriptions for religious citizens follow from a certain type of discourse about what religion *is*. Part of my aim in this chapter will be an attempt to spell out some of these parameters as well as to outline how taking up these questions in the domain of political theory comes to re-shape Habermas's own understanding of religion. In the final section of this chapter, after laying out the parameters of Habermas's revised theory of religion in the public sphere, I will revisit Behbabib's critique of the "generalized" and the "concrete" other and suggest that Habermas's macro-focus on questions of justification and deliberative argumentation obscures the ways that dominant discourses have a disproportionate effect in shaping the discursive terrain where public reason occurs. As I will argue in chapter five, attention to

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[444] See remarks by Habermas in *MCCA*, 43, 66, 79. For treatment by critics sympathetic to Habermas, see Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jurgen Habermas* (1988); Kenneth Baynes, *The Normative Grounds of Social Criticism*; Seyla Benhabib, and *Situating the Self: Gender Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (1992).

[445] Finlayson and Freyenhagen, *Habermas and Rawls: Disputing the Political*, 2.

[446] Finlayson and Freyenhagen, Ibid., 2.

a more critical understanding of "discourse" along with a more deconstructive approach to the conceptual terrain that has come to shape how we conceive of "religion" in the first place, will go a long way in correcting some of the gaps in Habermas's theory as well as provide an important supplement to Benhabib's useful reversal of Habermas's model by granting priority to the "concrete" other so that the claims of cultural groups outside of the dominant norm can be better conceptualized within the larger framework of legitimate public reasons.

The Initial Debate

As Todd Hedrick has observed, both Habermas and Rawls undertake projects that were more common to the 18th and 19th centuries than the late 20th or 21st, given the systematic nature of their approach and the ways that they aim to articulate a universal concept of reason and an impartial standpoint for the regulation of society *as a whole*.[447] Unlike many philosophers and social theorists of the "postmodern" variety, they both agree that the idea of public reason is not only plausible—however idealized and counterfactual it may be—but also represents the only universal basis for the articulation of a common political will. Habermas and Rawls also affirm the potential "reasonableness" of religious doctrines and aim to include them in the political domain under their own particular conceptions of public reason. At the heart of the initial debate was the question of whose theory was more procedural and whose more substantive.[448] Habermas claimed that Rawls's theory was not procedural enough and relied too heavily on certain substantive presuppositions embedded in the original position and the idea of an overlapping consensus, thereby placing too much emphasis on the "right" over the "good." Rawls, for his part, claimed that Habermas's theory was also too substantive since it looked to account for questions of meaning and truth, which, for him, is more than any "political" theory can or should hope to achieve. Among other things, this debate highlights not only differences in their theoretical approaches, but also hinges on the question whether a theory can be neutral or impartial whilst accommodating the variegated views of a diverse citizenry.

Habermas's opening salvo, entitled "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism," revolves around 3 interrelated critiques: 1) of Rawls's devices of representation; 2) of his criteria for rational acceptability and acceptance; and 3) of his balance between individual and collective rights. On the first point, Habermas argues that the original position grants too much autonomy to individuals to reason from the perspective of their own comprehensive doctrines behind a "veil of ignorance" and therefore hinders our ability to test for the "moral point of view." Moreover, by including certain *basic rights* in the original position in an a priori fashion, Rawls prevents deliberation over which of these "primary goods" participants would ideally choose to uphold in a well-ordered society.[449] For this

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[447] Todd Hedrick, *Rawls and Habermas*: *Reason, Pluralism, and the Claims of Political Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

[448] For a discussion on these dynamics see Cristina Lafont, "Procedural Justice?: Implications of the Rawls-Habermas Debates for Discourse Ethics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 29 no. 2, pp. 163-181.

[449] See the section on Rawls, above, for a list of these basic rights in the form of his 2 principles.

reason, Habermas claims that these rights can only be considered as one set of goods among others[450] and that Rawls has, in effect, smuggled substantive ideas in the backdoor in a "monological fashion"[451] without having first tested for their acceptance.

Habermas's second concern has to do with Rawls's idea of an "overlapping consensus," where individuals are compelled to align their "reasonable" comprehensive views with a common understanding of public reason.[452] In this way, Rawls prioritizes the "question of stability" over the collective search for consensus and thereby circumscribes the "epistemic meaning" of the public use of reason.[453] What is at stake for Habermas here is the idea that a theory of justice should be able to generate more than mere *acceptability;* it must also be able to be tested for its *acceptance* or validity.[454] In the absence of this further step, Habermas fears that Rawls will not be able to claim neutrality toward competing comprehensive doctrines since he does not recommend the necessary legwork for mutual perspective taking.[455] What is more, Habermas claims that Rawls implicitly grants so-called "reasonable" doctrines the status of validity or "truth" without first testing them for their acceptance.[456] As he frames the problem:

> Because such doctrines are "comprehensive" in precisely the sense that they offer interpretations of the world as a whole, they cannot merely be understood as an ordered set of statements of fact; their contentions cannot be expressed completely in sentences that admit of truth and they do not form a symbolic system that can be true or false as such.[457]

Rawls, it would appear, is in a bit of a conundrum. On the one hand, he denies that normative statements can be "true," (e.g., in the weak sense that Habermas claims for *formal pragmatics*) while granting, on the other hand, the status of "truth" to all reasonable comprehensive views. Habermas suspects that the reason for these conceptual gymnastics is because Rawls denies the possibility that any "freestanding" morality can exist outside of religious or metaphysical doctrines and sees the device of an overlapping consensus as the only possible compromise.[458] In contrast, Habermas argues for a "neutral concept of the moral person" by shifting the burden from ideas generated in the original position to his own procedural model for the public use of reason.[459]

This leads to Habermas's third and final concern—that Rawls has sacrificed the "liberties of the ancients" for "the liberties of the moderns." While Habermas's position

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450 Habermas, "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism," *Inclusion of the Other*, 54.

451 Habermas, Ibib., 57.

452 Ibid., 63.

453 While acknowledging that this is not Rawls's intention, Habermas urges that, "he must allow some epistemic relation between the validity of his theory and the prospect of its neutrality toward competing worldviews being confirmed in public discourses." Ibid., 63.

454 Ibid., 62.

455 Ibid., 63.

456 Ibid., 64.

457 Ibid., 67.

458 Ibid.

459 Ibid., 68.

on this matter is laid out in further detail in his essay, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," the stakes are made quiet clearly in this essay and are worth quoting in full:

> Liberals have stressed the 'liberties of the moderns": liberty of belief and conscience, the protection of life, personal liberty, and property—in sum, the core of subjective private rights. Republicanism, by contrast, has defended the "liberties of the ancients": the political rights of participation and communication that make possible the citizen' exercise of self-determination. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Kant shared the aspiration of deriving both elements from the same root, namely, from moral and political autonomy: the liberal rights may neither be merely foisted on the practice of self-determination as extrinsic constraints nor be made merely instrumental to its exercise. Rawls, too, subscribes to this intuition; nevertheless, the two-stage character of his theory generates a priority of liberal rights that demotes the democratic process to an inferior status.[460]

Echoing his concern with the original position, Habermas is claiming here that while Rawls grants political autonomy a "virtual existence" in the original position, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, citizens find themselves in a situation where they are already "subject to principles and norms that have been anticipated in theory and have already become institutionalized beyond their control."[461] He continues, noting that since the "essential discourses of legitimation have already taken place within the theory,"[462] citizens therefore cannot conceive of the political constitution as an on-going project since basic liberal rights have been secured "prior to all political will-formation."[463] Since, as Habermas argues, citizens can only become autonomous if they can view themselves as the "joint authors of the laws"—the so-called liberties of the ancients—Rawls's priority of the right over the good runs the risk of acting as an unwitting agent of utilitarianism, despite his intentions to the contrary.

The first and most significant claim that Rawls makes in his "Reply to Habermas," is his distinction between their respective theories, classifying Habermas's position as a "comprehensive doctrine" while labeling his own as "freestanding" and "political."[464] Rawls's second and related claim is that this is because of their respective "devices of representation." Whereas Habermas's "ideal speech situation" is derived from his theory of communicative action, Rawls maintains that the original position has the virtue of being able to stand independent of any comprehensive worldview. As previously noted, Rawls's idea of the "burdens of judgment" and the "criteria of reciprocity" are understood to come about through the exercise of public reason. Here it is worth recalling how Rawls lays out these terms in *Political Liberalism*:

> A modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines but a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines. … Political liberalism assumes that, for political purposes, a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime.[465]

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460 Ibid., 68-9.

461 Ibid., 69.

462 Ibid., 69-70.

463 Ibid., 70.

464 Rawls, "Political Liberalism: Reply to Habermas," in *Habermas and Rawls*, 46.

465 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xviii.

Given this understanding of the "fact of reasonable pluralism" it isn't hard to see why Rawls does not take the bait when Habermas challenges him on the need to prove the epistemic validity of his theory in order to better secure its claim to neutrality. While he shares Habermas's aim to justify his theory in such a way that it could be considered independent from any "deeper" or "higher" metaphysical view, Rawls does not believe that a "political" theory of justice ought to look for a "philosophical" grounding,[466] by which he means that it should avoid questions of meaning and truth.[467] For Rawls, these "deeper" or "higher" questions should be left up to individuals to work out on their own and for themselves from the perspective of their own comprehensive doctrines. For these and other reasons, he maintains that Habermas blurs the lines between theoretical and practical reason by attempting to include the "substance" of all religious and metaphysical doctrines under the umbrella of his theory of communicative reason.[468] As he puts it:

> His main idea, I surmise, is that once the form and structure of the presuppositions of thought, reason, and action, both theoretical and practical, are properly laid out and analyzed by his theory of communicative action, then all the alleged substantial elements of those religious and metaphysical doctrines and the traditions of communities have been absorbed (or sublimated) into the form and structure of those presuppositions. This means that to the extent those elements have validity and force in moral justification in matters of right and justice, their force is fully captured and can be defended by reasoning of that form and structure; for those presuppositions are formal and universal, the conditions of the kinds of reason in all thought and action.[469]

The gist of Rawls's argument here is that while Habermas wants to include the entire "culture of civil society" in his notion of public reason, he (Rawls) limits his conception of the public sphere to legislators, political candidates, and citizens when they are voting on "constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice."[470] Rather than conceive of deliberative democracy as creating conditions for an "ideal discourse situation" to arise, Rawls's ideal citizens are encouraged to come to terms with a political conception of justice and then adapt it to their own values and interests. Only at this point is it possible for a "reasonable overlapping consensus" to emerge.[471]

All of this points to rather interesting distinction between Rawls and Habermas's competing views of religion. As Todd Hedrick observes, Rawls maintains that while "deeper" or "higher" doctrines cannot be upheld as modes of *public* justification, they are

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466 Rawls, "Reply," 51.

467 Rawls justifies his political conception of justice as "freestanding" by outlining three necessary features: first, a clear differentiation of political, economic and social institutions that are accountable and able to work together; second, that it can be formulated apart from any comprehensive doctrine, while at the same time being compatible with many, and; third, that its main principles, such as fairness and cooperation, are linked to the traditions of the constitution, basic laws and key historical documents. Ibid., 48.

468 In an effort to explain what he means by metaphysical in Habermas's work Rawls writes: "His logic is metaphysical in the following sense: it presents an account of what there is. And what there is are human beings engaged in communicative action in their lifeworld." Ibid., 50.

469 Ibid., 89.

470 Ibid., 53, n.13.

471 Ibid., 58.

likely to be what people regard as most authoritative, as the *ultimate* justification for their own conception of justice. In this sense, political philosophy should avoid adjudicating between competing truth-claims, while recognizing their importance for individuals. Rawls's strategy, in a nutshell, can be seen as a way to preserve people's private sources of meaning and motivation while limiting their more stultifying effects. Hedrick's take on Habermas's position is an instructive one, though only as an example of his earlier position and not as one that is reflective of the view he holds today.[472] As he writes, "Habermas … seems to be of the mind that higher or deeper justifications are becoming untenable and are losing their power in the modern age."[473] While such a position may have been accurate during the time of Habermas's debates with Rawls, this is hardly the view that he holds today. As I will show in the last section and develop further in chapter five, Habermas's more recent strategy also tries to preserve the meaning-generating effects of comprehensive doctrines by elevating so-called "religious" worldviews to a place of (arguably) unprecedented significance among "secular" thinkers.

Habermas's follow-up to Rawls's "Reply," entitled, "Reasonable versus 'True' or the Morality of Worldviews," provides a more pointed analysis than his initial offering. Of central importance in this essay is the question of whether political theory should be considered independent of philosophy, a point that hinges, as we have seen for Rawls, on the idea that philosophy is by its very nature "metaphysical" (i.e., in the sense that it relies too heavily on comprehensive doctrines) thereby failing to meet the standards of a "freestanding" and impartial theory of justice. As a way to contest this claim, Habermas will examine how Rawls draws the boundaries between the political and the metaphysical, arguing that they are based upon a "peculiar dependence" on what he considers "reasonable" and "true."[474]

Habermas argues that while procedural theories such as Rawls's "original position" are useful in helping to illuminate certain modern ideals such as moral autonomy, equal respect, and solidarity, if reason is to mean anything at all it must signify more than "what is rational for a particular person to do in light of her existing preferences."[475] Habermas's emphasis on "existing preferences" is meant to underline a serious limitation that he finds in the "original position"; namely, that it does not allow for practical discourses to be carried out *intersubjectively*. Without this further step, he claims, the moral point of view remains tied to the first person perspective and will thus reflect only *particular* and not *common* interests. In contrast, Habermas argues that a pragmatic theory of argumentation is able to differentiate between *assertoric* statements (i.e., a proposition that asserts something) and *ought* statements that have been sifted through the filter of communicative reason. "Once it is translated into an intersubjectively shared evaluative vocabulary," he claims, "it is no longer tied to contingent desires and preferences and can achieve, as a candidate for value-generalization in moral justification, the epistemic status of an argument."[476] More importantly, Habermas claims

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[472] It is odd that Hedrick's well-researched book, published in 2010, does not address Habermas's shift in opinion on the role of religion in the public sphere (and in relation to Rawls no less), which has been evident since at least 2005.

[473] Hedrick, *Rawls and Habermas*, 25.

[474] Habermas, "Reasonable versus 'True' or the Morality of Worldviews," in *Inclusion of the Other*, 77.

[475] Habermas, "Reasonable," 81.

[476] Ibid., 81-2.

that this idea of the public use of reason (i.e., as a *mode of argumentation*), allows citizens to "take a stand on what committed participants claim to be true, right and valuable from their first person perspectives."[477]

Part of Habermas's concern here is that people's "non-public reasons," such as those associated with religious or metaphysical doctrines, will likely be understood as at least equal to if not more reasonable than any political notion of public reason. In this sense, Rawls's "reflective equilibrium" requires citizens to subordinate and repress what they believe to be "true" in favour of what is deemed "reasonable" under the guise of political liberalism. Habermas wants to reverse the priority so that political values are "justified on the basis of a conception of practical reason that first determines which comprehensive doctrines can count as reasonable."[478]

Summing things up, the crux of the Habermas-Rawls debate finds common ground on the significance attributed to religious and metaphysical doctrines in determining how citizens will look to justify their understanding of justice and in this way marks a—if not the—central stumbling block for conceptualizing an ideal of public reason. Whereas Rawls's strategy aims to allow citizens to preserve their deepest comprehensive views while encouraging them to align those doctrines with a common public and political understanding of shared reason, Habermas argues that a more critically engaged process is necessary so that "non-public reasons" can be aired out in the light of day and confronted through a process of collective opinion and will-formation. Before turning to Habermas revised thoughts on the religion and the public sphere, it will be instructive to review Rawls's unofficial follow-up to this debate in his essay, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited."

The Idea of Public Reason Revisited

In a letter to his editor at Columbia University Press, dated July 14, 1998, Rawls discusses his essay, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," noting that it was his clearest and best statement on political liberalism to date and that "[i]t contains a number of new ideas and alters greatly the nature of the role of public reason."[479] In particular, the relationship between political liberalism, public reason and "the major religions" takes centre stage and serves as a starting point for a revised version of *Political Liberalism*, which remained incomplete at the time of his death in 2002.[480]

At the start of "IPRR," Rawls characterizes his revised position on public reason as a sort of pact or compromise with comprehensive doctrines, religious or otherwise. The basic idea here is that political liberalism will not criticize or attack any comprehensive view so long as they are compatible with the basic requirements of public reason, including "that a reasonable doctrine accepts a constitutional democratic regime

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[477] Ibid., 84.

[478] Ibid., 93-4.

[479] Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *Political Liberalism*, 438.

[480] Rawls also notes revisions he would make to his "Relpy to Habermas," though he doesn't specific what, precisely, these are. As he writes, "I feel obligated, in deference to Habermas, not to touch; but I might note certain revisions I would now make. At the time that was printed (March 1995) I was not using several ideas found in my present writing." Rawls, "Idea," 439.

and its companion idea of legitimate law."[481] Here public reason is understood to refer only to the "public political forum" and not to the background culture of civil society. The former includes the discourse of judges, government officials, and candidates for public office,[482] while the latter involves religious institutions, professional schools, organizations of all kinds and the media.[483] The "criterion of reciprocity" stipulates a commitment to offering terms of reasonable cooperation to others while the "duty of civility" is fulfilled when those in the public political forum clearly explain their reasons for their political positions and judgments,[484] and when citizens, in their turn, hold them to account for it.[485]

Rawls is at pains to stress that the "duty of civility" is not a legal obligation, but rather a moral one, since it cannot be coerced and must follow from a certain conception of democratic citizenship, (e.g., as a deliberative democracy)[486] which requires, among other things, the public funding of elections, "orderly and serious" open forums for discussing public policy,[487] and widespread education about constitutional essentials and "pressing problems."[488] As with Habermas's model, Rawls's idea of public reason is a counter-factual idealization of what a just society ought to look like, though one that is based on real and existing cognitive presuppositions and institutional structures.

Rawls also distinguishes between public and "secular" reason, which he defines as "comprehensive nonreligious doctrines" that entail particular moral doctrines, whereas public reason adheres to "political values," which he defines as follows:

> First, their principles apply to basic political and social institutions (the basic structure of society);
>
> Second, they can be presented independently from comprehensive doctrines of any kind (although they may, of course, be supported by a reasonable overlapping consensus of such doctrines; and
>
> Finally, they can be worked out from fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public political culture of a constitutional regime, such as the conceptions of citizens as free and equal persons, and of society as a fair system of cooperation.[489]

It is at this point that Rawls introduces his *proviso*, which states that comprehensive doctrines can be introduced into political discussion at any time provided that they are eventually translated into "properly political reasons."[490] Here he cautious against citizen

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[481] Ibid., 441.
[482] Ibid., 442-43.
[483] Ibid., 443-44, n. 13.
[484] Ibid., 444.
[485] Ibid., 445.
[486] According to Rawls: "There are three essential elements of deliberative democracy. One is an idea of public reason, although not all such ideas are the same. A second is a framework of constitutional democratic institutions that specifies the setting for deliberative legislative bodies. The third is the knowledge and desire on the part of citizens generally to follow public reason and to realize its ideal in their political conduct." (448)

[487] Ibid., 448
[488] Ibid., 449.
[489] Ibid., 453.
[490] Ibid., 453.

proceeding "directly from our comprehensive doctrines" and suggests that they begin from basic principles (e.g., as noted above).[491]

Interestingly, Rawls provides a number of examples as to how "religious or philosophical values" might be translated into "proper political values," as with the example of the well-known Good Samaritan story,[492] and the struggle for civil rights in the US.[493] This proviso is intended to address the problem of how persons of "faith" (which includes nonreligious persons) would support a constitutional regime where their own comprehensive positions may not prosper and even decline?[494] While Rawls is hesitant to supply a clear set of rules as to how all this might look, and suggests that the details of the proviso need to be worked out in practice, he is confident that reasonable comprehensive doctrines will be compatible with a political conception of justice. As a consequence:

> Citizens' mutual knowledge of one another's religious and nonreligious doctrines expressed in the wide view of public political culture recognizes that the roots of democratic citizens' allegiance to their political conceptions lie in their respective comprehensive doctrines, both religious and nonreligious. In this way citizens' allegiance to the democratic ideal of public reason is strengthened for the right reasons.[495]

In other words, the idea of public reason and of allowing citizens to bring the full weight of their (reasonable) comprehensive views into public debate will reveal the mutual imbrications of such ideas, showing that "we also endorse a reasonable political conception belonging to the family of reasonable such conceptions" thereby strengthening "the ties of civic friendship."[496]

In conclusion, Rawls re-affirms his earlier distinction between political philosophy and political liberalism[497] and stresses his interest in reconciling conflicts that derive from "irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines." Interestingly, he also notes conflicts arising from differences in class, occupation, ethnicity, gender and race, along with "those deriving from the burdens of judgment," but suggests that it is only the former problem that is of concern to political liberalism.[498]

This revised model of a more inclusive role for "religious citizens" to bring their comprehensive doctrines to the table, so to speak, will have a significant impact on Habermas's own conception of religion in the public sphere, to be discussed in the final two sections of this chapter. Here it is important to note that both Rawls and Habermas downplay the particularities of concrete socio-cultural differences and distinctions in their

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491 Ibid., 455.
492 Ibid., 456.
493 Ibid., 464.
494 Ibid., 459.
495 Ibid., 463.
496 Ibid., 465.
497 As he writes, "In political philosophy one role of ideas about our nature has been to think of people in a standard, or canonical, fashion so that they might all accept the same kind of reasons. (n. 86) In political liberalism, however, we try to avoid natural or psychological views of this kind, as well as theological or secular doctrines. Accounts of human nature we put aside and rely on a political conception of persons as citizens instead." Ibid., 482.

498 Ibid., 487.

analysis in favour of more abstract and generalized models of inclusion and accommodation.

Disputing the Political: Some Brief Commentary on the Debate

Much of the focus of the essays contained in the Festschrift *Habermas and Rawls: Disputing the Political* has to do with issues surrounding differences in their respective theories, on-going debates over what can and should be considered "reasonable," as well as addressing missed opportunities to pose these problems differently. For example, Joseph Health asks readers to suppose that instead of challenging Rawls on his understanding of what constitutes a "political" conception of justice, Habermas had claimed that his own theory was in fact political in Rawls's sense of the term?[499] Inverting the title to one of Rawls's essays, "Justice: Transcendental Not Metaphysical,"[500] Heath suggests that perhaps some of the confusion in this debate stemmed from Rawls's misunderstanding of Habermas's notion of a "weak transcendental" argument, where "transcendental" was mistaken for "metaphysical." Heath clarifies this distinction as follows:

> The way that Habermas uses the term, a transcendental claim is one that purports to articulate an *unavoidable presupposition*. Habermas's own work focuses on what he calls transcendental pragmatics, which involves articulating the presuppositions of particular social practices. The trick involves showing that certain presuppositions are necessary to a particular practice, and that the practice in question is pragmatically unavoidable (for us humans).[501]

Heath further points out that Rawls seems to have been under the impression that Habermas sought to apply his idea of an "ideal discourse situation" to the domain of democratic institutions and decision-making,[502] a problem that, as he observes, would "entail a straightforward conflation of legal validity and moral rightness (an association that Habermas identifies with 'premodern worldviews')."[503] If Heath is correct here this may help to explain why Rawls accused Habermas of presenting a theory of justice that amounted to a comprehensive doctrine. I will return to this question momentarily, though before I do two further points of Heath's are worth considering.

First, he argues that Habermas's discourse principle (D) does in fact meet the criteria of a "freestanding" concept for the simple reason that it is platitudinous in that "it doesn't claim much more than that norms must be justifiable."[504] Where Habermas's theory faces a considerable challenge—and indeed, this would appear to be a perennial stumbling block for a more widespread engagement with his work—is in getting his interlocutors to reckon with his claim, as Health points out, "that the rationality of certain kinds of action depends upon the justifiability to others of the rule that the actor is following (and not just the goals that he or she is pursuing)."[505] In other words,

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499 Joseph Heath, "Justice: Transcendental not Metaphysical," in *Habermas and Rawls*, 118.

500 See Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" (1985).

501 Heath, "Justice," 123.

502 See Rawls, "Reply to Habermas," in *Habermas and Rawls*: *Disputing the Political*, 177.

503 Heath, Ibid., 122.

504 Ibid., 124.

505 Ibid., 127.

Habermas's idea of communicative action requires that scholars and, to extend the idea, citizens too, can accept the presupposition that following certain procedural rules of engagement can and should lead to non-instrumental forms of practical reason. Following this line of argument, then, it becomes clearer that part of what is at stake for Habermas is: a) the defense of the claim that certain presuppositions are unavoidable in contexts of communicative reasoning and; b) as Heath puts it, establishing a "boundary on the scope of reasonable pluralism" that necessarily follows from such an idealization.[506] Heath is correct to suggest that Habermas's position aims to put forward a "weak transcendental" argument that should be understood as distinct from a comprehensive or metaphysical doctrine, as Rawls understands the term, since his theory is based on a re-constructive model grounded in communicative competencies that are reflexively open to on-going modification. To the extent that Rawls may have committed this category mistake, his critique was on the wrong footing. What Heath neglects to address, however, and what has become much more apparent in Habermas's recent work, is the extent to which his theory is invested in providing a model for meaning and motivation through the construction of a "post-secular" understanding of religion. While Heath rightly observes that the theory of communicative action provides a "comprehensive account of theoretical, practical and aesthetic rationality," and that Rawls simply assumes a concept of the "reasonable" as "a basic intuitive moral idea,"[507] without any clear defense or definition,[508] he does not make the further—and to my mind necessary—distinction, as James Gledhill points out in this same volume, that Rawls is not interested in reconciliation through the public "use" of reason, but reconciliation *by* public reason, which suggests that comprehensive doctrines are politically unreconcilable.[509] This distinction is crucial and is one, as Habermas recognized in his reply to Rawls, that makes all the difference for their respective theories of religion. Whereas Rawls wants to bifurcate private and public reason and thereby encourage a sort of split-identity between the ethics of citizenship and those of one's private life, while encouraging citizens to align their own comprehensive views with a *particular* notion of public reason, Habermas wants to draw explicitly upon the "epistemic meaning" contained in so-called private "religious language" and have it brought out in the light of day in the informal public sphere. What is more—and this is where the charge that he may in fact be encouraging a view that could be labelled as "comprehensive" comes into play—Habermas wants to draw upon the semantic contents of religious language for its purported value for the use of "secular" public reason. This distinction will become clearer when Habermas takes up the question of religion in the public sphere as *the* primary object under consideration.

A further point to consider before turning to Habermas's revised model on these questions is the difference between how Rawls and Habermas understand the idea of the "secular." In her essay "Rawls and Habermas on the Place of Religion in the Political Domain," Catherine Audard observes that Rawls's main concern is to establish "a shared public and independent conception of justice … that mediates direct confrontations

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506 Ibid., 126.

507 See Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 82.

508 Ibid., 127.

509 James Gledhill, "Procedure in Substance and Substance in Procedure: Reframing the Rawls-Habermas Debate," in Habermas and Rawls, 196-7.

between religious doctrines and state powers."[510] Here "state powers," which Rawls insists must be "secular" in the sense of maintaining neutrality in the political sphere,[511] are limited to constitutional questions of basic rights.[512] From this it follows that "[r]eligious doctrines that accept this principle are 'reasonable' in the limited political sense of recognizing the reality of the political domain. They can, then, recognize equal freedom for other religions and the 'right to exist' for reasons that are 'political,' not 'comprehensive.'"[513] While Habermas's view of the secular neutrality of the state has many similarities with Rawls's, his more recent shift toward a view of liberal democratic societies as "post-secular" hinges on his understanding (which was only latent in his debate with Rawls) of the cognitive requirements of modernity. This, as will become evident in the next section, owes much to what Habermas believes "secular" citizens owe to their "religious" counter-parts in contexts of practical reasoning; in a nutshell, taking their claims seriously. One way that he aims to convince hardline sceptics to suspend their disbelief is by urging them to consider the close imbrications of the genealogy of religious and philosophical reason, suggesting that the semantic content of religious ideas can help to re-animate a disenchanted world deprived of significant bonds of solidarity, motivation, and meaning.

One final thing to point out here, which I will develop further in chapter five, is that for both Rawls and Habermas, the definition of religion is tied to the practical use of public reason and is therefore dependent, to varying degrees, upon an aggregate of a variety of insiders' self-descriptions and self-understandings of their own comprehensive traditions. There is an obvious pragmatic dimension to this strategy inasmuch as it is responding to the claims of a variety of groups that typically label themselves "religious" (however we might define these boundaries) and who draw upon reasons *in public* that are tied to their own comprehensive traditions. Whereas Rawls looks to keep these views private, however, Habermas wants to make them public in two ways. First, given that his view of the public sphere is more encompassing than Rawls's, comprising the formal and the informal domains, achieving "popular sovereignty" will require a more open-ended use of public reason for its potential "truth" content. Second, as I will turn to now, Habermas also wants to rethink the very idea of religion itself so as to appeal to the sentiments of a complex citizenry—religious and nonreligious alike.

Religion in the Public Sphere Revisited

This section will deal with Habermas's emphatically titled essay, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' by Religious and Secular Citizens," (2005 [2008]) along with some reflections on some of the debates that it has provoked. Included in this section will be some thoughts on how the idea of the "post-secular" contributes to Habermas adopting a greater emphasis on the importance of translating "religious concepts" into "secular language" in order to establish a basis for shared cognitive presuppositions for religious and secular citizens and to provide

[510] Catherine Audard, "Rawls and Habermas on the Place of Religion in the Political Domain," in *Habermas and Rawls*, 228.

[511] See the discussion of "IPRR" above.

[512] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 154-58.

[513] Audard, "Rawls and Habermas," 232.

resources of meaning and motivation for society as a whole. While Habermas's revised position in this essay offers some innovative ideas on dealing with intractable social and political problems and provides a new evaluative orientation for understand "religion" as a potentially useful identity formation for complex societies, he does not offer much in the way of description (e.g., of concrete scenarios or the type or how, example, translation might proceed). This problem, as I have argued most pointedly in chapter two, owes much to the abstract "macro" nature of Habermas's analysis, which tends toward more "generalized" and universal categories in the interest of broad-based comparison of how religion functions on the level of society. One consequence that follows from this approach is that he tends to overlook the discursive construction and reconstruction of religion as a constantly shifting category of analysis and, in the process, thereby narrows the range of tools in order to address the problems at hand. In concluding this chapter, I will point toward ideas that will be more fully developed in the final chapter regarding the need for a more critical discursive analysis of the many "discourses" in Bruce Lincoln's sense of the term, on and about "religion" in the interest of taking up a more critical and self-reflective methodology. This problem is nicely highlighted when comparing Habermas and Derrida's approaches to critical theory inasmuch as Derrida urges scholars to pay closer attention to the many iterations of the concepts that we have inherited.

"Religion in the Public Sphere" opens with the lines that I quote in the introductory section of this dissertation: "Religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance since the epoch-making historical juncture of 1989-90."[514] This retrospective analysis, which owes a lot to Habermas's revised thinking on religion in the post-9/11 era, is framed here as the product of a variety of "symptoms," including: varieties of religious "fundamentalism" linked to national and ethic conflicts, especially those in Muslim countries and in Israel, and fuelled by things like "violent colonization and failed decolonization,"[515] to fears of a so-called "clash of civilizations" in the Western world and a rethinking of "Occidental Rationalism" as described by Max Weber.[516] On this last point, Habermas is at pains to point out that the West's own image of modernity seems to be undergoing a "gestalt switch," noting a widespread "political mood" that is decidedly "anti-Enlightenment."[517] While he is sceptical that such trends can stand up to sociological evidence, citing Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart's 2004 study, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, which defends the hypothesis linking upward trends in secularization with "existential security,"[518] Habermas argues that cultural conflicts in the United States,

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514 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' by Religious and Secular Citizens," in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 114.

515 Here Habermas notes, echoing statements made in his earlier essay, "Faith and Knowledge": "Capitalist modernization that forcibly penetrates these societies from the outside under unfavorable conditions triggers social uncertainty and cultural upheavals. On this reading, religious movements must come to terms with the upheavals in social structure and cultural time-lags that individuals may experience as deracination under conditions of an accelerated or failing modernization." Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 115.

516 Ibid., 116.

517 Here he cites an article from the New York Times on the lack of "respect for evidence" in the lead up to the Iraq War. Ibid., 117.

518 Ibid., 117, n. 6.

where "conflicting value orientations" are the order of the day, have shifted the balance of political power toward "religiously motivated voters" and thus perceptions about the role and "mentality" of civil society on the whole.[519] He notes that in France, for example, a certain conception of laicism has prevailed seeking to limit the role of religion in state affairs, while the notion of religious freedom in the United States rests more on the idea of a positive liberty to exercise one's own religion without state interference. It is in this uncertain and variegated context that Habermas wishes to take up the debate inspired by Rawls's notion of the public use of reason, with particular attention to the following question posed in *Political Liberalism*: "How it is possible … for those of faith … to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?"[520]

Habermas lays-out his approach to this problem in six steps, which I will cover in some detail, focusing on some aspects over others in order to lay out the boundaries of his revised position. First, Habermas will address the "liberal premises of the constitutional state" and discuss the implications of Rawls's theory for the "ethics of citizenship." Next, he will deal with objections to this idea, followed by his own thoughts for mediating what he calls this "liberal self-understanding." Habermas's fourth move is to lay out the cognitive conditions and epistemic attitudes that he deems necessary so that religious and nonreligious citizens can fulfill their roles to one another, while the fifth section deals with what he calls the need for a "secular awareness" that we are living in post-secular societies. In the last section, Habermas addresses the difficult question of fostering "complementary 'learning processes,'" which he claims the state cannot influence by political or legal means.[521] It is with the fourth and fifth section that I will deal with most directly.

Following a basic genealogy, Habermas argues that the liberal premises of the constitutional state stems from the philosophical tradition of *natural reason*, where it is held that public arguments are made possible by a common understanding of human reason, which is also what allowed the state to gain secular legitimacy; that is, legitimacy that was understood to exist at an arms length from the authority of a *particular* religious tradition.[522] It is the practice of constitution making and the generation of basic rights that must fill the gap in legitimacy by creating the conditions for equality among citizens and regulating these conditions via "positive law."[523] Following Rawls's lead in his essay "IPRR," Habermas agrees that democratic procedures are dependent on two components: equal political participation and the "epistemic dimension of a deliberation that grounds the presumption of rationally acceptable outcomes."[524] It is these two components, as Habermas will argue in the last section in this essay, that explain why the political virtues that both he and Rawls champion are "legally noncoercible," and aim only to articulate the conditions for participation and self-determination. This is what Rawls terms the "duty of civility," which refers to the requirement for legislators and citizens alike to explain important issues to one another with good reasons. While this requirement raises

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519 Ibid., 117-18.

520 Ibid., 123.

521 Ibid., 119.

522 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 120.

523 See chapter 3 in *Between Facts and Norms* for Habermas's discussion on positive law.

524 Ibid., 121.

a high bar for actually existing democracies, Rawls maintains that it is the natural corollary of a constitutional society that has instituted equal rights and positive law. With this point, Habermas is in general agreement. Turning to Rawls's controversial proviso, which requires legislators to use a secular or neutral language when dealing with political questions and suggests that all reasonable comprehensive doctrines may be introduced in public political discussion provided that "proper political reasons" are given in due course, Habermas counters this proposal with the claim that it places a difficult and undue burden on religious citizens. What interests Habermas here is how in the ensuing debates over Rawls's proposal, the weight of attention has been given to the implications this holds for citizenship and not to what it means to have an impartial state.[525] For Habermas, impartiality requires reconciliation with the cognitive presuppositions of a diverse and complex citizenry.

Moving into the second section of his argument, Habermas picks up on the critique of Paul Weithman, who argues, contra Rawls, that the civic involvement of churches would likely decline if they were constantly forced to distinguish between religious and political language. Moreover, Habermas argues, such a move would put an unnecessary constraint on religious freedoms by expecting something impossible and undermine the devotional lives of many.[526] Habermas poses the problem as follows: "A devout person conducts her daily existence *on the basis of* her faith. Genuine faith is not merely a doctrine, something believed, but is also a source of energy that the person of faith taps into performatively to nurture her whole life."[527] Putting aside for the time being the rather contentious nature of these claims (e.g., the assumptions regarding a religious persons' intentions and her internal state), Habermas's point is clear enough: those who outwardly identify as faithful tend to perform their convictions in a *substantial* way that is not always easily reconciled with competing political ideas in the public sphere.[528] For this reason Habermas will claim that the liberal state cannot simply expect religious citizens to make a strict separation in the political public sphere, especially "when they experience this as an attack on their personal identity."[529]

Turing to solutions, Habermas argues that the liberal state should avoid placing "unreasonable mental and psychological" burdens on religious citizens and argues for the need to foster cognitive conditions for ideal perspective taking. While agreeing that that religious citizens should accept the limitation that only "secular reasons" count beyond the threshold of state institutions, (e.g., parliaments, courts, administration, etc.) which is what he calls the "institutional translation proviso," Habermas holds firm that they should not have to split their identity and translate their religious ideas when participating in public discourse.[530] Habermas makes the further (and more provocative) claim, recalling his conversation with public and political theologians in 1988, that the liberal state also has an interest in allowing religious citizens to use their own *idiom* (my italics); "for it cannot be sure that secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity."[531] Here we can see that a crucial shift in

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[525] Ibid., 124.
[526] Ibid., 125-26.
[527] Ibid., 127.
[528] Ibid., 127.
[529] Ibid., 130.
[530] Ibid.
[531] Ibid., 131.

Habermas's thinking has occured. Whereas he had previously argued that *philosophy* should not cut itself off from the "sematic contents" of religious language, he now extends this idea to all citizens of the liberal, democratic state, thus marking a new role for religion in the public sphere: "The truth contents of religious contributions can enter into the institutional practice of deliberation and decision-making only when the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e. in the political public sphere itself."[532] Given these revised considerations, Habermas is hopeful that secular citizens will open themselves up to the "possible truth content" of religious language—a
burden that he had formerly placed upon liberal theologians (and had considerable trouble in convincing them [and himself] to do so).

The fourth section in Habermas's essay gets to the heart of his argument for how to obtain a revised view of public reason in light of new epistemic and cognitive challenges that he claims have become apparent in the post-Soviet and post-9/11 world. Importantly, Habermas takes it as axiomatic that the "competition between worldviews and religious doctrines … cannot be resolved at the cognitive level," by which he means on the level of truth claims. To leave disputes on this level of argumentation, which has become commonplace in public discourse and is a lynchpin of certain strains of Anglo-American philosophy, fails to account for the "normative regulation of the social interaction of citizens" and results in irreconcilable divisions and a politics reduced to a *modus vivendi*.[533] Since, for Habermas as well as for Rawls, it is the constitution that distinguishes a liberal polity from an authoritarian one, and since the liberal state cannot demand or impose a strong political ethos upon its citizens, the "translation proviso," as Rawls presents it, runs the risk of creating an asymmetrical cognitive burden on religious citizen to which secular citizens are (presumably) spared. Given the fact of reasonable pluralism, Habermas argues that the public use of reason can only take place under "certain cognitive preconditions." The rub of the problem as he sees it is that these "epistemic attitudes" must be the product of "an already existing mentality" and cannot simply be expected of citizens nor coerced by "appeals to virtue."[534] In short, this (ideal) normative expectation requires a corresponding change in mentality in order for it to become integrated and widespread. While this is clearly a counterfactual ideal, Habermas maintains that such transformations of "religious consciousness" have been part and parcel of Western culture since the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and include: 1) grappling with the challenges of religious pluralism; 2) the rise of modern science, and; 3) of positive law and "secular morality."[535] In order for this model to be successful in effecting an epistemic change, Habermas insists that religious citizens succeed in the first instance when they are able to relate their beliefs' to other doctrines in a "self-reflexive manner"; in the second instance when they "develop an epistemic stance toward the internal logic of secular knowledge" and the monopoly on this knowledge by scientific experts; and, finally, when they develop an epistemic stance toward the priority of secular reasons in the political arena, which requires an internalization of "the egalitarian individualism of modern natural law and universalistic morality" and in line with their

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[532] Ibid.
[533] Ibid., 135.
[534] Ibid., 136.
[535] Ibid.

own comprehensive views.[536] While these are by no means easy tasks, most (liberal minded thinkers) would agree that at least some recognition of these preconditions is not only necessary for a well-functioning society, but has long been a part of our shared "modern" consciousness, however poorly enacted and unevenly applied. Indeed, Habermas affirms that such "hermeneutic self-reflection" has already taken place in "our culture" in the theologies of the Protestant and Catholic variety.[537]

The more pressing contemporary challenge, as Habermas sees it, requires religious communities to develop these epistemic attitudes through reconstructing articles of faith in ways that are both compatible with modern sensibilities and convincing to "people of faith." Only then can it be said that a "learning process" has occurred. Given the asymmetrical burden that his revised model places upon religious communities, Habermas suggests that secular citizens should also undergo a "cognitive burden" since their cooperation requires more than a rigid "secularist" attitude toward those who are religious. As he puts it:

> This cognitive adaptation should not be confused with the political virtue of mere tolerance. What is at stake is not a respectful sensibility for the possible existential significance of religion for some other person, something also expected of secular citizens, but a self-reflexive overcoming of a rigid and exclusive secularist self-understanding of modernity.[538]

As Habermas see it, the crux of the problem is that so long as secular citizens view religious communities as "archaic relics" of the past, they will be in constant anticipation of their extinction—a position most famously espoused in the present context by the so-called "New Atheists."[539] This epistemic orientation sows seeds of social disunity and inhibits the potential for solidarity since participants in public debate on different sides are unable to take one another seriously. In an attempt to bridge the gap, Habermas suggests that a "democratic civic ethos" can only continue if "all citizens can be reasonably expected not to exclude the possibility that these [religious] contributions may have cognitive substance"; a view, he stresses, that ought to be understood as non-threatening so long as the institutional requirement for translation is respected.[540] This "change in mentality," Habermas claims, is no less "cognitively exacting" than the challenges faced by religious citizens to adapt to the requirements of modernity. This, at any rate, is the core of Habermas's proposal, as he fears that without such "cognitive presuppositions" from both religious and secular citizens the public use of reason will remain an impossibility. In short, a recognition of the "limits of secular reason" is presented here as a necessary corollary on the secular side of the ledger so as to avoid an unfair cognitive burden on behalf of religious citizens and so that "complementary learning processes" can take place.

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536 Ibid., 137.

537 In note 46, Habermas briefly discusses Thomas M. Schmidt's work on a "non-agnostic" philosophy of religion, along with the work of Matthias Lutz-Bachmann. Friedrich Schleiermacher is also upheld as having played an exemplary role on the "Protestant side" in distinguishing between "the role of the theologian and that of the apologetic philosopher of religion." Ibid.

538 Ibid., 138.

539 See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006); Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* (2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (2004); and Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (2007).

540 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 139.

Perhaps most interesting in Habermas's revised proposal, moving into the fifth section of his argument, is his claim that while certain theologies have responded positively to the cognitive challenges of modernity (though he does not specify or sufficiently justify this claim), the same cannot be said for the "naturalistic background of secularism," which he views as the topic of an on-going debate that is underdeveloped at present. As a counter example, Habermas upholds his own view of postmetaphysical thinking, which, he claims, has become attuned to the idea that "we" (i.e., in the Euro-West) are living in "post-secular" societies. He continues:

> The secular counterpart to reflexive religious consciousness is an agnostic, but nonreductionistic form of postmetaphysical thinking. It refrains, on the one hand, from passing judgment on religious truths, while insisting (in a nonpolemical fashion) on making a strict demarcation between faith and knowledge. On the other hand, it rejects a scientistically truncated conception of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the genealogy of reason.[541]

While I will return to these more philosophically oriented questions in the conclusion of this dissertation, here it is important to point out Habermas's rejection of scientism, which he characterizes as a "radical naturalism," where anything that cannot be empirically observed is devalued *eo ipso*. Some of the dangers that he identifies with this way of thinking include a possible regression to deterministic thinking,[542] along with a blind faith in science that is unable to recognize the validity and possible contributions of competing worldviews to public discourse and thus unable to find meaningful grounds for mutual recognition.[543] One alternative that Habermas proposes is to re-conceptualize reason as "multidimensional," which he looks to buttress in his more recent work by reconceiving the boundaries between "faith and reason" through a genealogical analysis of Western metaphysics and the "world religions."[544] Here he claims that a complex "web of inheritance" has taken place between them, where Greek concepts such as "autonomy" and "individuality" and Roman concepts like "emancipation" and "solidarity" have been invested with meaning of a "Judeo-Christian" origin. The nub of this argument is that philosophy has repeatedly learned and continues to learn through its encounters with religion and, more importantly, "receives innovative impulses when it succeeds in freeing cognitive contents from their dogmatic encapsulation in the crucible of rational discourse." Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard are noted as exemplary figures in this regard.[545] While Habermas insists on the distinction between faith and reason, where

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[541] Ibid., 140.

[542] See Habermas's essay, "Freedom and Determinism" *in Between Naturalism and Religion*, 151-180, for a discussion on current debates on free will and freedom of choice in light of advances in cognitive and neuroscience.

[543] See Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, especially his essay, "The Debate on the Ethical Self-Understanding of the Species," 16-100.

[544] Habermas characterizes this inheritance as follows: "For the religions that have their roots in this period made the cognitive leap from mythical narratives to a logos that differentiates between essence and appearance in a very similar way to Greek philosophy. Since the Council of Nicaea, philosophy also took on board and assimilated many motifs and concepts, especially those associated with salvation, from monotheistic traditions in the course of a Hellenization of Christianity." Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 141-142.

[545] Ibid., 142.

the latter distinguishes itself through "publicly criticizable validity claims," he goes on to make the rather bold claim that postmetaphysical thinking cannot decide which aspects of religious doctrines are rational and which are irrational. He continues:

> At best, philosophy circumscribes the opaque core of religious experience when it reflects on the specific character of religious language and on the intrinsic meaning of faith. This core remains as profoundly alien to discursive thought as the hermetic core of aesthetic experience, which likewise can be at best circumscribed, but not penetrated, by philosophical reflection.[546]

While this passage might appear odd if quoted out of context, raising questions as to why philosophy (and indeed which philosophy?) cannot interrogate such claims, these reflections can be better understood when placed in the context of the lines that immediately follow. Here Habermas suggests that the attitude that philosophy must take toward religion is the same as that of secular citizens—that is, with ambivalence toward the status of religions' epistemic claims as a necessary cognitive shift in order to provide a basis for mutual perspective taking and the cooperative search for shared meaning. This is understood as analogous to the role that theology plays for religious discourses (e.g., translating rituals into reasoning discourses), where a genealogy of reason (and its imbrications with religion) becomes the new ground for secular self-reflection upon its own presuppositions. It is for this reason, Habermas boldly claims, that the cognitive burdens for religious and secular citizens are by no means asymmetrical.[547]

In the final section, Habermas acknowledges the challenges of his proposal, while reminding his readers that a deliberative politics is by its very nature "epistemically demanding."[548] While noting that his normative understanding of modernity can be plausibly defended within the framework of an evolutionary social theory, he acknowledges that the problem shifts when taken up from the perspective of normative political theory.[549] Given the aforementioned problems with scientism and the uncertainty of secular mentalities, the public use of reason must be understood as "essentially contested," especially since religious citizens cannot be expected to view themselves as "cognitively backward." To do so would be to place an unrealistic burden upon them. These controversial and demanding suggestions for liberal states hinge not only on a revised understanding of public reason and what is possible for citizens to accept as reasonable constraints, but also upon a radical re-conception of the relationship between faith and knowledge and its implications for the self-understanding of (post-secular) society.

Replies to Habermas's Revised Model

At the start of her essay, "Religion and the Public Sphere: What are the Deliberative Obligations of Democratic Citizenship?" Cristina Lafont makes the rather useful (if obvious) point that the problem of religion in the public sphere is naturally of great significance to defenders of deliberative democracy, which is grounded in the idea of finding common agreement amongst a diverse citizenry without excluding any

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546 Ibid., 143.
547 Ibid.
548 Ibid.
549 Ibid., 144-45.

significant comprehensive views.[550] While she applauds Habermas's revision of Rawls's proviso, Lafont finds his position both unnecessary and even contrary to achieving his aims. For one thing, she thinks that the requirements that Habermas envisions for religious and secular citizens are too demanding and thus unrealistic,[551] and argues instead for what she calls an "accountability proviso"[552] in order to obtain the correct balance, in her eyes, for democratic legitimacy:

> The key is to cash out the liberal criterion of democratic legitimacy in terms of a policy of mutual accountability. According to this policy, citizens who participate in political advocacy in the informal public sphere can appeal to any reasons they sincerely believe in, which support the coercive policies they favor, provided that they are prepared to show (against objections) that these policies are compatible with the basic democratic commitment to treat all citizens as free and equal, and this can be reasonably accepted by everyone.[553]

The crux of her argument is that Habermas's revision of Rawls's proviso in favour of an "institutional translation proviso" still leads to the exclusion of religious reasons and does so, more importantly, *when it matters most*" (her italics).[554] Lafont describes this controversy, first, in relation to Habermas's idea that secular citizens should avoid adopting an epistemic stance toward religious reasons that claims that they have "no cognitive substance," noting that such an obligation deprives them of the same rights that Habermas wants to avoid when considering the limitations frequently placed upon religious citizens (i.e., that they should bracket-out their beliefs).[555] Following Paul Weithman, Lafont argues that the heart of the problem is not whether religious citizens have the right to include their sincere beliefs, "but whether they have the right to do so and nothing more."[556] This view is contingent, as should be clear from the lines I've quoted above, upon her idea that citizens should only be obliged to defend their positions in relation to "basic democratic principles and ideals which are generally acceptable to all democratic citizens."[557] To put it succinctly, there is no need to "bracket" your beliefs nor feel obliged to give science or other religions there due so long as you abide by the principle to treat citizens as free and equal. This strategy, not unlike Rawls's, looks to avoid serious conflicts by placing an emphasis on "political" reasons.

Like Habermas, however, Lafont is interested in the problem of how to create an "epistemic dimension" to the public sphere, where rationally acceptable outcomes of public deliberations are actually conceivable *in practice*. She denies that this can be done with Habermas's proviso since it imposes an unrealistic burden that attempts to protect the so-called "integrity" of religious positions for the sake of avoiding conflict and thus,

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550 Christina Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere: What are the Deliberative Obligations of Democratic Citizenship?" in *Habermas and Religion*, 230-1.

551 As she writes, "For example, religious citizens should not appeal to religious reasons that deny the authority of science or the possible truth of other religions, and secular citizens should not appeal to secularist reasons that deny the possible truth of religious beliefs." Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere," 234.

552 Lafont, Ibid., 247.

553 Ibid., 235.

554 Ibid., 237.

555 Ibid., 238.

556 Ibid., 240.

557 Ibid., 244.

as Habermas hopes, creates a situation where "religious language" can be understood *differently* via acts of translation. Lafont wants to shift this constraint by suggesting that in the case of conflict citizens are obliged to show that their positions are "consistent with the democratic commitment to treat all citizens as free and equal."[558] Here she draws on the example of gay marriage:

> Whereas citizens may not feel compelled to address objections based, say, on the intrinsic value of homosexual lifestyles or of cultural diversity, which they may not share, they must feel compelled to address objections based on the political value of equal treatment that they do share as democratic citizens.[559]

This strategy aims to highlight what is problematic in Wolterstorff's position, which Habermas partly endorses, namely, that religious citizens ought to base their reasoning on their *actual convictions*. While lauding his desire to allow citizens to retain their own epistemic reasons in public deliberations, Lafont argues that this does not go far enough, in the case of Wolterstorff, in preventing negative outcomes that would violate the basic principles of democratic legitimacy. Habermas's view, by contrast, is seen as too burdensome, and Lafont discards his requirements for religious citizens to acknowledge the truth of scientific reason or religious positions other than their own, along with the need for secular citizens to engage with the potential truth claims of religion in favor of a more simple strategy that merely requires an obligation to treat all citizens as free and equal.

Lafont's proposal is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it suggests the necessity of stating certain political obligations in advance of deliberation in order to provide a common basis for shared principles and democratic evaluation. While Haberams's position suggests something similar, his reliance on the notion of popular sovereignty, where ideas are generated through the use of public reason and not decided in advance, potentially leaves him in a bind since, as Lafont stresses, "political action belongs to the realm of the *here and now*."[560] This pragmatic observation seems to be presented as a stop-gap measure that Lafont wants to make plain in order to address such immanent and divisive issues as gay rights and abortion. In an earlier essay on this topic,[561] she lays out the problem as follows:

> In my view, taking religious (or any other) contributions to political questions seriously only obliges us to engage them seriously. That is, it obliges us to evaluate them strictly on their merits and thus to be prepared to offer the counter arguments and counter evidence needed to show why they may be wrong, in case one thinks they are. Indeed, this is clearly what is going on in the debate over evolution and creationism. Those defending evolution are certainly fulfilling their political obligations of citizenship regardless of what their personal cognitive stance towards the cognitive substance of religion may be. It may well be that many defenders of evolution operate from a perspective that entirely rules out any possible cognitive substance for religion.[562]

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[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid., 245.
[560] Ibid., 242.
[561] See Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Remarks on Habermas's Conception of Public Deliberation in Postsecular Societies," in *Constellations* Vol. 14, No 2, 2007, pp. 239-259.
[562] Lafont, "'"Religion and the Public Sphere: What are the Deliberative Obligations of Democratic Citizenship?" 249.

Although I do not think that Lafont gives enough credit to Habermas's aim to facilitate learning process between secular and religious citizens—indeed, she does not appear to even acknowledge the complexity and reasons for this endeavour—she indirectly touches upon two central problems with his idea of religion in the public sphere. First, that by refusing to assert any strong political obligations (or "civic obligations," as Melissa Yates puts it) for citizens to abide by, Habermas places too much hope in what *may* result from deliberations *if* the ideal of communicative reasoning is (proximately) realized. The second and related problem that Lafont's essay touches on is that Habermas largely avoids engaging with concrete conflicts in his analysis, such as gay rights or abortion issues, opting instead to allow citizens to work it out for themselves, while at the same time urging for a communicative model that hopes to rid them of ideas that aren't liberally sound. By avoiding any critical analysis of how the many spheres of conflict operate (e.g., on the level of rhetoric, symbols, and via the interplay dominant and subordinate narratives in a given communicative space), Habermas limits the opportunity for citizens (or at the very least for scholars) to interrogate the discursive logic of the very terms and concepts that circulate in the public sphere. While Lafont clearly misses Habermas's intention—or at least dismisses it as an unrealistic burden—and, I might, does not do justice to the critical questions that he raises, her analysis does reveal a glaring gap in Habermas's model of religion in the public sphere; namely, how to address those illiberal and even irrational positions (i.e., irrational from a cognitive-scientific point of view, as with evolution or climate change) that may also rightly claim the label "religious?" Without a more critical analysis of how dominant narratives and rhetoric come to shape the very idea of reason and what is possible, Habermas's counter-factual proposal is lacking the critical force that it requires. Here Maeve Cook's offers some useful points of entry.

Maeve Cooke's most recent essay on Habermas's view of religion in the public sphere touches on problems, both directly and indirectly, that are central to my critique. In "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy," which appears as Cooke's contribution in the Festschrift *Habermas and Religion*, she builds on her earlier critique that Habermas conflates religious with authoritarian arguments,[563] which she argues is the main reason why he still requires a Rawlsian-type proviso when it comes to limiting the role of religion in the formal public sphere. As an alternative, Cooke argues that any such exclusion should only occur on the grounds of *authoritarianism* and not because a claim is religious per se.

In this essay, Cooke is interested in teasing out *why* Habermas feels it necessary to exclude religious validity claims from parliaments and legislatures, which she refers to as his "violation thesis," and suggests that such claims are detrimental to the goal of creating a normative framework for democratic legitimacy.[564] In particular, Cooke is interested in challenging Habermas understanding that religious validity claims are less

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563 See Cooke, "Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion: The Limitations of Habermas's Postmetaphysical Proposal," in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* (2006) 60: 187-207; "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Theory and the Place of Religion," in *Constellation*s, Vol. 14, No 2, 2007, 224-238.

564 Maeve Cooke, "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy," in *Habermas and Religion*, 250.

accessible than secular ones, drawing attention to one passage in particular in his essay "Religion in the Public Sphere":

> Religiously rooted existential convictions, by dint of their if necessary rationally justified reference to the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truths, evade that kind of unreserved discursive examination to which other ethical orientations and worldviews, i.e. secular "conceptions of the good", are exposed.[565]

What draws Cooke's attention in this passage is the distinction that Habermas makes between religious and ethical convictions, where the former are labelled *as distinct* for three reasons: first, because they reference a dogmatic authority; second, because that authority is authoritarian; and third, because they appeal to revelation.[566] Drawing attention to the third of these reasons, Cooke suspects that this is why Habermas wants to keep religious convictions at an arm's length from questions of moral and legal/political validity, claiming that his understanding of practical validity is too indebted to the (ideal) outcome of argumentation, by which I understand her to mean claims that can be measured via truth, rightness, and sincerity. Cooke relies on a twofold strategy to counter this position. First, she argues that all claims to practical reason have an element of dogmatism, not just religious ones, since they are based on "fundaments,"[567] borrowing a line from Wittgenstein. Her second point has to do with the dependency of all forms of reasoning upon what she terms "collective lived experience or a socio-cultural vocabulary,"[568] which is analogous with Benhabib's distinction between the generalized and the concrete other. For Cooke, as for Benhabib, understanding requires not just a general affirmation of propositions, but a contextual understanding, which is contingent upon things like a shared socio-cultural vocabulary, as she argues above.

Cooke suspects that the reason that Habermas wants to restrict the uses of religious language is because it often entails an epistemological and ethical authoritarianism (e.g., by claiming privileged access to absolute knowledge and calling upon people to act in such a way that is in strict accordance with that form knowledge).[569] While Cooke is aware that Habermas has long acknowledged the capacity for "learning processes" among those who identify as religious she suspects that his view on religion—and by extension, on "the religious"—has much to do with the presumption that those who hold a "genuine faith" have an epistemic dependence on dogmatic ideas.[570] In contrast, she will claim that religious arguments, like philosophical ones, are like

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565 Habermas, quoted in Cooke, "Violating Neutrality," 250.

566 Cooke, Ibid., 251.

567 Here she writes, drawing parallels with Kantian and Christian morality: "They are dogmatic in the sense that they are the fundaments—the 'bedrock'—of processes of practical deliberation that, at any given time, in any particular socio-cultural context, cannot be challenged on the basis of good reasons. In *this* sense, the Kantian moral principle, which rests on the conviction that the dignity of every human being is inviolable, is as dogmatic as the Christian idea that human beings are made in the image of God." Ibid., 251.

568 Ibid., 251.

569 Ibid., 254.

570 As she writes, "The capacity for reflexivity that Habermas ascribes to post-Enlightenment religious believers applies not only to particular religious propositions but to the fundaments of religious belief itself." Ibid., 255.

metaphorical "riverbeds" that erode and shift over time. What is at stake for Cooke is to challenge Habermas on at least two fronts. First, she wants to contest his emphasis in his theory of communicative action on the primacy of arguments "internal" to an ideal speech situation and suggest that "argument-external" ideas are equally influential in shaping cognitive learning processes and thus need to be better accounted for. Second, she wants to contest the idea that religious worldviews are somehow fixed and therefore require special treatment.

On this first issue, the crux of the problem as Cooke sees it is that Habermas's idea of moral validity represents an over-idealization of the power of arguments to effect changes in peoples' perceptions. She lays out the stakes as follows:

> Here, we see the first noteworthy feature of Habermas's conception of moral validity: it attributes to human beings the power to produce knowledge that is valid in an unconditional sense. A further noteworthy feature is that it implies a purely argumentation-internal view of how we arrive at moral knowledge. In stipulating that the right answer must be arrived at for the same reasons, it implies that only those shifts in perception that are brought about by way of the exchange of reasons within moral argumentation are epistemically significant.[571]

Not only does this position downplay what Cooke calls non-argumentative reasons, which she likens to changes in perception over time due to multiple influences, (e.g., someone deciding to become a vegetarian based on an accumulation of different reasons and experiences) but also suggests that Habermas's conception of moral, legal, and political autonomy is ultimately dependent upon "insights of practical reasons" that are generated discursively.[572] As discussed in the introductory section on *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas makes a distinction between morality and democratic legitimacy, where the latter includes pragmatic and ethical validity claims and thus stipulates a lesser requirement for the general acceptability of the outcome of deliberation. If it is true that religious claims do not entail a distinct epistemic core from ethical or philosophical ideas, then it follows that there is no a priori need for their exclusion, so long as they are not authoritarian.

Cooke's argument in favour of including religious language in the formal public sphere is interesting for a variety of reasons, though it is not my aim to take up or reject her ideas here. What interests me is how it challenges Habermas's claim that religious concepts rest upon an epistemic foundation that is somehow impenetrable at its core. Here I suspect that Habermas's reliance on a "duty of civility" prevents him from offering a more biting critique and, what is more, skews his own theoretical understanding in favour of the politically expedient goal of finding a more common ontological ground between secular and religious citizens. While I don't fully agree with Cooke's strategy to get around this problem by linking the idea of revelation to "disclosure,"[573] since the former is often based on supernatural claims that can resist translation, (as Habermas rightly points out) her arguments indirectly touch upon two of

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[571] Ibid., 263.

[572] Ibid., 267.

[573] She defines disclosure as follows: "By 'disclosure,' I mean simply that opening of one's eyes that precedes new ways of seeing in the domain of practical reason." Ibid., 257.

the central concerns that I have flagged with Habermas's theory, which narrow his conception of religion and unwittingly charge it with a Euro-centric bias.

Cooke concisely frames one problem with Habermas's approach when she observes that his "criteria for determining whether or not the new way of seeing counts as a cognitive gain are specified in terms of the procedure and outcome of argumentation."[574] As I have argued previously, by emphasizing a macro-theory of rationality and action and relying upon a deliberative theory of argumentation that upholds such ideals as rational autonomy and individual freedom, Habermas subtly and unwittingly privileges those cultural groups that are most attuned to such rules of engagement *as* social and cultural values. Far from rejecting these values, which Cooke also affirms in her argument,[575] I would suggest that her emphasis on "nonargumentative" experiences is analogous to what Benhabib refers to as the claims of culture and the need for a reversal in priority between the "generalized" and the "concrete" other, where marginalized ideas, sentiments, and discourses are brought to the fore so that dominant narratives are forced to contest with their own conceptions of what is natural *as a contested ground* in need of revision in light of competing ideas. Cooke frames this problem nicely at the end of her essay, though her intentions are not quite the same as my own. As she puts it:

> Any attempt to give a normative account of the relationship between public deliberation and legal/political validity in an epistemic sense must address these questions on a micro-contextual level. The kind of micro-analysis called for here would have to use case studies of actual practices democratic deliberation to show that greater inclusiveness, for example, improves the epistemic quality of the outcomes of public deliberation and to explain precisely how it does so.[576]

Cooke's emphasis on cases studies and the micro level applies not only to the claims of distinct communities, but also, as I will come to argue in the final chapter, on the realm of dominant "discourse" about religion that circulates within the public sphere. Following impulses sparked by the work of Jacques Derrida in chapter five, and touching upon the work of Bruce Lincoln in the conclusion, I argue that one largely overlooked angle in Haberams's theory of religion is how ideas associated with the concept "religion" circulate in a discursive realm of dominant and subordinate ideas, many of which rely on the lure of sentiment to convince others to their side and can thus serve to distort the "force of the better argument," as Habermas puts it. This additional critical component is necessary, I claim, for establishing a firmer basis (i.e., by clearing the detritus) for the use of public reason.

One final problem to note with Habermas's conception of religion in the public sphere is the question of how to determine what constitutes "reasonable" religious language in the first place? This, I will claim, requires a more critical discourse on the constantly shifting boundaries between things like "religion," "culture," ethnicity," as well as notion of "faith" and "reason," which Habermas himself has come to engage in

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574 Ibid., 262.

575 Cooke defends certain normative assumptions here based on the "evaluative horizon of Western modernity. … They can be traced back to processes such as the desacralization of knowledge, secularization of authority, and democratization of political power." Ibid., 272.

576 Ibid., 273.

recent years. Without a more complex understanding of the ways in which religion and "religious language" signifies an unstable discursive concept with a variety of shifting cultural iterations, Habermas's claim to offer a non-coercive theory of justice remains vulnerable to the long-standing Eurocentric charge. His debate with Jacques Derrida offers a fruitful lens for these wider concerns to emerge.

Chapter 5 - Habermas and Derrida: The Politics of Deconstruction

Of all of the debates that Habermas has engaged in throughout his long career, directly and indirectly, there is perhaps none more relevant to contemporary problems in philosophy and social theory than his exchange with Jacques Derrida. This exchange began with a cutting critique by Habermas in 1985 in his essays "Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida's Critique of Phonocentrism" and "Excursus on Levelling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature," and resulted in a rapprochement in the late 1990s, where they would go on to collaborate at conferences,[577] in an interview on 9/11 appearing in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, (2003) and in a joint-letter against the war in Iraq just prior to Derrida's death on October 9, 2004.[578] Among other things, their exchange has been upheld as an allegory for the so-called modern/post-modern divide and bears directly on debates within the study of religions, particularly those that focus on the distinction between pragmatic and social constructionist theories, which I will discuss in the conclusion of this text. Habermas's rational reconstructive approach to critical theory, as laid out in chapters one through four, relies on a particular relationship between what he calls "postmetaphysical" philosophy and the social sciences. Like Derrida, one of his primary aims is to re-image Western philosophy and social theory in such a way that the voice of the "other" is able to emerge. Unlike Derrida, Habermas approaches such problems by drawing upon the reconstructive efforts of the social sciences and produces structural models (e.g., communicative, ethical, democratic) to be tested and revised in relation to certain idealizing presuppositions about contemporary knowledge (epistemology) and the question of human interests (e.g., ethical and existential).[579] Derrida, by contrast, has focused his critical lens on tracing the use of concepts like religion, along with various cognates (e.g., metaphysics, death, sacrifice, friendship, forgiveness, sovereignty, law, hospitality, the 'messianic,' autoimmunity, etc.) in relation to their inheritance in Western

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[577] Both Derrida and Habermas attended conferences together at the Suhrkamp Haus in Frankfurt on June 24, 2000, followed by a conference in Paris on December 3-5, 2000. See Habermas, How to Respond to the Ethical Question," in *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, ed. Lasse Thomassen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 115-127; Derrida, "Honesty of Thought," Ibid., 300-306.

[578] This letter was written by Habermas as Derrida was unable to write his own due to illness. It was co-signed and presented as a joint-statement, published in May 31, 2003 in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and the French publication Libération. See "February 15, or What Binds Europeans Together: A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe, in The *Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 270-277.

[579] For an interesting thought-experiment that attempts to apply Habermas's theory of discourse ethics, see Simone Chambers, "Feminist Discourse/Practical Discourse," in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 163-180.

philosophy, while exploring various iterations, limits, and sites/cites of possibility/impossibility.[580] In what follows, I begin with a discussion on how Derrida and Habermas's work has been received *together* in order to trace some of the strategies that have been used in creating conceptual bridges between them. Next, I address their earlier exchange beginning with Habermas's essays in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (hereafter *PDM*) followed by a look at Derrida's essay "Signature Event Context" and his response to Habermas in the afterward of *Limited Inc*. After establishing these parameters, I then turn my attention to two essays by Habermas and Derrida that appeared together in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, showing how Derrida's concepts of autoimmunity and hospitality offer a crucial supplement to Habermas's understanding of fundamentalism and toleration. In the final section I draw upon a recent essay from Seyla Benhabib as an example of how Derrida's work can be productively brought to bear on Habermas's theory, while pointing in the direction of how this impulse might be taken further in relation to the study of religions.

One important observation about these influential "European" thinkers is that they are contemporaries, Derrida having been born one year after Habermas in 1930, to a Jewish family in Algeria. While both were profoundly affected by the Holocaust[581] at a young age and marked by the political currents of the late 1960s as their work gained widespread recognition, their French and German backgrounds represent significant conceptual filters through which they have viewed the world and written about it.[582] Habermas, who was born into a Protestant family and drafted into Hitler Youth in the final year of the war, has spent much of his career analyzing and critiquing German intellectual and political currents, including the dynamic relationship between civil society and the institutional structures of parliaments and the rule of law.[583] Derrida, for his part, has written and spoken extensively about his own experiences, especially as it relates to his position as an outsider growing up as a Jew in Algeria,[584] having left the

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[580] This binary pairing, possibility/impossibility, is one example of how Derrida attempts to destabilize conceptual schemes but showing their mutual interdependence as well as their conceptual limits, which always calls for a critical re-examination in light of context and re-iteration. His distinction between justice and law offers another example, where justice always remains outside of law and therefore impossible, yet is at the same time its condition of possibility. See Derrida, "The Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foudation of Authority,'" in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Mary Quaintance (New York: Routledge, 2002), 228-298.

[581] While I don't develop it extensively here, the legacy and inheritance of the work of Heidegger is one of the most enduring points of difference between Habermas and Derrida.

[582] It should be noted that Derrida has been more forthright in his interest in and connection to German philosophy, including reflections on the "Judeo-German psycho." See Derrida, "A Testimony Given…." in *Questioning Judaism: Interviews by Elisabeth Weber*, 39-58, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP), 2004; Derrida, "Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German," *Acts*, trans. Moshe Ron, 135-188.

[583] For a, intellectual-biographical sketch of Habermas's life and work see Matustik (2001) and Specter (2010).

[584] For example, in *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida notes that his identity does not fall under any of the three most common categories ascribed to the participants he is addressing at a conference among multi-national Francophone speakers—French speakers from France; Francophones who are neither French nor Maghrebian; French-speaking Maghrebians who are not French citizens—and asks which taxonomy he should invent? Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Standford University Press, 1998),13. See also, Derrida, "Taking a Stand for Algeria," in *Acts*, trans. Boris Belay, 299-307.

African continent for the first time only at the age of 19.[585] These brief biographical details help to situate their respective theories and serve as a fitting metaphor for their different approaches to philosophy and social theory—Habermas, born into relative privilege in "core" Europe and embodying a socially normative position, (e.g., an educated, "German" male born in Germany to a Protestant family)[586] has sought to critique existing structures through reviving what could be called a quasi-modernist and universalist defense of reason. Derrida, born on the "periphery" and embodying a status outside the cultural/ethnic norm, has sought to destabilize the structural categories of modernity, universalism, and reason through a radical critique of logocentrism or the "metaphysics of presence," and the uses of language more generally. In this broad sense, both Derrida and Habermas are very much conditioned by their own time and place; a point that is readily apparent in how they approach questions on alterity and otherness.

The most comprehensive and, to my knowledge, the only scholarly volume dealing exclusively with Habermas and Derrida's work *together* is *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, (2006) (hereafter *DHR*) edited by Lasse Thomassen. Released shortly after Derrida's death, it contains a number of essays and interviews that trace their early exchange through to their late collaborations, along with eight contributors by fellow scholars familiar with their work. These contributions are as telling as they are informative of the kind of influence that both thinkers have had upon contemporary debates. Divided in four sections,[587] the themes addressed in this volume cover their sharp, earlier differences stemming from Habermas's charge that Derrida had blurred the lines between philosophy and literature and elevated rhetoric over logic, to their interpretations and approaches to questions in ethics and politics, including identity and tolerance/hospitality, along with some shared overlapping interests, such as the idea of radical democracy, opposition to the Iraq War and a *general orientation* toward an international or cosmopolitan ideal concerning questions of justice and law.

It is perhaps more than mere coincidence that the commentaries contained in this text come from scholars in departments of philosophy and political studies,[588] and approach these questions in a style closer to that of Habermas, with the possible exception of Simon Critchley, who has published a number of books in something closer to what we might call a "Derridian" vein.[589] I make note of this not as a passing detail, but rather as a critical (albeit speculative) observation that Derrida's deconstructive approach can be more easily grafted onto a Habermasian framework (i.e., a pragmatic

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585 See Derrida, "Taking a Stand for Algeria," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 303.

586 For a rare biographical essay where Habermas discusses humiliations experienced in his youth due to a cleft palate, see Habermas, "Public Space and Political Public Sphere—The Biographical Roots of Two Motifs in my Thought," in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 11-23.

587 The sections are titled: 1) Philosophy and literature; 2) Ethics and politics; 3) Identity/difference: rights tolerance and political space; and 4) Beyond the nation-state.

588 The one exception is Martin Morris, who has been a professor of communication studies at both the University of Windsor (Ontario) and Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

589 See Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishers), 1992.

reconstructive approach to questions of ethics and politics) than the other way around.[590] Indeed, as all of these thinkers argue in one way or another, Derrida can be productively drawn upon as a complement to certain gaps in Habermas's thought, providing a crucial supplement to his more systematic, structural, and "macro" ways of thinking. It is this impulse from which I take my lead. In addition to *DHR*, I will touch upon arguments in two additional volumes, *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, (1992) and *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, (1997) which contain helpful essays that address their work together, along with two separate essays from Thomas McCarthy (1989/1990) and Axel Honneth (1999).

Perhaps the most historically instructive essay in *DHR* comes from Richard Bernstein's contribution, "An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida." Referring to the broad theoretical camps that both thinkers have often been associated with by their various interlocutors since at least the time of Habermas's provocation in the mid-1980s, Bernstein's classificatory schema is not meant to re-affirm this imaginary divide, but to underscore how both thinkers were often drawn upon as representative examples of one or the other side, especially throughout the 1990s, by which time most of Habermas's major work had been translated into English. There is perhaps no better example of these earlier tensions than Seyla Behabib's contribution to *DHR*, "Democracy and Difference: Reflections on the Metapolitics of Lyotard and Derrida," originally written in 1994 and updated in this volume with an afterward. In her initial response Benhabib frames the problem in stark terms, arguing that the "postmodernist critique of normative thinking" obscures the lines "between forms of difference which foster democracy and forms of difference which reflect anti-democratic aspirations."[591] While acknowledging that concepts like "différance," "otherness" or "le différend" (Lyotard) are useful for understanding the ethos of distinct communities that have been marginalized or excluded in the political public sphere, Benbabib claims that by constantly undermining *constatives*[592] by unmasking their performative impossibility and historical contingency, Derrida confuses modern concepts of democratic legitimacy with their theological and cosmological iterations typically found in earlier modes of thought, such as the philosophy of "nature" and "consciousness."[593] Revisiting this essay in December of 2004, shortly after Derrida's death, Benhabib locates her earlier contribution in the context of other contentious debates during that time, such as those she had with Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser over questions of

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590 I am unaware of any thinkers of note that write primarily from a Derridian style of theorizing that draw on Habermas's work in any substantial way.

591 Benhabib, "Democracy and Difference: Reflections on the Metapolitics of Lyotard and Derrida," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 130.

592 To simplify, a constantive is a speech acts that declares something to be the case, such as "the library closes at 6pm" and "the right to remain silent."

593 Thomas McCarthy offers a similar critique of Derrida, arguing that his style of philosophy does not lend itself well to a historically differentiated critique of democratic institutions. As he writes: "What sorts of social, political, legal, economic institutions of democracy does he see superseding those we have experienced or imagined? What replacements does he envision for received notions of rights, justice, tolerance, respect and other such 'edifying humanist' conceptions? Derrida does not attempt to satisfy us on such matters, nor is he likely to do so." See Thomas McCarthy, "The Politics of the Ineffable: Derrida's Deconstructionism," in *Ideals and Illusions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 97-126. This essay was originally published in *The Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989/1990), 146-168.

feminism and "post-modernism."[594] In a footnote reflecting on this period in 2004, Benhabib observes:

> The present article belongs to the same period of the mid-1990s, when the paradigm struggle between French and German modes of theorizing, critical theory and postmodernisms of various sorts, appeared most intense. Rereading and revising this essay after many years, I am surprised by the extent to which certain themes announce themselves in it which proved decisive not only for the evolution of my own work but for the eventual redrawing of the theoretical and political lines between critical theory and Derrida's work as well. … It was truly surprising to find in this essay *in nuce* the problems which were to preoccupy me in the decade after the mid-1990s, such as European unification and citizenship; the rights of others—aliens, refugees and citizens—;and cosmopolitanism. It is around these issues as well that the eventual rapprochement between Habermas and Derrida, as documented in this volume, took place.[595]

Among other things, Benhabib's observations underscore how earlier tensions arose in a context where what was at stake for competing schools of thought was framed in largely oppositional terms.[596] We may also note here that as with many such disagreements between influential theorists, the first phases of a critical exchange are likely to be presented in a somewhat caricature-form given the relatively small number of scholars sufficiently schooled in both areas of thought. As time moves on and as socio-historical conditions shift, a more rigorous, nuanced, and well-informed conversation will often emerge.[597]

Originally included as a chapter of his book, *The New Constellations: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity,* (1991) Bernstein's essay is one of the first among scholars versed in both Habermas and Derrida's work[598] to layout problems, parallels, and differences between them. Situating Habermas's work as a critical response to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,[599] Bernstein points out that his concern with so-called "post-modernism" and "post-Enlightenment" thought stemmed from a suspicion that it represented a new form of "anti-modernism" that he had spent much of his career fighting against, especially in the work of Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger.[600] As Bernstein observes, "For Habermas is hyper-sensitive to those aspects

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[594] See Benhabib et.al, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge), 1994.

[595] Benhabib, "Democracy and Difference," 128, n.1.

[596] Christopher Norris provides an example of these tensions from Derrida's side of the divide in his essay, "Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy: Habermas on Derrida," noting that Habermas and his advocates had misread Derrida and focused their critique on a partial reading of a few select texts. Norris lists, "Structure, Sign, and Play," the 'Envois' section of *La Carte Postale*, and his introduction to Husserl's essay, "The Origin of Geometry" as examples. See Norris, "Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 103-104.

[597] It is worth noting here that of the eight essays contained in *DHR*, only Benhabib, Bernstein and Richard Rorty's contributions appear prior to the year 2000 and can thus be said to be products of a more divisive debate.

[598] See, for example, Bernstein, ed. *Habermas and Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985.

[599] Bernstein, "An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 75.

[600] For a discussion on this point, see David Couzen's Hoy, where he notes Habermas's charge that Derrida wanted to "return to the premodern traditions where reason has not yet undermined the mystery of

of the pernicious cultural tendency to separate Germany's 'spiritual destiny' from the moral and political achievements of Western democracy."[601] This is part of the reason, he suspects, that Habermas was so critical of Derrida during this time since he perceived in his work a re-animation of the late Heidegger and a disdain for empirical research into political and juridical problems. Indeed, this concern is evident even after their rapprochement and was the central question in Habermas's 2000 essay, "Judéités: Questions for Jacques Derrida," which was presented in front of Derrida in Paris on the relationship between his work and Judaism.[602] Noting Habermas's affinity with American pragmatists such as Peirce, Mead, and Dewey, Bernstein calls attention to his suspicion with modes of thought that could undermine the idea of communicative reason,[603] and the concomitant task to articulate a norm-oriented ideal for a radical, deliberative democracy.[604] Bernstein also helpfully situates Derrida's observation that we can never step outside of "metaphysics,"[605] and locates his approach as an ethical-political critique of universalism in moral and political philosophy that seeks to problematize questions of decision and action by underlining the "singularity" of every declaration and the inevitable experience of "undecidability."[606] While pointing out that Derrida does not provide the kind of empirical analysis that Habermas's does on the "complex dynamics of institutional structures," which, he argues, provides a crucial supplement to Derrida's work,[607] Bernstein looks to create a bridge between their respective projects by showing how Derrida can be critically brought to bear on the theory of communicative action. As he puts it: "For Derrida, like Adorno and Benjamin, is far more sensitive to what Habermas acknowledges but does not closely analyze—the multifarious ways in which

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hidden religious authority." Hoy, "Splitting the Difference: Habermas's Critique of Derrida," *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 127.

601 Bernstein, "Allegory," 79.

602 This point will be discussed in the second to last section below, where Habermas calls attention to Heidegger's rejection of humanism and affinities with what Habermas calls a form of "neo-paganism." This essay also appears under a different title, including a postscript in Habermas, "How to Answer the Ethical Question: Derrida and Religion," in *Europe: The Faltering Project,* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 17-36.

603 For example, Bernstein observes the following on Habermas's view of French philosophy: "Their failure, according to Habermas, is not to realize and fully appreciate that the 'fallibilist consciousness of the sciences caught up with philosophy too, a long time ago. When they declared that philosophy or metaphysics is over, their image of philosophy is still that of the Absolute system—the philosophy of the 'last word,'" Ibid., 77.

604 Ibid., 78.

605 Ibid., 79.

606 Ibid., 85.

607 Expanding on this point, Bernstein writes: "When Derrida examines questions of justice, law, violence he does not primarily deal with specific institutional practices, but with the written texts, specifically the writings of those who have addressed these issues—Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Kafka, Benjamin, Levinas, etc. I do not want to denigrate this way—this *methodos*. His analyses are extraordinarily perceptive and rich in their consequences. But surely—as Derrida himself acknowledges—they need to be supplemented by the theoretical and empirical study of societal institutions and practices. But this is not what Derrida does. There is nothing in Derrida's writings that seeks to rule out the importance of critical theoretical and empirical research into the structural dynamics of society and politics." Ibid., 93.

communication (even under 'ideal' conditions) goes awry."[608] This point will be central for my own critique of Habermas inasmuch as he points towards broad structural problems but (often) does not pay attention to the messy details left floating in the margins.

Richard Rorty, a long-time friend of Habermas's and aficionado of Heidegger and Derrida's work, provides another example of an early attempt to parse their approaches in a mutually productive fashion in his 1995 essay, "Habermas, Derrida and the functions of philosophy." While I take issue with Rorty's claim that thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault do little to address questions of liberal democracy and are thus better understood as good "private" thinkers that help us to grapple with ontological and existential concerns, Rorty's attempt to bring about a détente (of sorts) between Habermas and Derrida can be seen as a productive opening toward thematizing some of the ways that their respective approaches can be thought about together. As he observes, quoting Habermas in *PDM*:

> Habermas does not feel he has done justice to a philosopher unless he places him within a religio-political context, and has connected his work up with the need to 'regenerate the unifying power of religion in the medium of reason'. So when he says that in Derrida and Foucault the 'philosophy of subjectivity' has exhausted its possibilities, it is possibilities of public usefulness that he has in mind.[609]

Rorty touches here on an important reason why Habermas had felt so threatened by Derrida's work in the mid-1980s, given his concern with the practice of mutual perspective taking in the context of liberal democratic societies, where fallible notions of "truth," in the political and pragmatic sense of the term, are deemed to be fundamental for the practical use of public reason.[610] While Rorty is wrong to place Derrida in a "private" box, his intervention helps open a conversation that others would later take-up in a more nuanced fashion.

There is perhaps no better example of the fruit born of these bridging efforts by the likes of Bernstein and Rorty than Simon Critchley's remarks in a "Frankfurt Improptu—Remarks on Derrida and Habermas," which was presented in front of both thinkers at the *Suhrkamp Haus* in Frankfurt on June 24, 2000, to which Derrida would later offer a reply.[611] Critchley wants to disabuse the idea, *pace* Habermas, that Derrida was ever a "post-modernist" or a "neo-Heideggerian" and rejects the notion, *pace* Rorty, that Derrida can or should be understood as a "private ironist." For Critchley, Derrida has always had an ethical and a political orientation,[612] though he argues that these currents have been "more strongly foregrounded in his work over the past ten years or so," citing

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608 Ibid., 89.

609 Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 49.

610 Rorty adds that, for Habermas: "Such a philosophy politicizes epistemology, in the sense that it takes what matters to the search for truth to be the social (and in particular the political) conditions under which that search is conducted, rather than the deep inner nature of the subjects doing the searching. Ibid., 48.

611 Derrida's reply, "Performative Powerlessness—A Response to Simon Critchley," will be touched upon below.

612 Here he cites, "Violence and Metaphysics" (1964); and "The Ends of Man" (1968) as representative examples.

texts such as "The Force of Law" (1992); *Spectres of Marx* (1993); *Politics of Friendship*; and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1997) as representative examples.[613] While pointing out a significant difference and possible impasse between Derrida and Habermas on the question of "metaphysics,"[614] Critchley argues that there are clear affinities between them when it comes to matters of justice, pairing Habermas's context-transcending idealizations with Derrida's notion of "democracy-to-come." Pushing the argument further, he notes that while Habermas was wrong to accuse Derrida of reducing society, politics, and history to the status of the "ontic," (i.e., to subjective questions of Being) it could be said that his "theoretical categories lack sufficient sociological mediation,"[615] leading him to ask Derrida whether he is perhaps too critical of the idea of *proceduralism* inasmuch as it helps to regulate deliberation toward political decision-making?[616] For this reason, Critchley wants to pair Derrida's idea of a "democracy-to-come" with "more concrete forms of democratic political deliberation, action and intervention."[617] Critchley points to an opening in Habermas's work that bears considerably on my own interests from a passage near the end of *Between Facts and Norms*:

> The fact that everyday affairs are necessarily banalized in political communication also poses a danger for semantic potentials from which this communication must still draw its nourishment. … No civil religion, however cleverly adjusted, could forestall this entropy of meaning. Even the moment of unconditionality insistently voiced in the transcending validity claims of everyday life does not suffice. *Another* kind of transcendence is preserved in the unfilled promise disclosed by the critical appropriation of identity-forming religious traditions, and *still another* in the negativity of modern art. The trivial and everyday must be open to the shock of what is absolutely strange, cryptic, or uncanny. Though these no longer provide a cover for privileges, they refuse to be assimilated to pregiven categories.[618]

Critchley interprets this passage as an acknowledgement on Habermas's part of the need to find a *supplement* for the transcending validity claims that he outlines in his theory of discourse ethics. While questioning whether this asymmetry should be limited to so-called religious or aesthetic claims, he points here to an opening that Habermas will shortly develop with his expanding interest on the question of religion, *circa* 2001. What interests me here is Habermas's recognition, if only implicitly, of the limitations of his own theoretical model, where that which he cannot find a comfortable space for—a sort

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613 See Critchely, "Frankfurt Impromptu—Remarks on Derrida and Habermas, in *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 99. Axel Honneth makes a similar point on Derrida's so-called "ethical turn," citing the work of Simon Critchley, Richard Bernstein, Stephen K. White and Andrew Benjamin as scholars who supported this claim, while also noting that such "ethical" concerns can be found in Derrida's earlier work, such as his essay "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*. See Honneth, "The other of justice: Habermas and the ethical challenge of postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*. Ed. Stephen K. White (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 289-323.

614 Critchley notes how Habermas's notion of postmetaphysical thinking, which looks for an empirical or normative justification of reason, comes up against Derrida's genealogical deconstruction that insists we cannot get outside of the text (e.g., of tradition and metaphysics), as a an example of this potential impasse.

615 Critchley, Frankfurt Impromptu," 101.

616 Critchley, Ibid., 105.

617 Ibid., 109.

618 Quoted in Critchley from *Between Facts and Norms*, 490. Ibid., 104.

of alterity or utopian longing—is acknowledged as gap in need of further thought and conceptual integration. As I will argue at the end of this chapter, and expand on in the conclusion of this dissertation, Habermas assimilates these ideas into the domain of ethical and existential concerns in a way that is too protective of conceptual boundaries, effectively undermining the bite of his critical theory.

The remainder of the essays in this volume, all written after 2000, including contributions from Bonnie Honig (2001); Martin Morris (2001); Martin Beck Matustik (2004); and Lasse Thomassen (2006), are from scholars who write more in the vein of Habermas's type of reconstructive work, though they all draw upon Derrida in order to radicalize and supplement Habermas's approach. Thomassen, for example, employs what he calls a "deconstructive reading of Habermas's texts" and argues that the relationship between democracy and constitutionalism is "undecidable"[619] and thus requires a greater sensitivity to its various "iterations,"[620] while Morris argues that Habermas's notion of post-national public spheres needs to be more open to the constructed nature of identities and more attentive to relations of power. Matustik, for his part, trained under Habermas and steeped in the philosophy of existentialism, wants to pair a number of their concepts together, such as: Habermas's regulative ideal with Derrida's event; Habermas's tolerance with Derrida's hospitality; Habermas's world citizenship with Derrida's democracy-to-come,[621] in order to further a "political alliance" between them on certain ethical-political questions in the tradition of Kant,[622] especially those relating to the ideal of hope in the impossible through a "messianicity, stripped of everything."[623] Before turning to these affinities, however, and showing some ways in which Derrida's work can be productively brought to bear on Habermas's critical theory of religion, it will be instructive to revisit their early exchange in order to contextualize the precise points of division that they would later smooth over, though not without retaining certain sharp edges.

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity consists of 12 lectures and begins with a discussion on Hegel's conception of modernity and how it has been inherited in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer, Derrida, Bataille, and Foucault.[624] Situating this discussion in the context of "end-of-philosophy" debates in the mid-1980s,[625] Thomas McCarthy notes in his introduction to *PDM* that it was the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger that Habermas found most troubling in French "post-structuralist" thought. As he writes:

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619 Lasse Thomassen, "'A Bizarre, Even Opaque Practice': Habermas on Constitutionalism and Democracy," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 176.

620 Thomassen, "'A Bizarre, Even Opaque Practice,'" 185.

621 Martin Beck Matustik, "Between Hope and Terror: Habermas and Derrida Plead for the Im/Possible," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 287.

622 Matustik, "Between Hope and Terror," 289.

623 Ibid., 290.

624 *PDM* also includes three excursuses on Schiller, Cornelius Castoriadis and Niklas Luhmann.

625 For closer look at some of the broader parameters of these debates, see Baynes, Bohman, and McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1986.

> Habermas is concerned here to respond to the challenge posed by the radical critique of reason in contemporary French thought by re-examining 'the philosophical discourse of modernity' from which it issues. His strategy here is to return to those historical "crossroads" at which Hegel and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche, and Heidegger made the fateful decisions that led to this outcome; his aim is to identify and clearly mark out a road indicated but not taken: the *determinate* negation of subject-centered reason by reason understood as *communicative* action.[626]

I have quoted McCarthy here in order to help distil what is at stake for Habermas in this lengthy and complicated text. While space does not allow me to unfold *PDM's* many interweaving arguments, it is important to situate Habermas's initial critique of Derrida within this broader set of concerns. In particular, and as noted above, Habermas felt that by failing to overcome "subject-centered reason," these trends in "French thought" served as an unwitting handmaiden for neoconservative politics,[627] since both were said to constitute forms of "anti-modernism."[628] Without a thoroughgoing intersubjectivist paradigm of "communicative action," Habermas fears that "modernity" (my scare quotes) will not be able to defend its more salvageable and enduring legacies, such as the separation of value spheres between art, science, and morality and structural differentiation on the levels of political institutions and law, as has been noted in previous chapters.[629]

Habermas's first essay on Derrida in *PDM*, "Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida's Critique of Phonocentrism," which is immediately preceded by an essay on Heidegger,[630] focuses attention on the ways in which Derrida inherits both Heidegger's and Husserl's work, while also noting his debt to Levinas and to "Jewish mysticism" in the form of a "negative theology." A more in-depth analysis of the precise points of Habermas's critique—an analysis that has not, to my knowledge, been undertaken—would have to pay close attention to how Habermas situates Derrida's in relation to these three thinkers.[631] Unlike his second essay in this volume, "Excursus on Levelling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature," which provoked a fair bit of criticism against Habermas for not having quoted Derrida's work, this first essay does indeed reference him widely,[632] regardless of the merits of his analysis.[633]

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626 McCarthy, "Introduction," *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, vii.

627 See Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991. See also Houlb, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, 162-186; Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, 133-170; Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, 131-146.

628 As Diana Coole puts it: "This is why he condemns the postmoderns as 'young conservatives' whom he sees retreating into antimodernism, the archaic and an alliance with premodernists." See Coole, "Habermas and the question of Alterity" in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, 223.

629 McCarthy, Ibid., x-xi.

630 See Habermas, "The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics: Martin Heidegger," *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 131-160.

631 As will be addressed at the end of this chapter, such an analysis would also need to detail the ways in which Habermas will later situate Derrida's work in relation to Kierkegaard, Benjamin, Adorno, Jaspers and Gershom Scholem, among others.

632 Here Habermas engages with the following texts by Derrida: "The Ends of Man"; *Of Grammatology*; *Writing and Difference*; "Signature Event Context"; *Speech and Phenomena*; "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy* and "Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva," in *Positions*.

Habermas situates Derrida's philosophy in the wake of Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," where his interest in "deconstruction" is said to parallel Heidegger's "destruction" (*Destruktion*) in the "familiar melody of the self-overcoming of metaphysics."[634] Specifically, Habermas is concerned with Derrida's inheritance of the "concept of the history of Being" and whether he is able to make the necessary shift away from Heidegger's sentimental "fatalism," which Habermas describes as trapped within "homely pictures of a preindustrial peasant counterworld."[635] Habermas's first point of criticism is that Derrida does not engage with an analysis of ordinary language use—with its grammar or logic—but instead wants to challenge structuralism through a study of the foundations of writing in *Of Grammatology*.[636] This challenge, he continues, is one that aims to reach "back beyond the beginnings of phonetic writing"[637] such that modernity becomes the search for traces that "no longer holds out the prospect of a meaningful whole as the book of nature or the Holy Scripture had done."[638] It is here where Habermas notes the alleged "Jewish" influence on Derrida's thought, with a nod to his indebtedness to the work of Levinas:

> It is obvious that Derrida, taking up from Levinas, is inspired by the Jewish understanding of tradition, which is more removed than the Christian from the idea of the book and precisely for this reason remains more rigorously bound to erudition in scripture. The program of a scripture scholarship with claims to a critique of metaphysics is nourished from religious sources. By the same token, Derrida does not want to think theologically; as an orthodox Heideggerian, he is forbidden any thought about the supreme entity. Instead, similarly to Heidegger, Derrida sees the modern condition as constituted by phenomena of deprival that are not comprehensible within the horizon of the history or reason and of divine revelation.[639]

It is worth pondering here for a moment what is being suggested with these claims. Putting aside the rather inflammatory phrase "orthodox Heideggerian," which, whatever its precise meaning, is clearly not intended as a complement, Habermas is suggesting that since Derrida's debt to Heidegger does not allow him any thought of the divine, he is forced to supplement this lack through the work of Levinas in the form of a negative theology.[640] Habermas's point here, so far as I can tell, is that despite Derrida having recourse to a more sophisticated linguistic analysis than Heidegger did, he does not take "deconstruction" beyond the philosophy of consciousness and thus remains trapped in the confines of a "subject-centred reason." This point is underscored by Habermas when he

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633 Coole makes the argument that the problem was not so much that Habermas did not read "Derrida et.al," but that he denies an emancipatory role to "alterity" and thus "condemned such appeals as irrational, anachronistic and out of step with history's evolution …" Ibid., 223.

634 Habermas, "Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida's Critique of Phonocentrism," *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 161.

635 Habermas, "Beyond," 162.

636 Ibid., 163.

637 Ibid., 164.

638 Ibid., 165.

639 Ibid.

640 David Couzen's Hoy glosses Habermas here as follows: "Since the quarrel is between the Enlightenment's faith in reason and the counter-enlightenment's rebellion against reason, what Habermas is objecting to is the vestige of Jewish mysticism (not because it is Jewish, of course, but because it is mystical to the point of being not only mysterious but also unintelligible)." See Hoy, *Ibid*., 127.

writes: "His attempt to go beyond Heidegger does not escape the aporetic structure of a truth-occurrence eviscerated of all truth-as-validity."[641] In other words, Derrida commits a cardinal sin in Habermas's eyes by failing to acknowledge how claims to truth can be rationally reconstructed by referring to different types of "validity."

Putting a finer point on this, the problem of an "eviscerated" notion of "truth-as-validity" in Derrida's work is further evidenced, according to Habermas, in his critique of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, where he (Derrida), like Husserl, adopts a *semiotic* approach instead of a *semantic* one, which results in a failure to make "a grammatical distinction between signal language and propositionally differentiated language."[642] In Husserl's work, the pragmatic functions of speech are described as *extrinsic* to the speaker,[643] where communicative expressions are understood to be indications of some pure meaning rather than, say, as rules for following signs, as was developed in the work of Wittgenstein.[644] While acknowledging Derrida's wish to critique Husserl's "Platonizing of meaning," where linguistic expressions are disembodied and interior, Habermas claims that Derrida doesn't heed the philosophy of language in distinguishing between the intersubjective practice of following rules in order to convey meaning that comes from innerworldly experience:[645]

> Instead, Derrida follows Husserl along the path of separating off (in terms of transcendental philosophy) every innerworldly thing from the performances of the subject that are constitutive of the world, in order to take up the battle against the sovereignty of ideal intuited essences within its innermost precincts.[646]

Where this separation becomes most problematic is in what he takes to be Derrida's denial that any meaning-intention of a speaker can ever be fulfilled and that its' "promissory note" is forever compromised by *difference* and *otherness*.[647] The crux of the problem for Habermas is two-fold: first, he thinks Derrida believes that only writing and not speech can count as an "originary" sign that contains a fullness of meaning.[648] Unfortunately, for Derrida, meaning and intention are immediately lost with all transcription (i.e., with each iteration) and go on to exist only in fragments or traces.[649] What is more, and this brings us to the second problem, Derrida fails to account for how

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[641] Habermas, Ibid., 166-67.
[642] Ibid., 168.
[643] Ibid., 169.
[644] Ibid., 170.
[645] Ibid., 171.
[646] Ibid., 172.
[647] Ibid., 174-75.
[648] As he elaborates: "Derrida pursues Husserl's attempt to elaborate the ideal sense of meaning 'in itself' and purified of all empirical associations. Derrida pursues Husserl's idealizations right to the most inward point of transcendental subjectivity in order to make plain here, at the source of the spontaneity of the experience that is present to itself, the ineradicable difference which, if it is presented on the model of the referential structure of the written text, as an operation dissociated from the performing subject, can thus be conceived precisely as an event without any subject. Writing counts as the absolutely originary sign, abstracted from all pragmatic contexts of communication, independent of speaking and listening subjects." Ibid, 178.
[649] Ibid., 178.

"objective" and "performative" expressions have *pragmatic* meanings when they are explained in the context of "an intersubejctive practice of applying rules."[650]

Derrida's emphasis on the originary sign thus presents a form of mysticism according to Habermas, which he compares to Schelling's interest in the "temporalizing" of the "past, present, and future ages of the world," where the goal of philosophy becomes one of searching for a past that can never be present. Habermas doubles-down on this characterization of mysticism and negative theology in Derrida's concepts of *trace* and *archéwriting*, noting that "we see again the Dionysian motif of the god making his promised presence all the more palpable to the sons and daughters of the West by means of his poignant absence." As a consequence, genuine social pathologies remain undiagnosed and disconnected from "scientific analysis" and indeterminacy reigns supreme.[651] Unlike Heidegger, whose writings bent toward an authoritarian view of human destiny, Derrida is characterized as holding on to an "anarchist wish to explode the continuum of history," which he fills with a "Jewish mysticism,"[652] where "tradition" is seen as the ever-delayed event of revelation.[653] Here Habermas levels what is perhaps his harshest criticism of Derrida, which relates to the question of religion:

> Mystical experiences were able to unfold their explosive force, their power of liquefying institutions and dogmas, in Jewish and Christian traditions because they remained related in these contexts to a hidden, world-transcendent God. Illuminations cut off from this concentrated font of light become particularly diffuse. The path of their consistent secularization points into the domain of radical experiences that avant-garde art has opened up. … In the mysticism of the New Paganism, the unbounded charisma of what is outside the everyday does not issue in something liberating, as it does with the aesthetic; not in something renewing, as with the religious—it has at most the stimulus, taking it back into the context of the monotheistic tradition.[654]

To summarize these points thus far, Habermas's critique runs as follows: in his attempt to overcome the deficiencies in Husserl and Heidegger's thinking, Derrida resorts to a "science of writing" that denies the possibility of any sort of "metaphysics" that could be grounded in the here and now. Because he takes up Husserl's interest in a *semiotic* approach and not one that zeroes-in on the *semantic* aspects of pragmatic contexts of intersubjective, rule-oriented communication, he is left without an anchoring point through which "illumination" is possible, and so he clings to a sort of "negative" monotheism that has now become "diffuse" since it has been severed from its former "transcendent" meaning common in more traditional worldviews. Habermas ends this essay on somewhat of a speculative note, writing that if his suspicions are not "utterly false" then Derrida has returned to the point where mysticism becomes enlightenment. This was a concern of Gershom Scholem's and, as Habermas argues, found a productive (though failed) strategy in the work of Walter Benjamin, who tried to ground theology in historical materialism. Habermas is doubtful that a project such as Derrida's, as he sees it, can be renewed with the "tools of a negative foundationalism."[655]

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[650] Ibid., 173.
[651] Ibid., 181.
[652] Ibid.
[653] Ibid., 183.
[654] Ibid., 183.
[655] Ibid., 184.

Excursus

There can be little doubt that Habermas is on shaky-ground when he follows-up this first essay without once quoting Derrida's work in his twenty-page "Excursus on Levelling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature." In the echo of this debate, which played out through supporters of one or the other side through the mid-1980s and much of the 1990s up until their rapprochement in 1999, it was often overlooked that Habermas had engaged directly with Derrida's work in the essay-proper; a point that was reinforced by Derrida's emphasis on the "Excursus" in his afterward in *Limited Inc.* (to be discussed below). In any case, if we take Habermas's "excursus" *as a type of literary device*; that is, as a detailed discussion on a specific point and a digression from another written text, his omission may be *partly* forgiven, though it is by no means excusable. While much of his critique here reiterates points made in the first essay, some elaborations are worth noting, especially the charge that Derrida levels the distinction between philosophy and literature by elevating rhetoric to a place of primary importance.

Tracing the arch of this excursus, Habermas charges Derrida at the end of his argument with dulling the critique of reason by relieving philosophical thinking of the task of solving problems, and shifting such questions into the domain of literary criticism, which Habermas claims has been the goal of Derrida's "disciples" in literature departments.[656] It is both telling and instructive that Habermas ends his excursus with a footnote that makes reference to his own essay "Philosophy as Stand-in and Interpret," which, it is worth recalling, sought to re-define philosophy's role as a mediating interpreter between the "lifeworld" of distinct communities and the expert language of the sciences and urged for a critical re-thinking of the "interplay between the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive dimensions that has come to a standstill today like a tangled mobile."[657] David Couzens Hoy underscores this point when he observes that Habermas sees deconstruction as undermining the separation between science, morality, and art instituted by Kant, which he wants to maintain in a revised and reconstructed form.[658] Considering these aims and Habermas's claim that all forms of "subjectivism" function to support neoconservative politics, it becomes clear why Derrida's perceived "levelling" of these important distinctions is looked upon with suspicion. Without these distinctions, Habermas believes that "reason" cannot effectively be critiqued nor productively re-set toward an "interplay" that brings out its strengths while minimizing its weaknesses. What is more, Habermas claims that Derrida is caught up in a "performative contradiction" inasmuch as he ignores how these categories function autonomously and how, moreover, the intelligibility of his own arguments are dependent upon such distinctions.[659] Martin Jay argues that this charge of a "performative contradiction" is one of the harshest rebukes that Habermas levels at his opponents, which he traces back to his arguments in "What is Universal Pragmatics?" (1976), where

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656 Christopher Norris makes a similar point when he notes, "these criticisms apply not so much to what Derrida has written as to what has been written about him by various (mostly American) commentators." See Norris, *Ibid*., 103.

657 See Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-in and Interpreter," *MCCA*, 19.

658 See Hoy, *Ibid*., 141.

659 Habermas, "Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction Between Philosophy and Literature," *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 185.

he critiqued the classic structuralist binary between language and speech, which privileges *langue* over *parole* and thus obscures the pragmatic uses of language and the possibility of their formal analysis.[660]

While Habermas does acknowledge the "rebellious labor of deconstruction" as successfully "dismantling smuggled-in basic conceptual hierarchies," he argues that Derrida's goal is to place rhetoric over logic, such that "[t]here can only be talk about 'contradiction,'" which leaves the "deconstructionist" free to treat works of philosophy like works of literature.[661] To put it differently, the immanent critique of philosophical arguments (especially, in this context, those pertaining to the pragmatics of language use) with an eye toward their productive reconstruction is no longer the goal of critical theory under *this* interpretive strategy, whose main (and perhaps only?) concern is to engage in rhetorical play in order to overturn established binaries *ad infinitum*. It is in this sense that Habermas charges Derrida with not proceeding analytically, but, instead, merely "identifying hidden presuppositions or implications." He continues, "… Thus, the constraints constitutive for knowledge of a philosophical text only become accessible when the text is handled as what it would not like to be—as a literary text."[662] To put it succinctly, the task of philosophy under "deconstruction" is no different than the critique of literature.

Ultimately, Habermas's fear is that "deconstruction" will render all genre distinctions "ultimately dissolved," including philosophy and science, art and literature.[663] It is not entirely clear, however, whether Habermas is aiming his critique at Derrida or those scholars who have taken up his work in certain American universities, whom he quotes throughout this text. Drawing in particular on Jonathan Culler's book *On Deconstruction*, (1982) as well as works by Christopher Norris and Paul de Man,[664] Habermas zeroes his attention in on Culler's statement that if philosophical texts can be read through literary criticism, then literary texts can also be seen as philosophy[665] through the shared critique of metaphysics.[666] This point is underlined by what Habermas takes to be a key statement by Culler, whose work, Habermas argues, is to undo hierarchies such as serious/nonserious, truth/fiction in his critique of literature. Quoting Culler, Habermas writes:

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660 See Martin Jay, "The Debates over Performative Contradiction: Habermas versus the Poststructuralists" in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth et al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 273.

661 Habermas, "Excursus," 188.

662 Ibid., 189.

663 Ibid., 191.

664 Habermas cites a number of other critics as well as universities that he sees as carrying on this task in footnote 2: "This is especially true of the Yale Critics, Paul de Mann, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, and Harold Bloom. See J. Arac, W. Godzich, and W. Martin, eds., *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis, 1983). In addition to Yale, important centers of deconstruction are located at Johns Hopkins and Cornell Universities," 407.

665 Ibid., 192.

666 Ibid., 193.

> If serious language is a special case of non-serious, if truths are fictions whose fictionality has been forgotten, then literature is not a deviant, parasitical instance of language. On the contrary, other discourses can be seen as cases of a generalized literature, or archi-literature.[667]

These lines are immediately followed by the rather strong rebuke: "Since Derrida does not belong to those philosophers who like to argue, it is expedient to take a closer look at his disciples in literary criticism within the Anglo-Saxon climate of argument in order to see whether this thesis really can be held."[668] This statement is made all the more curious when we consult footnote 7 in Habermas's text, where he makes reference to Derrida's essay, "Signature Event Context," along with Searle's counter-argument in "Reiterating Differences: A Reply to Derrida" and Derrida's reply in "Limited Inc," which originally appeared in *Glyph* 1 (1977) and *Glyph* 12 (1977).[669] As will become evident when I turn to address the first of these essays, Derrida does indeed argue in defense of his position in no short measure.

Where Habermas appears to see continuity between Derrida's work and Culler's statement is with the idea that any action that can be repeated, including *utterances that act as promises*, can be treated symbolically and can therefore be analyzed like fiction. (i.e., as nonserious and metaphorical) By contrast, Habermas defends J.L. Austin's distinction between a fictional "quotation of a promise" (e.g., as can be found in a play) and a performative speech act, which he claims has an illocutionary force, which is binding on participants in certain contexts. This distinction is crucial for Habermas and is worth quoting here in full:

> Only the actually performed speech act is effective as action; the promise mentioned or reported in a quote depends grammatically upon this. A setting that deprives it of its illocutionary force constitutes the bridge between quotation and fictional representation. … Derrida makes no attempt to 'deconstruct' this distinctive functional mode of ordinary speech within communicative action. In the illocutionary binding force of linguistic utterances Austin discovered a mechanism for coordinating action that places normal speech, as part of the everyday practice, under constraints different from those of fictional discourse, simulation, and interior monologue. … They can be analyzed as the kinds of idealizing suppositions we have to make in communicative action.[670]

While Habermas does not defend speech act theory in its entirety,[671] he is insistent on specifying the context required for the "illocutionary success" of standard speech acts,[672] which both he and Searle have taken up in different ways by stressing how the meaning of sentences can only be valid if they are set against "a shared background knowledge that is constitutive of the lifeworld of a linguistic community."[673] As discussed in previous chapters, Habermas's claim that communicative reason can be grounded in what he calls "idealizing suppositions" that are present when agents orient

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667 Culler, qtd. in Habermas, Ibid., 193.

668 Ibid., 193.

669 Ibid., 194, n. 7.

670 Ibid., 196.

671 For Habermas's critique of Searle, see, "Comments on John Searle's 'Meaning, Communication, and Representation," in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, Ed. Maeve Cook (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 257-276.

672 Ibid., 196.

673 Ibid., 197.

themselves toward reaching an understanding about something in the world through validity claims (e.g., to truth, rightness, and sincerity) requires him to make a clear distinction between "fictional discourse" and the "normal (everyday) use of language."[674] Habermas maintains that Derrida "cannot acknowledge […] the independent logics of these problems" since he is focused on the "poetic use of language,"[675] which prevents him from recognizing how language functions differently in the domains of science, morality, law, art and literature.[676] The result of this "levelling," then, is nothing less than the dulling of the critique of reason:

> If, following Derrida's recommendation, philosophical thinking were to be relieved of the duty of solving problems and shifted over to the function of literary criticism, it would be robbed not merely of its seriousness, but of its productivity. Conversely, the literary-critical power of judgment loses its potency when, as is happening among Derrida's disciples in literature departments, it gets displaced from appropriating aesthetic experiential contents into the critique of metaphysics. The false assimilation of one enterprise to the other robs both of their substance.[677]

Whatever else we might say about this analysis (and Derrida will have something to say), it is clear that at this point in time, during the mid-1980s, Habermas viewed "deconstruction" as a threat to the idea of philosophy as a "stand-in and interpreter," where its task is to work with the social sciences in order to put back together the "tangled mobile" of a now-differentiated reason (i.e., art, science, and morality) on the path toward a renewed and productive interaction.

Derrida's Reply to Habermas

In an article published in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* on June 18, 2004, entitled, "Each in his own country, but both in Europe: the history of a friendship with obstacles—on Jürgen Habermas's 75th birthday,"[678] Derrida traces their first encounter to 1984 at the University of Frankfurt, where he had been invited by Habermas to give a lecture. He goes on to note that it was only a year after this encounter that Habermas published *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, characterizing the two chapters dedicated to his work as, "unjust and overhasty."[679] Derrida responded to Habermas in two lengthy footnotes in *Memories for Paul de Man* and in the 1988 afterward to *Limited Inc*., in the interest of the "ethics of discussion," which he notes was conducted "as far as possible with arguments, but admittedly a little polemical."[680] This early encounter was also, according to Derrida, conducted indirectly by other "parties" on their behalf, which he notes with a tone of regret had forced some students to form alliances who "were then sometimes handicapped in making progress."[681] The context of

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674 Ibid., 203.

675 Ibid., 206.

676 Ibid., 207.

677 Ibid., 210.

678 This text was later reproduced in *The Derrida-Habermas Reader* as "Honesty of Thought," 300-305.

679 Derrida, "Honesty of Thought," 301.

680 Ibid., 301-2.

681 Ibid., 302.

the debate that result in *Limited Inc.* began in 1977 upon the publication of "Signature Event Context," which offered a critique of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), and appeared along side a rebuttal by John Searle entitled "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," in the first issue of the literary theory journal *Glyph*. Derrida's initial essay and his reply to Searle comprises the text of *Limited Inc*., along with a lengthy afterward, "Toward an Ethics of Discussion," where he addresses questions from the book's editor, Gerald Graff, and offers his most thorough reply to Habermas during this time.[682]

Derrida's begins "Signature Event Context" by zeroing in on the problem of defining the word "communication," and asks, somewhat ironically, if it "communicates a determinate content, an identifiable meaning, or a describable value,"[683] if it is, in short, communicable? Far from engaging in mere word-play, what is at stake for Derrida is how "communication" moves beyond questions of semantics, semiotics and linguistics toward what he calls "nonsemantic movements," which is a problem that Austin had opened up in his discussion on "performatives," noting how language functions differently, for example, in the context of a play, the "christening" of a ship or vows exchanged during a marriage ceremony. While acknowledging Austin's useful innovation in addressing the "performative" or perlocutionary effect of speech acts, Derrida asks whether a "context" and an "event" can ever be "absolutely determinable," and whether or not we can claim to have developed a "scientific" understanding of context. This is the primary question that Derrida seeks to raise here, with the aim of demonstrating how contexts are never "entirely certain or saturated."[684] His hope is that calling attention to this "structural non-saturation" of context will have the effect of showing: 1) the inadequacy of "*the current concept of context* (linguistic or nonlingusitic)" (italics in the original), which would in turn; 2) necessitate a displacement of the concept of writing, "*at least in the limited sense of a transmission of meaning*."[685] (emphasis mine)

Turing to the work Condillac (1714-1780) and his influence on the French "ideologues," Derrida points out how he placed writing "under the authority of communication," where it was believed to offer an imitation of communication such that, "[r]epresentation regularly supplants (supplée) presence."[686] In other words, Condillac argued that writing represents a *presence* that is said to be continuous, even homogenous, with the author's *intention*. It is here where Derrida introduces his concept of "iterability," noting its (likely) origin in the Sanskrit term *itara*, meaning "other," which he will argue structures all writing as tied to processes of repetition and alterity. This process of writing, as Derrida notes here and elsewhere,[687] is what Plato condemned in the *Phaedrus*, since the written word marked a deferral from the immediate context of

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682 One further text of note in this exchange was an article by Searle that appeared in the *New York Review of Books*. See John R. Searle (1983) "The Word Turned Upside Down," *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 30, Number 16, October 27, 1983.

683 Derrida, "Signature Event Context" in *Limited Inc*., translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffery Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1.

684 Derrida, Ibid., 2-3.

685 Ibid., 3.

686 Ibid., 5

687 See "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-172.

speech and consciousness and hence from all "absolute responsibility."[688] The point that Plato introduces in his condemnation of writing picks up on what Derrida calls the "breaking force" of all writing from its context, which is "not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text."[689]

While Derrida clarifies that he is interested in raising the problem of how the written sign is not limitable to any one context and that it can always be *grafted* onto other chains of signification, his main concern is to point out that repetition or iteration marks both the possibility and the impossibility of writing. If writing is not repeatable its' function or usefulness would die with the author. Writing must therefore be readable beyond the "death" of the sender. Here we can see a nod to the pragmatics of communication that so concerns Habermas. While Derrida is clear to suggest that every sign, spoken or written, can be placed in "quotation marks" and can therefore break with any given context, (a point that Habermas would no doubt agree with) he follows this with a claim that marks a clear distinction between them. As he writes, "This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [*ancrage*]."[690] Even if we understand this idea as Derrida intends it; namely, that such iterability is what defines all language and gives us the distinction between normal and abnormal in the first place, the statement that there are only contexts is no doubt one that would raise Habermas's ire. However, when we situate these remarks in the broader context of Derrida's argument, it is clear that Habermas did not "read him," or at least did not reproduce his many qualifications, much less the crux of his argument.

This argument for Derrida turns on Austin's recognition that performative utterances, unlike constative ones, which aim to constitute or state a matter or fact, (e.g., the library closes at 6 pm) are distinct from claims that can be easily measured for their truth-value, since their "semantic content" relies on what they mean in different contexts. Derrida's concern, and indeed the point of his argument, is that Austin has not accounted for the how "structure of locution," of speech acts in general, always and already entails iterations that lack any clear, pure, and determinate meaning.[691] This "impurity" of performatives, however, is also a condition of possibility. As he writes:

> For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception,"non-serious,' citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative?[692]

Derrida's point is not to deny that performatives can succeed in conveying meaning, but that every event or utterance is singular and requires a repetition or citation of meaning that can always lead to confusion.[693] His critique of Austin is therefore one that seeks to

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688 Derrida, "Signature," 8.

689 Ibid., 9.

690 Ibid., 12.

691 Ibid., 14.

692 Ibid., 17.

693 Ibid.

set the very idea of the "relative purity" of performatives, as Austin puts it, on its head. Here it is worth quoting him at some length:

> Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, one ought to construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, assuming that such a project is tenable and can result in an exhaustive program, a question I hold in abeyance here. In such a typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance [*l'énonciation*]. Above all, at that point, we will be dealing with different kinds of marks or chains of iterable marks and not with an opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular and original event-utterances, on the other. The first consequence of this will be the following: given that structure of iteration, the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content. … The "non-serious," the *oratio obliqua* will no longer be able to be excluded, as Austin wished, from 'ordinary' language.[694]

In other words, if consciousness can never be totally present in a performative utterance, then the concept of context that Austin tries to account for cannot claim to have found a foundation for what is "ordinary" in these types of speech acts, which remain trapped in the "metaphysics of presence" or logocentrism. This idea, which runs along with the critical thrust of Derrida's entire argument, is made plain in his conclusion. If writing and speech are not the mere "transference of meaning," but rather always caught in chains of iteration, then these traces must be accounted for. If Derrida is correct, as his argument aims to be, then "the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would be only an effect, and should be analyzed as such."[695] This "double-gesture" as he calls it, of affirming while displacing classical structures, therefore seeks, in short, to intervene in the field of conceptual oppositions in order to account for their differences.[696]

Toward an Ethic of Discussion

In his afterward to *Limited Inc*., "Toward an Ethic of Discussion," Derrida reconsiders his debate with Searle over a decade after their initial exchange, clarifying his position in response to questions by the volume's editor, Gerald Graff. It is here in this text where Derrida responds to Habermas in a lengthy footnote, couched within the broader context of his debate with Searle and his reception among certain American critics of his work. Derrida opens by noting "a certain uneasiness" with the "violence" of his reply to Searle in the essay "Limited Inc.," that first appeared in *Glyph* in 1977, while stressing that he felt it necessary to take a strong tone in response to the "brutality" of Searle's reading of his work. For this reason, Derrida notes, the subtitle of *Limited Inc.* could have been "politeness and politics," underlining how "deconstruction" is, contrary to its critics charge, invested in an ethic of discussion.[697]

Derrida underlines his concept of "undecidability" in the language of an "ethical-political responsibility" and differentiates his position from dialectical and "calculable"

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694 Ibid., 18.

695 Ibid., 20.

696 Ibid., 21.

697 Derrida, "Afterward: Toward and Ethics of Discussion," Limited Inc., 113.

modes of thought, arguing that it is only by paying attention to the "undecidable" that the "field of decision" can open up.[698] This point is nicely laid out as he attempts to clarify his critique of binaries such as serious/nonserious, promisive/nonpromisive, etc.:

> To this oppositional logic, which is necessarily, legitimately, a logic of 'all or nothing' and without which the distinction and the limits of a concept would have no chance, I oppose nothing, least of all a logic of *approximation* … a simple empiricism of difference in degree; rather I add a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of 'general theory,' or rather another discourse, another 'logic' that accounts for the impossibility of concluding such a "general theory."[699]

Here Derrida clearly acknowledges the practical function of binary distinctions when it comes to questions of language and meaning and places them under the "logic of approximation," while stressing the "supplementary" aim of his approach, adding that "[i]t is more 'scientific' to take this limit … into account and to treat it as a point of departure for rethinking this or that received concept of 'science' and of 'objectivity.'"[700] Since neither Searle nor Austin account for "borderline cases," he continues, they are able to pretend that there is relative simplicity where there is none, adding that they do not "recognize the unclarity of their good old *Aufklarung*," and are thus "dangerous dogmatists and tedious obscurantists."[701] Part of the problem for Derrida, (and here we can see a nod in Habermas's direction, if only peripherally) is that Searle, Austin and the more "secularized" language philosophers since Wittgenstein, fail to recognize that by describing a certain purity or "ethicity" in language they are producing a "metaphysics," though one, he readily admits, that is inescapable.[702] Contrary to Searle's criticism, (and Habermas's) Derrida points out that he had in fact previously acknowledged the "necessary presuppositions" of performative language use and "intentionality"[703] and wanted to stress, rather, "only a structural limit to the *telos*, to the accomplishment (fulfillment) and to the hegemony of said intentionality."[704]

Leading up to his footnote on Habermas, Derrida looks to clarify his distinction between fiction and nonfictional discourse, noting that he *does* distinguish between law, constitutions, declarations of rights, grammar, and the like from novels, and that his claim is that they are all "fictions" in the sense that they "are not things found in nature" but rather founded by convention, which always creates a border or limit that works by

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698 Derrida, "Afterward," 116.

699 Ibid., 117.

700 Ibid., 118.

701 Ibid., 119.

702 As Derrida elaborates: "They exclude, ignore, relegate to the margins other conditions no less essential to ethics in general, whether of *this given* ethics or of *another*, or of a law that would not answer to Western concepts of ethics, right, or politics. Such conditions, which may be anethical with respect to any given ethics, are not therefore anti-ethical in general. They can even open or recall the opening of another ethics, another right, another 'declaration of rights,' transformation of constitutions, etc. It is such conditions that interest me when I write of the iterability and of all that is tied to this quasi concept in a discourse and in other texts that I cannot reproduce here." Ibid., 122.

703 Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c …," 105.

704 Derrida, "Afterward," 130.

excluding some "other." It is for this reason, Derrida argues, why the study of literature has much to teach about questions of rights and law.[705] Turning to Habermas, Derrida stresses that he has never reduced concepts to metaphors, but instead sought to deconstruct all concepts, including philosophy, science and rhetoric, in order to show their *aporias* or limits. Here it is worth quoting Derrida at some length as he addresses Habermas directly in order to capture both his arguments as well as the tone in which they were levelled:

> The most massive and most recent example of the confusion that consists in attributing confusions to me in places where quite simply I have not been read is furnished by Habermas, precisely concerning the debates with Searle. The second of the two chapters devoted to me in his latest book is entitled 'Excursus …". Although I am not cited a single time, although not one of my texts is even indicated as a reference in a chapter of twenty-five pages that claims to be a long critique of my work, phrases such as the following can be found: '… in his business of deconstruction, Derrida does not proceed analytically…. Instead [he] proceeds by a critique of style …' (sic! p.189) … "That is false. I say *false*, as opposed to true, and I defy Habermas to prove the presence in my work of that 'primacy of rhetoric' which he attributes to me with the three propositions that follow and which he then purports to criticize (pp. 190ff.). With a stupefying tranquility, here is the philosopher of consensus, of dialogue and of discussion, the philosopher who claims to distinguish between science and literary criticism, daring not only to criticize without citing or giving a reference for twenty-five pages, but even worse, justifying his nonreading and his atmospheric or hemispheric choices by this incredible alibi: 'Since Derrida does not belong to those philosophers who like to argue … it is expedient to take a closer look at his disciples in literary criticism within the Anglo-Saxon climate of argument in order to see whether this thesis really can be held.'[706]

Whatever we might say about Habermas's reading of Derrida, it is clear from these lines that Derrida's own rebuttal was "a little polemical" to say the least, as he noted after their rapprochement, and does not leave Habermas much room for an immediate response that would have likely set things on a more "communicative" path.

Derrida adds further that if he insists on taking this strong line against the likes of Habermas and Searle, it is precisely because of a tendency among philosophers like them to accuse him of "performative contradiction" while evoking the language of dialogue, logic and proof without having clearly read him or taken up the substance of his arguments.[707] While Derrida is certainly on solid ground in his claim that Habermas had not read him in the sense of engaging with the substance of his arguments, as the above analysis of "Signature Event Context" should make clear, Derrida might also be accused of the same here inasmuch as he does not take note of the precise way in which Habermas believes that he has engaged in performative contradiction (i.e., by critiquing Habermas's theories of pragmatics and communicative reason). Moreover, it is

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[705] Ibid., 133-34.

[706] Derrida, "Afterward," 134, n. 9.

[707] Derrida continues: "Everywhere, in particular in the United States and in Europe, the self-declared philosopher, theoreticians, and ideologists of communication, dialogue, and consensus, of univocity and transparency, those who claim ceaselessly to reinstate the classical ethics of proof, discussion, and exchange, are most often those who excuse themselves from attentively reading and listening to the other, who demonstrate precipitation and dogmatism, and who no longer respect the elementary rules of philology and of interpretation, confounding science and chatter as through they had not the slightest tastes for communication or rather as though they were afraid of it, at bottom," Ibid., n.9 (157-58).

unfortunate in the context and interest of this debate (at least in retrospect) that Derrida did not spend more time addressing the ways in which Habermas did in fact critique his work in the first essay in *PDM* and chose to focus his comments here on the "Excurses," which likely contributed to the perception that Habermas had not read him at all, rather than the more nuanced critique of a partial reading and an unfair assimilation of his work with certain scholars of American literature.[708]

While much of the dust has long settled on this debate, the lines that are often drawn around a "Derridian" or "Habermasian" approach to critical theory remain under-developed, as do the ways in which their theories might work constructively together. Since Habermas is the focus of this dissertation and since Derrida's work is, in my estimation, more easily grafted onto his systematic theoretical model, (a claim that Derrida himself alludes to, as I have noted above) I will focus the next two sections highlighting some ways that Derrida's approach can be productively brought to bear on Habermas's work. Here it is worth underlining a few further points from Derrida that speak to this complementary or supplementary approach. In an attempt to clarify the definition (or one of the definitions) of deconstruction, Derrida repeats his famous and misunderstood line: "there is nothing outside of the text" (il n'y a pas de hors-texte), and simplifies it as suggesting that, "there is nothing outside context."[709] In this sense, "texts" can refer to anything and must be understood in their singularity if theoreticians are to be as precise and "scientific" as possible. As he writes:

> I want to recall that undecidibility is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive—syntactical or rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc.). They are *pragmatically* determined.[710]

In attempt to turn pragmatics on its head, then, Derrida argues for what he had elsewhere referred to as a "pragrammatolgy," indicating "the intersection between of a pragmatics and a grammatology."[711] It is here, with this idea, that I take my impulse from Derrida as a supplement to Habermas's work.

Before turning to Derrida and Habermas's joint-interviews on the events of 9/11 in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* as the primary example of a collaboration of sorts between them, it will be useful to underline a few of the "bridging efforts" that I have touched on above in order to put a finer point on how one might go about using their distinct critical theories in a collaborative sort of way. As noted in the first section by Richard Bernstein and Simon Critchley, Derrida's work can be rightly said to be lacking in a firm sociological or "social scientific" grounding. This is not so much a criticism of Derrida as an acknowledgement of what kind of work he does and is interested in doing.

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[708] It is worth pointing out that Derrida does acknowledge Habermas's first essay and his use of citations there, though this is only in passing as he does not deal with their contents. As he puts it, "Of course, I am not suggesting that it suffices to cite a few phrases or to mention some titles of books in order to argue seriously, to comprehend and enlighten a thought. To be convinced of this it will be sufficient to read Habermas's preceding chapter ("Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Derrida'), in which the apparatus of several footnotes protects no better against an at least equal confusion," n. 9, 158.

[709] Ibid., 136.

[710] Ibid., 148.

[711] Ibid., 148, n. 16.

As we will see, his deconstructive efforts can be productively brought to bear on existing structures without undermining them, though it could be said that they work most effectively when they are employed in the interest of improving reconstructive models such as those of Habermas. One advantage to Habermas's approach, in particular his emphasis on intersubjective agreement is, as Martin Morris puts it, that it "frees us from the aporias associated with the reification of language."[712] That is to say, Habermas's theory of formal pragmatics and discourse ethics provides a consistent framework for testing communicative interactions. Whatever its weak spots, this framework of validity claims is one that can help orient dialogical disputes and communicative breakdowns by stressing the need to redeem one's claims on the basis of accurate empirical knowledge, (truth) existing principles, (normative rightness) and sincerity. (when one's claims are validated through one's actions) As Morris also observes, however, affirming the "radical indeterminacy" of the lifeworld need not necessarily lead to an affirmation of power over validity and meaning,[713] but can help to "historicise the allegedly necessary idealisations that are assumed in all 'normal' (as opposed to fictional) discourse."[714] Martin Jay makes a similar point when he observes that in rejecting the classical Saussurian priority of language over speech, (i.e., language as rules that pre-exist all speech acts and are understood to be independent of utterances) Habermas has "simply reversed the hierarchy,"[715] stressing the pragmatic over the structural level and "normal" understanding over "world-disclosing speech."[716] As social conflicts are just as likely to be constituted by the latter aspects of these pairs, without close attention to the infrastructure of language-use and its "world disclosing" effects, Habermas's critique misses a crucial level in need of rigorous analysis and conceptual repair.

Drawing on an example from Slavoj Žižek on the overthrow of Ceausescu in Romania, where rebels waved a communist flag with the star cut out in the middle, Morris observes that:

> It seems impossible for Habermas to account for this kind of space in-between, this khora as Derrida calls it, without undermining the very structure which supports his theory of human communication and understanding. This phenomenological difference in accounting for 'spacing'—for the background or 'placing' of language and all its productions—thus identifies one of the profound differences between Habermasian critical theory and deconstruction.[717]

This critique by Morris finds an earlier iteration in comments made by Thomas McCarthy in a footnote from his 1990 essay on Derrida, which was largely sympathetic to Habermas and was the first thoroughgoing critique to my knowledge by a scholar familiar with both thinkers. McCarthy draws parallels between Derrida's comments on the necessity of logocentrism, despite its problems, while asking, "Are the idealizations built into language more adequately conceived as pragmatic presuppositions of

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712 Martin Morris, "Between Deliberation and Deconstruction: The Condition of Post-National Democracy," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 239.

713 Morris, Ibid., 239.

714 Ibid., 246.

715 Jay, "The Debates over Performative Contradiction: Habermas versus the Poststructuralists," 273.

716 Jay, Ibid., 275.

717 Morris, "Between Deliberation and Deconstruction," 243.

communicative interaction or as a kind of structural lure that has ceaselessly to be resisted? Or as both?"[718] This impulse to engage both of these modes of critique finds one of its more productive iterations in an essay by Axel Honneth, where he draws upon Derrida's essay "The Politics of Friendship" in order to highlight the limits of Habermas's priority of questions of justice over concrete forms of ethical life. As he writes, which is worth quoting at some length:

> What interests him primarily is the question of how two intersubjective attitudes that refer to different kinds of human responsibility form a synthesis. In every relation of friendship, Derrida claims, there is first a dimension of the relationship to the other in which he or she appears in the role of the concrete, unrepresentable individual person. A principle of responsibility governs here, one that has asymmetrical features because I am obligated to respond to my friend's pressing request or entreaty without considering reciprocal duties. But if the relationship were determined solely by such a principle an asymmetrical, one-sided obligation, it would no longer be friendship but already love. Only in affection, which is untroubled by any other considerations, do I experience the other as a person to whom I am obligated unconditionally, that is, beyond every moral responsibility. That is why, for Derrida, a second dimension of intersubjectivity is a factor in friendship, a dimension in which the other person appears in the role of the generalized other. In this moment of generality those institutionally embodied moral principles emerge which regulate within a society the responsibility—according to symmetrically distributed rights and duties—I have for all other persons.[719]

Honneth's appreciative reflections here, written in 1995, nicely anticipate the rapprochement between Derrida and Habermas and highlight similar problems raised by Benhabib in her essay on the generalized vs. the concrete other; that is, on the necessity for a more concrete interrogation of alterity and otherness to be measured against those necessary generalized models that enable communication to take place.

Philosophy in a Time of Terror

In her preface to *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Giovanna Borradori makes the rather insightful, if obvious, observation that philosophy books are rarely conceived at a precise point in time[720] and often take years or even decades for their conception. As significant events in the 21st century tend to happen in real time and are mediated for the consumption of mass viewing audiences, their representations are more prevalent than ever before and, while unequal dynamics of power remain, they are increasingly subject to hitherto unpredictable shifts in light of the rapid and exponential growth in communications technologies. This point can be usefully illustrated if we were to ask, for example, what if the attacks of 9/11 had taken place in 2011, when the "Arab Spring" and "Occupy" movements emerged, and was *also* mediated through social media in addition to that presented in the mainstream? From a technological perspective, the media coverage of 9/11 already represents a by-gone era of conventional images without the now-widespread use of video sharing (e.g., Youtube) and discussion forums (e.g.,

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[718] McCarthy, "The Politics of the Ineffable," 102, n. 27.

[719] Honneth, "The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism," *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, 308.

[720] Borradori, "Introduction: Terrorism and the Legacy of Enlightenment—Habermas and Derrida," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, ed., Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix.

Facebook) that constitute new public spheres of social interaction. Despite these innovations, there was something "new" about 9/11in that it was witnessed in "real time" by the entire world and played in an endless loop in the weeks, months, and years that followed. In this way, a new iconography—the planes, the falling towers, the "bearded terrorists"—was born, which helped to condition the discourse surrounding this "event" and the response by governments at home and on the international stage. In the intervening years, this discourse has contributed and been re-inscribed in mass movements around the world, wars in the Middle East and in Africa, and heightened tensions in Western countries that are often marked along religio-ethnic lines.

While neither Derrida nor Habermas is a politician or military strategist, they were, during this time, two leading figures in European philosophy with strong personal connections to the United States. Moreover, their interests in political theory, especially in the case of Habermas, and in the politics of language-use, in the case of Derrida, called not only for their reflections on this event of "world historical impact,"[721] but also for their thoughts on what it meant for their own philosophical projects? Did it change or undermine anything in their thinking or perhaps reaffirm their positions more than ever? While these questions require a more serious and in-depth treatment than I am able to provide here, it is of little doubt that 9/11 had an impact on the direction of their research. In the case of Derrida, question of democracy, cosmopolitanism, and especially sovereignty came to the forefront in his work with texts such as *Rogues* and *The Beast and the Sovereign* (Volumes 1&2) up until his death in December 2004. In the case of Habermas, a considerable shift occurred as questions of religion in the public sphere took centre-stage in his writings, which is where they remain to this day.

In the context of these interviews and of this dissertation as a whole, it is instructive to compare their responses for at least two reasons. First, it highlights their willingness (indeed, eagerness) to engage philosophically with contemporary events and offer reflections before the dust has settled. In this sense, their thoughts on this affair were largely filtered through past and then-current ideas in their work, without the benefit of hindsight and thus a more historically informed analysis. These interviews thus represent a test case for the productive use-value of philosophy "in a time of terror" by asking what it can do and what is it worth? Second, given the collaborative nature of this project, where both Derrida and Habermas were asked similar sets of questions on the same topic, this text represents the most striking example for comparing and contrasting their theoretical positions, exploring where they overlap and where they diverge. Some common points of interest will converge upon an affirmation of a certain ideal of democracy and of international law, urging constraint and reflection for governments around the world, while differences will appear on the ways that they reflect upon the images, the language used, (e.g., "terrorism" and "fundamentalism") and the ways in which they take-up primary concepts of political-philosophical import, such as toleration and religion.

Habermas opens his remarks in an interview entitled, "Fundamentalism and Terror," with some biographical reflections, noting how he spent two months in Manhattan just after the attacks and was able to experience first-hand the difficultly in mounting any kind of criticism in public, especially surrounding the invasion of

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[721] Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 26.

Afghanistan. Recalling such incidents as the anthrax scares and the plane crash in Queens, NY, on November 12, 2001, Habermas notes an air of paranoia in the US, where "people seemed ready for the worst," which was reflected in the "senseless calls to 'be alert,'" and of the widespread sense of "living at a turning point in history."[722] While Habermas is circumspect about Borradori's initial question on whether 9/11 represents an "unprecedented event" that will radically alter how "we" see ourselves, ("we" presumably referring to "us" in the Euro-West) stating that only "effective history" can measure such things with the privilege of hindsight, his interest in the present context revolves around the West's response to these attacks, asking whether the "fragile coalition against terrorism" will "be able to advance the transition from classical international law to a cosmopolitan order."[723] Here, in a nutshell, is the crux of his concern—that is, whether this new situation will be able to move in the direction of a more unified global order that could be said to reflect the ideals of reason and justice, or whether the West's reaction will fall back upon an older, more insular and unilateral approach that both he and Derrida would like to avoid? Habermas's reply is thus an attempt to offer solutions that might help steer a different course.

After briefly addressing the "symbolic force" of destroying the Twin towers in New York City, and how it "literally took place in front of the 'universal eyewitness' of a global public,"[724] Habermas turns his attention to what is distinct about these "new terrorists" and how we might conceptualize a response to this "new" threat? While it should be noted that Habermas is not nearly as systematic in this interview format as he is in his usual writings, the arch of his replies can be distilled as follows: 1) reaffirming the ideals of cosmopolitanism and international law as necessary frameworks for addressing problems of this nature; 2) addressing certain cognitive mentalities, (which I will characterize as "quasi-dialectical"[725] problems) that he deems necessary for a communicative use of reason in public debates; and 3) defending his position against a certain type of "deconstruction." Here I will argue that while Habermas does indeed offer some insightful ideas that point in the direction of productive solutions, his "quasi-dialectal" approach and misreading of what "deconstruction" can and (perhaps) should contribute to these and related debates, results in a narrow analysis of what is at stake in a critical discourse on "fundamentalism and terror," and offers a striking example of the limitations of his theory, which will become apparent when I turn to Derrida's reply.

Addressing the first point above, it will be useful to note that Habermas had controversially lent his support to the first Gulf War, which he details in an interview with Michael Haller, which was published in a series of interviews in *The Past as Future*. (1991 [1994]) As Peter Hohendahl points out in his forward to this volume, Habermas's cautious support for the UN/US intervention had much to do with the political context of

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722 Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 26.

723 Ibid., 27.

724 Ibid., 28.

725 By "quasi-dialectical" I refer to the conceptual use of binary pairs to reveal imminent tensions in theory and in the social world, which Habermas wants to think about together in order to point toward similar logics that operate within them. In this way, it is not dialectical in the Hegelian-Marxian sense of looking for opposing pairs in order to find a synthesis, but rather drawing upon common distinctions (e.g., faith and knowledge; naturalism and religion; modernization vs. fundamentalism) in order to highlight tensions and split the differences, as it were, though often more to one or the other side.

Germany in the early 1990s, where questions of reunification, Germany's involvement in supplying Saddam Hussein with chemical weapons, and the threat posed to Israel were front and centre in the debate and severely divided those on the German left. Distinguishing pros and cons on four levels, including Western oil interests, the colonial past, the use of chemical weapons by Hussein, and the justification for the intervention through the United Nations, (though carried out by the US and its allies) Hohendahl stresses that much of Habermas's decision came down to the question of legitimacy, where in the wake of the collapse of the communist block, he held an "interest in the possibility of an international peacekeeping force that will ultimately transform the nature of foreign relations.[726] Drawing attention to this earlier context is instructive for at least two reasons. First, it highlights Habermas's long-standing willingness to comment on current affairs, without the privilege of hindsight, and, second, points to a conceptual problem that he has only partially remedied in his post-9/11 reflections. Two brief quotes from his interview will be instructive for helping to situate his position. The first has to do with the idea that the universality of human rights has its foundation in "universal world religions," (none are listed specifically) which are said to converge around certain core moral intuitions, such as equality, respect, and the integrity of the individual person, which establishes a basis for an "overlapping consensus," following Rawls, for norms that might lead to a peaceful coexistence.[727] Habermas goes on to add:

> The philosophical discussion on these topics is in a state of flux. But I'm convinced that Rawls is right, that the basic content of the moral principles embodied in international law is in harmony with the normative substance of the great world historical prophetic doctrines and metaphysical worldviews.[728]

In the paragraph that follows, Habermas notes that such worldviews cannot be closed-off by "sectarian isolation" nor from the "intellectual content of European modernity" and must meet the challenges of pluralism without falling into one of two traps. The first trap is what he calls a "shopworn liberalism," while the second "runs through secular postmetaphysical thinking itself." He continues:

> Here the counterpart to religious fundamentalism forms the scepticism of a self-destructive critique of reason, one that senses behind every universal validity claim the dogmatic will to domination of a cunning concealed particularism. Ever since the influential work of Carl Schmitt, this antihumanistic form of thought has stamped itself on the intellectuals of the right, and unfortunately of the left as well, particular here in Germany.[729]

Although space does not permit me a detailed examination of the broader context of these remarks, which do, of course, need to be carefully considered, they are revealing of certain continuities in Habermas's thinking today. In the first instance, Habermas clearly sees a normative kernel of *moral rightness* in the so-called "world religions" in the form

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726 Peter Hohendahl, "Forward," in *The Past as Future*, trans. & ed. Peter Dews (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xiii.

727 Habermas, "The Gulf War: Catalyst for a New German Normalcy? in *The Past as Future*, trans. Max Pensky (Omaha, NB: The University of Nebraska Press), 20.

728 Habermas, "The Gulf War," 20-1.

729 Ibid., 21.

of equality and moral autonomy and thus signals in no uncertain terms that he does not see "religion" as the main problem facing modern conflicts as its "moral intuitions" are compatible with notions of universal rights and reason. The problems in this instance are identified as tepid forms of liberalism, (a point upon which he does not elaborate)[730] and the "quasi-dialectic" between "religious fundamentalism" and sceptical critiques of reason. In all cases, these positions are seen to hinder the pursuit of grounding universal validity claims and must be called out and taken to task. As will be discussed momentarily, much of these ideas remain in Habermas's thinking today, though with some important modifications.

Returning to "Fundamentalism and Terror," it is clear that Habermas is much more circumspect about the role and legitimacy of the United Nations in the wake of 9/11, calling it a "paper tiger" whose credibility has been shattered by constant manipulation at the hands of powerful states,[731] while noting that European powers seemed incapable of seeing beyond their own interests in forging a viable response, adding that the Bush administration is acting like a "callous superpower,' especially in its rejections of an international criminal count in favour of military tribunals, its refusal to sign the Biological Weapons convention and its termination of the ABM Treaty.[732] All of these positions, for Habermas, reflect an "old style" politics that is yet to prove itself capable of lending legitimacy to international institutions, legal structures, and military ventures that could claim some credibility as a possible way forward. In this context, then, Habermas seeks to draw upon the insights of his own critical theoretical model, without the affirmation of an existing institutional body as he had previously done during the Gulf War, (however cautiously and provisionally) pointing instead toward what he sees as the kind of cognitive presuppositions that will be necessary to address these new realities, including a reference to constitutional principles. These cognitive presuppositions revolve around a series of conceptual pairs that can be detected in Habermas's remarks, including modernization vs. fundamentalism, the Arab world vs. the West/the US, pluralism vs. neoconservativsm and terrorism, tolerance vs. hospitality and deconstruction vs. hermeneutics.

Given the apparent inability of existing institutions to address these "new terrorists," who fight in a decentralized manner and who, unlike previous conflicts involving nation-states "with professed political objectives in order to conquer power," "allow their religious motives of a fundamentalist kind to be known, the calculation of the danger of this new threat is deemed "impossible." Moreover, they are said to pursue a

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730 The full reference reads: "Openness to the world, however, mustn't lead to the apathy of a shopworn liberalism, as the example of Johann Baptist Metz's opposition to the Eurocentrism of the Catholic Church Illustrates. See Habermas, "The Gulf War" *The Past as Future*, 21.

731 He continues, "The discrepancy between what should and what can be done, between justice and power, sheds a negative light both on the credibility of the UN and on the practice of intervention of unauthorized states that merely usurp a mandate … This unclear jumble of classical power politics, consideration for regional alliances, and attempts at a cosmopolitan regime not only strengthens the opposing interests between North and South, East and West within the UN. It also fosters the superpower's apprehension toward all normative restrictions of its scope of discretion." Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 39.

732 Ibid., 27.

program that is intent only on "the engineering of destruction and insecurity."[733] One problem or aporia here, then, is that the response to such attacks risks undermining constitutional states through increased militarization, security measures, and a use of force that risks being ineffective and potentially making the situation worse. (Needless to say, it should not be controversial to suggest that these fears have come true, more or less, in Western democracies, in the intervening years) Here we may provisionally note a few problems with Habermas appraisal of these "new terrorists" and his interpretations of their alleged "religious motives of a fundamentalist kind," and ask what or whom constitutes a "terrorist"? On what criteria is this determination based and what role does "religion" have to play? Moreover, why are these actions, *a posteriori*, deemed beyond the pale of reason and calculation? In a trivial sense, Habermas is surely correct: there was no evident state actor behind these attacks, nor any professed territorial ambitions, (at least not in the US) while the professed religious motives of the perpetrators of 9/11 were plain for all to see. Anticipating Derrida's reply, this line of questions is found to be lacking, especially when it comes to his definition of "fundamentalism" and "terror."

In response to Boradorri's question about his classification of fundamentalism as a modern phenomenon in his October 14, 2001 lecture "Faith and Knowledge,"[734] Habermas admits that the term has a "pejorative ring to it," while arguing that it characterizes a "peculiar mindset," which "insists on the political imposition of its own convictions and reasons, even when they are far from being rationally acceptable," adding that, "[t]his holds especially for religious beliefs." He goes on to note that fundamentalism should be distinguished from the relationship between dogmatism and orthodoxy, which is represented by institutions like the Vatican, and determines this relationship with reasons, however problematic they may be.[735] Habermas follows these comments with some rather curious remarks, which require careful consideration. He writes:

> Such orthodoxy first veers toward fundamentalism when the guardians and representatives of the true faith ignore the epistemic situation of a pluralistic society and insist—even to the point of violence—on the universally binding character and political acceptance of their doctrine.[736]

Here he seems to be suggesting that fundamentalism is a doctrine deprived of any legitimately recognized authority, by which we can infer one that acknowledges the "fact of pluralism," along with the supremacy of science within its own domain, and the need for a secular state. While these lines are not problematic in and of themselves, problems emerge when placed on a continuum with the remarks that immediately follow, which are worth quoting at some length:

> Until the onset of modernity, the prophetic teachings were also world religions in the sense that they were able to expand within the cognitive horizons of ancient empires perceived from within as all-encompassing worlds. The 'universalism' of those empires, whose peripheries seemed to blur beyond their boundaries, provided the appropriate background for the exclusive claim to truth by the world religions. However, in the modern conditions of an accelerated growth in complexity,

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733 Ibid.

734 See Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge," in *The Future of Human Nature*, 101-115.

735 Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 31.

736 Ibid., 31.

> such an exclusive claim to truth can no longer be naïvely maintained. In Europe, the confessional schism and the secularization of society have compelled religious belief to reflect on its nonexclusive place within a universal discourse shared with other religions and limited by scientifically generated secular knowledge. At the same time, the awareness of a religion that learned to see itself through the eyes of others has had important political implications. The believers could from then on realize why they had to renounce violence, in general, and refrain from state power, in particular, for the purpose of enforcing religious claims. This cognitive thrust made religious tolerance, as well as the separation between state and church possible for the first time.[737]

In unpacking this statement it should be underlined that for Habermas "fundamentalism" is not merely a social effect of a seemingly rigid mentality, but also a philosophical-anthropological statement about the "nature" of certain groups who have yet to embrace the same cognitive learning process as those countries in the West that benefitted from the legacies of the Protestant Reformation. The first problem to flag here is the blanket assumption that the "world religions" in the time of "pre-modernity" saw themselves in terms of "all-encompassing worlds." While it is true in the trivial sense that the rise of modern science contributed to structural differentiations that helped to facilitate a separation of confessional powers from "state" authority, it does not follow that this is also true for distinct groups within those societies, as Habermas would no doubt acknowledge.Without evidence of the uniformity of these "pre-modern" worldviews, his point remains controversial at best, and a grand "macro" generalization devoid of any meaningful context, at worst. A second and related point is Habermas's macro-assimilation of "religious belief" as a primary mover of violent acts, as though motives can be reduced to mere belief. Here we find what I term modernization/fundamentalism binary, where the alleged motivations of the latter, driven by a rigid religious belief system, are measured against an ability (or lack thereof) to acknowledge the authority of secular states, scientific knowledge, and the "fact of pluralism." In Habermas's words:

> I would explain the frozen features of such a mentality in terms of the repression of striking cognitive dissonances. This repression occurs when the innocence of the epistemological situation of an all-encompassing world perspective is lost and when, under the cognitive conditions of scientific knowledge and of religious pluralism, a return to the exclusivity of premodern belief attitudes is propagated.[738]

Explaining fundamentalism on such terms one gets the sense that the primary reason for these attacks is the result of a cognitive deficiency and an inability to adapt to modern realities, resulting in a violent outburst of irrational violence. Of course Habermas is much more sophisticated than this, though his several qualification of this point remain trapped within this intellectualist framework (i.e., one that privileges the manifest content of the speech acts of *some* who fall under this heading) that leads him to propose solutions through a reimaging of these "quasi-dialectical" problems. While not without merit, I will claim in my reflections on Derrida's response, that this approach is lacking.

Habermas goes on to suggest that part of the problem of fundamentalism can be attributed to an uneven modernization, where the globalization of financial markets and the expansion of "foreign direct investments," has split up the world into winner and

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737 Ibid.

738 Ibid., 32.

looser countries, noting that to the "Arab world," the US reflects an "insult to their self-confidence," while adding that it serves as a scapegoat to their "very real experiences of loss, suffered by populations torn out of their cultural traditions during processes of accelerated modernization." While briefly acknowledging the "long colonial history" as a destabilizing factor in the case of Afghanistan at the start of this interview, the "Arab world" is homogenized here as constituting a single entity and single mentality that, while victim to inequities of global economic systems, is represented largely as an externality of Western hubris, unable to live up to its better ideals. As he puts it:

> Let's admit it—the West presents itself in a form deprived of any normative kernel as long as its concern for human rights only concerns the attempt at opening new free markets and as long as, at home, it allows free reign to the neoconservative division of labor between religious fundamentalism and a kind of evacuating depleting secularization.[739]

Within the confines of this quasi-dialectic of a failed modernization, fundamentalism and terrorism is represented as a by-product of the West's shortcomings resulting in a preponderance of "pre-modern beliefs attitudes," which must lack, we can only assume, an ability to reason—hence his claims at the beginning of this interview that the "new terrorists" are only motived by "destruction" and that dealing with these problems is largely "incalculable." Habermas does offer one important qualification here, urging that, "we should not overlook the political motives we encounter in forms of religious fanaticism," noting that some who are drawn into the rhetoric of "holy wars" had previously been "secular nationalists."[740] These qualifications, however, are presented almost as an afterthought, while the weight of his analysis leans upon striking the right balance between "cognitive dissonances" that require serious adjustments.

Among these adjustments, and in reference to Borradori's remarks about his ideas of "translation" and a "search for a common language" across cultures, Habermas notes a few crucial structural problems in need of radical repair, without which current alienations and distortions in communication will continue unabated. These include the improvement of living conditions and "a sensible relief from oppression and fear" so that trust may be established and "a broadly effective enlightenment extend[ed] into media, schools, and homes." At present, the image that the West presents to the rest of the world is one of "unbounded capitalism" that results in "devastating stratification."[741] It is here, at this point, that the differences between Habermas and Derrida emerge most clearly.

Habermas claims that violence "begins with a distortion of communication" and can only be repaired through recourse to processes of communicative restoration—on the level of institutions and in day-to-day interactions in the public sphere. In defense of this position and in response to Borradori's query as to whether such notions of communicative "solidarity" are not always on "our terms," Habermas appears to be replying to Derrida directly, though his name is never mentioned. As he writes:

> The constant deconstructive suspicion of our Eurocentric prejudices raises a counter-question: why should the hermeneutic model of understanding, which functions in everyday conversations and which since Humboldt has been methodologically developed from the practice of interpreting

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739 Ibid., 33.

740 Ibid., 34.

741 Ibid., 36.

> texts, suddenly break down beyond the boundaries of our own culture, of own way of life and tradition? An interpretation must in each case bridge the gap between the hermeneutic preunderstanding of both sides—whether the cultural and spatiotemporal distances are shorter or longer, or the semantic differences smaller or larger. All interpretations are translations *in nuce*. … One can also show with Gadamerian arguments that the idea of a self-contained universe of meanings, which is incommensurable with other universes of this type, is an inconsistent concept.[742]

Habermas certainly has a point here, after all, engaging with a "hermeneutic preunderstanding" in contexts of communicative interaction should not be limited to one culture and, moreover, has much to commend it in terms of a telos for engaging the "other." What Habermas seems to be overlooking here, however, is that "deconstruction" need not undermine or even deny the viability of these pragmatic ideals for communicative interaction, but rather seeks, as Derrida will argue, to highlight the ways in which language is always unstable and calls for a greater attention to *this* problem. More importantly, as I argued at the close of chapter four in reference to Maeve Cooke's critique of Habermas, his proposed model for combating distortions in communication rests on a recourse to advanced modes of argumentation and presupposes that other, more pressing "distortions"—in language, understanding, and meaning—have *already* or potentially *could be* resolved by willing interlocutors. His remarks that follow neatly bear out this position:

> Struggling with the difficulties of understanding, people must, step by step, widen their original perspectives and ultimately bring them together. And they can succeed in such a 'fusion of horizons' by virtue of their peculiar capacity to take up the roles of 'speaker' and 'hearer.' Taking up these roles in a dialogue, they engage in a fundamental symmetry, which, at bottom, all speech situations require. When a native speaker has learned how to use the system of personal pronouns, she has acquired competence in exchanging the perspectives between first and second person. And in the course of mutual perspective-taking there can develop a common horizon of background assumptions in which both sides accomplish an interpretation that is not ethnocentrically adopted or converted but, rather, *intersubjectively* shared.[743]

Once again, Habermas has a point. Ideal contexts of communicative interaction among competent speakers can indeed elicit the development of a "common horizon of background assumptions," which, when combined with his reflections on the necessary cognitive presupposition that are required for communicative engagement, (both here and elsewhere, and especially in relation to religion in the public sphere) would no doubt enhance the conditions for meaningful dialogue. One suspects here that Habermas is still under the influence of his argument in the mid-1980s, as he seeks to defend his position against some imagined all-or-nothing "deconstruction" where "communication gets ontologized," as he puts it, and functions to prohibit "the critical power to put a stop to violence," which "can only dwell in the telos of mutual understanding and in our orientation toward this goal."[744] These persistent fears of Habermas's, buttressed by a quasi-dialectical model that seeks to resolve conflicts through analyzing opposing conceptions and showing how they become patholgized and distorted, finds no better

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742 Ibid., 36-7.

743 Ibid., 37.

744 Ibid., 38.

representation than in his closing remarks on the question of toleration, which will be usefully contrasted in the next section with Derrida's notion of hospitality.

Habermas acknowledges the problems inherent in the concept of tolerance and how it was practiced for centuries in a "paternalistic spirit." Here he sets up a binary or limit on this question between "militant democracy," which rejects "freedom for the enemies of freedom," and "straight deconstruction," both of which ignore how the constitutional state contradiction the paternalism inherent in the traditional sense of the term. He continues:

> Within a democratic community whose citizens reciprocally grant one another equal rights, no room is left for an authority allowed to *one-sidedly* determine the boundaries of what is to be tolerated. On the basis of the citizens' equal rights and reciprocal respect for each other, nobody possesses the privilege of setting the boundaries of tolerance from the viewpoint of their own preferences and value-orientations. Certainly to tolerate other people's beliefs without accepting their truth, and to tolerate other ways of life without appreciating their intrinsic value as we do with regard to our own, requires a *common standard* (emphasis mine). In the case of a democratic community, this common value base is found in the principles of the constitution.[745]

While it can be affirmed that inasmuch as such standards have been instantiated within institutions in liberal democracies and offer a crucial point of reference for challenging any instance where realities fail to be reflected in the ideal, Habermas's "common standard" is problematic for at least two reasons. For one thing, it is a counter-factual ideal that does not always work out in practice, especially for those on the margins, such as the poor, women, and people of colour. For another, by assimilating tolerance and thus *toleration of differences* to an abstract set of principles, Habermas overlooks the many ways in which solutions cannot be found on this level—or at least not on this level *alone*. His response to these exclusions is equally telling of this problem when he urges that a well-functioning constitution should tolerate civil disobedience, which allows for the "overstepping of its own boundaries" on "the condition that this rule-breaking resistance be plausibly justified in the spirit and wording of the constitution and conducted by symbolic means that lend the fight the character of a nonviolent appeal to the majority to once again reflect on their decisions."[746] While such strategies may be noble and representative of the more hallowed aspects of struggles for recognition, such as those waged by Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr., does Habermas really believe that even these ideals were somehow "pure" and not iterations of larger social forces whose many contradictions and expressions created space for such tactics to emerge? One glaring problem with Habermas's model, then, is an inability to account for anything that falls significantly short of his ideal other than trying to diagnose the structural inequalities and counter-veiling pressures that give rise to distortions in communication. While he provides a highly complex, nuanced, and admirable model for grappling with social systems in the face of complex and pluralistic societies, his seeming inability to account for how language and ideology functions symbolically to confound reason, and must be traced within contexts in order to understand its various iterations, marks a considerable gap in his thinking, which Derrida's work goes some distance in helping to remedy.

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745 Ibid., 41.

746 Ibid., 42.

Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides

In Derrida's interview with Borradori, he begins by calling attention to the naming and repetition of the appellation "September 11," and its construction and circulation through a "techno-socio-political machine."[747] In this way, he immediately marks his interest in deconstructing the conceptual framework through which this "major event" has been received so as to better understand what exactly is being constituted in the discourse about it and what, more importantly, is being left unsaid. As with Habermas's interview, one almost gets the sense that Derrida has Habermas in mind in his reply when explaining the purpose and the "ethics" of his position:

> I believe always in the necessity of being attentive first of all to this phenomenon of language, naming, and dating, to this repetition compulsion (at once rhetorical, magical, and poetic). … Not in order to isolate ourselves in language, as people in too much of a rush would like us to believe, but on the contrary, in order to try to understand what is going on precisely beyond language.[748]

Derrida goes on to describe the necessity in confronting this "repetition compulsion" as a duty to recall that the dominant response to this or any other "event" worthy of the name is "never purely natural and spontaneous," but rather the product of an inheritance that needs to be carefully deconstructed and thought through.

The "logic" through which Derrida seeks to locate "September 11," is one that he describes as a wound that we do not yet know how to name and thus remains, at present, a "horizon of nonknoweldge," since what is at stake has been largely repressed.[749] In order to address this "logic" and move closer in the direction of knowledge, Derrida refers to his concept of *autoimmunity*, which he developed most notably in his essay "Faith and Knowledge,"[750] (1996) to describe what he characterizes here as an "implacable law" that "regulates every autoimmunitary process."[751] Elaborating on this concept in his book *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, (2003) Derrida describes autoimmunity as a "strange illogical logic by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other, to immunize it against the aggressive intrusion of the other."[752] In her reading of this passage, Elizabeth Rottenberg comments that "[t]o speak of autoimmunity is thus first to situate (or resituate) the question of life, of the living being, of life and death, of 'life-death [la-vie-la-mort],' at the very heart of deconstruction."[753] While this only scratches the surface of a much more complex idea, what is important to note about autoimmunity, following Rottenberg's observation, is how it functions in Derrida's work

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747 Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida Deconstructing Terrorism," *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, 86.

748 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 87.

749 Ibid., 94.

750 The term also appears in *Specters of Marx* in 1993 and *Politics of Friendship* in 1994.

751 He continues: "As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its 'own' immunity.

752 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 123.

753 See Rottenberg, "The Legacy of Autoimmunity," in *Mosaic* 39/3 (September 2006), 4.

as a sort of quasi-ontology of human relations in the following sense: in order to protect one's *self* or one's "body," (be it of a person or a nation-state) one must create boundaries of protection, such as an explanation of why some "other" is unlike "us" (as with racial or gender stereotypes) or legal boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. Every act that seeks to circumscribe this "other" results in certain effects, the more repressive the more dangerous, since an inability to acknowledge and integrate the "other" (which always comes at a cost one's sense of "self") is precisely what multiples "distortions in communication," to borrow a phrase from Habermas. In this sense, autoimmunity supplements Habermas's concept of discourse ethics through an ideal speech situation by shifting the emphasis toward the *autos* or self, and functions by asking us to consider the affective dimensions of things like desire and trauma and how they are always filtered through rhetoric into order to affirm the sovereignty of the self.[754]

Derrida locates three moments of autoimmunity in relation to "September 11," the first of which is called "The Cold War in the head." This first moment describes how it was those same forces that the US had armed and trained to fight against the Soviet Union in the 1980s that mark the first "symbolic suicide," as this seemingly powerless force was able to find the means to attack the US with "*high-tech knowledge*," on its' own soil, whilst using its' own weaponry.[755]

The second moment of autoimmunity is entitled "Worse than the Cold War," signalling the "end" or at least what may be an end of sorts, to the type of conflict that remained within a closer horizon of calculability of geo-strategic angling between the Soviet Union and "the West." Since, as Habermas also notes, it is only the future that can determine how we will assimilate this "event" and therefore what is to come, the worst could still be around the corner, which has the effect of producing a sense of trauma "with no possible work of mourning" since there is no way to determine that the threat is over and done with.[756] As Derrida writes:

> Like the formation of Arab Muslim terrorist networks equipped and trained during the Cold War, this threat represents the residual consequence of *both* the Cold War and the passage beyond the Cold War. ... From now on, the nuclear threat, the 'total' threat, no longer comes from a state but from anonymous forces that are absolutely unforeseeable and incalculable.[757]

While this passage highlights a similar concern that was noted by Habermas in his reply, Derrida's interest is to underline the incalculable nature of the *type* of threat that may be faced, (hence the permanent state of trauma) but *not* of the incalculability of the actors themselves—a point that I will return to in due course. What Derrida underscores here in relation to autoimmunity and to the possible coming of the worst, is how calling "September 11" a "major event" is in a very real sense an attempt to neutralize its effects by giving it a name—to contain it and set boundaries as a way to "get over it," so to

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754 See Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 6-41.

755 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 95.

756 Ibid., 97.

757 Ibid., 98.

speak. Resisting this neutralizing impulse is, perhaps above all else, what he sees as philosophy's task to call to attention and to deconstruct.[758]

The third and final moment of autoimmunity is labelled "The vicious circle of repression," and is characterized by a concern that the response to these attacks in the form of the so-called "war on terrorism" will work "to regenerate, in the short or long term, the causes of the evil they claim to eradicate," causing new cycles of reprisals ad infinitum.[759]

Having established these autoimmunitary processes, which point toward the boundaries or limits of what remains calculable in the present context, Derrida turns to address what he thinks can be done and what the role of philosophy might be in helping to make sense of this incalculable situation. Like Habermas, Derrida calls attention to the need to reflect upon political philosophy in order to problematize the facile appropriations of concepts like "war" and "terrorism" that are parroted in the media. For example, contrary to Carl Schmitt, who theorized warfare as a conflict between clearly defined enemies,[760] Derrida notes that classifying this conflict as a "war on terrorism" amounts to an "abuse of rhetoric," and, more importantly, fails to signal how "technoscience" "blurs the distinction between war and terrorism."[761] While acknowledging how the political history of the word "terrorism" owes a considerable debt to the 'Reign of Terror' during the French Revolution, Derrida points toward the essential instability of this concept, noting not only the shifting contexts in which the same "terrorists" can become "freedom fighters" in one or another context, but also how definitions are marked by the very contexts in which they arise. As an example, he observes that it was only in the 1990s, after Algeria had ceded from French territory and was thus no longer considered part of France that the conflict in Algeria from 1954-1962, which had previously been labelled an "armed repression," "internal police operation" and "state terrorism," all of a sudden was declared a "war" by the French Parliament in order to pay the pensions of "veterans" who had lobbied for them.[762] His comments that shortly follow mark an important distinction from Habermas that was raised in their earlier exchanged on the question of semantics:

> Semantic instability, irreducible trouble spots on the borders between concepts, indecision in the very concept of the border: all this must not only be analyzed as a speculative disorder, a conceptual chaos or zone of passing turbulence in public or political language. We must also recognize here strategies and relations of force. The dominant power is the one that manages to

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758 As he puts it, "What will never let itself be forgotten is thus the perverse effect of the autoimmunitary itself. For we now know that repression in both its psychoanalytic sense and its political sense—whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy—ends up producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm." Ibid., 99.

759 Ibid., 100.

760 As Habermas glosses Schmitt: "I believe that Carl Schmitt's existentialist idea, according to which 'the political' consists merely in the self-assertion of a collective identity over against other collective identities, is false and dangerous in view of its practical consequences." See "Fundamentalism and Terror," Ibid, 38.

761 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 101.

762 Ibid., 104.

> impose and, thus, to legitimate, indeed to legalize (for it is always a question of law) on a national or world stage, the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation.[763]

Derrida is careful here not to reduce all conflict to a mere exercise in power as he states his commitment to the ideal of democratic institutions and international law, while urging the need to deconstruct the "still dominant juridico-political system" and to distinguish between "comprehending" an event and "justifying" it. Here it is worth recalling another important distinction between Habermas and Derrida's analysis of this situation that bears on the question of semantics. While Habermas assimilates "fundamentalism" and "terror" into a series of what I have called "quasi-dialectical" problems, where the seemingly irrational beliefs of fundamentalists, who are understood, in part, as unable to reconcile the cognitive presuppositions that are deemed necessary for modern reason, requires self reflection on the part of the West so as to create material conditions whereby such cognitive dissonances and distortions in communication can be ameliorated. In one of his more problematic remarks, Habermas argues that "Palestinian terrorism" "still possesses a certain outmoded characteristic in that it revolves around murder,"[764] which he seems to elide in his remarks that follow with "global terrorism" in "its lack of realistic goals and in its cynical exploitation of the vulnerability of complex systems."[765] Compare this response with Derrida's, while addressing the same problem:

> It would be necessary to analyze, in the same vein, the motivations and interests behind all the different geopolitical or strategico-diplomatic shifts that have 'invested,' so to speak, 'September 11.' … and the very useful but very hasty identification of Palestinian terrorism with international terrorism, which now calls for a universal response. In both cases, certain parties have an interest in presenting their adversaries not only as terrorists—which they are to a certain extent—but only as terrorists, indeed as 'international terrorists' who share the same logic or are part of the same network and who must thus be opposed, it is claimed, not through counterterrorism but through a 'war,' meaning, of course a 'nice clean' war."[766]

While Habermas resists the kind of hasty response the resulted in the Iraq War, and defers to ideals such as constitutional principles and international law, thus sharing with Derrida a very cautious approach in how to respond to "September 11," his framing of conflicts around quasi-dialectical problems results in an oversimplification of what is at stake and, as noted, an assimilation of concepts (and their "sematic instability") into a more generalized or homogenous whole.

Take for example, the words of bin Laden, who in a statement released to Western media on October 7, 2001, speaks of the war in Iraq and the plight of Palestinians as primary motives for the 9/11 attacks.

> What America is tasting now, is something insignificant compared to what we have tasted for scores of years. Our nation (the Islamic world) has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds. … When God blessed one of the groups of Islam, vanguards of Islam, they destroyed America. I pray to God to elevate their status and bless them.

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763 Ibid., 105.

764 Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 33.

765 Ibid., 34.

766 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 110.

> Millions of innocent children are being killed as I speak. They are being killed in Iraq without committing any sins and we don't hear condemnation or a fatwa from the rulers. In these days, Israeli tanks infest Palestine - in Jenin, Ramallah, Rafah, Beit Jalla, and other places in the land of Islam, and we don't hear anyone raising his voice or moving a limb. When the sword comes down (on America), after 80 years, hypocrisy rears its ugly head.[767]

While couched in what we might provisionally term "fundamentalist" rhetoric, bin Laden's speech is grounded in what are clear political reasons with the attacks serving as a response of sorts to these and other conflicts between the West and Muslim-majority countries. Derrida offers a much clearer analysis in this regard:

> And with all the angling going on between these triangles, it is difficult to disentangle the real from the alleged motivation, oil from religion, politics from economics or military strategy. The 'bin Laden' type of diatribe against the American devil thus combines such themes as the perversion of faith and nonbelief, the violation of the sacred places of Islam, the military presence near Mecca, the support of Israel, and the oppression of Arab Muslim populations.[768]

This deconstructive analysis further highlights the deficiencies in Habermas's "quasi-dialectical" approach by complicating the complex interrelationships between religion, politics, economics, and military conflict, (among other things) and by paying attention to how the effects of naming—in an attempt to neutralize the trauma—often serve to repress the contexts and multiple iterations through which concepts like "fundamentalism" or groups like "Arabs" are identified. Here we might recall Habermas's macro-generalizations about the "Arab world," and how "it" is framed as a victim of "processes of accelerated modernization" that "secretly admire[s]" the "economic, political, and military superiority" of the US.[769] Derrida, by contrast, urges caution against classifying "Islam" or the "Arab Muslim" world as a "world," and wants "to take all these divisions, differences, and differends into account," while focusing on those intersecting currents that "lead to fanaticism" and on interpretations of the Koran.[770] While I have little doubt that Habermas would agree with these injunctions, his top-down emphasis on what Seyla Benhabib has called "the generalized other," which she contrasts with the "concrete other," as discussed in chapter two, can have the effect of homogenizing complexity in such a way that the kind of repression that Derrida calls attention to is able to thrive. Once again, it is worth underlining Habermas's misreading of "deconstruction" as *mere* "ontologizing" and as necessarily opposed to the kind of institutional and even hermeneutic models that he wants to affirm.

Derrida's affirmative stance is always one of a yes… but (*oui*/*pas*), which functions as a sort of provisional and conditional affirmation in contexts of decision, while wanting to keep a space open, and a step beyond, the groundable, normative domain. It is in this spirit that he notes that there is nothing in bin Laden's discourse that speaks to "democracy" or "international law," and, while the American and European

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[767] See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/07/afghanistan.terrorism15. Accessed August 28, 2014.

[768] Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 112.

[769] Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 32.

[770] Derrida, Ibid., 112-13.

postures often fail to live up to their ideals, they represent a direction that, as he puts it, "leaves a perspective open to perfectability in the name of the 'political,' democracy, international law, international institutions, and so on."[771] In affirming these models and institutions, Derrida further qualifies his claim by noting that international institutions should be respected, while at the same time subject to constant revision and critique on the level of their structure, axioms, and principles.[772] As he puts it:

> Reflection (of what I would call a 'deconstructive' type) should thus, it seems to me, without diminishing or destroying these axioms and principles, question and refound them, endlessly refine and universalize them, without becoming discouraged by the aporias such work must necessarily encounter.[773]

These ideas align with another concept that Derrida terms "democracy-to-come," which he qualifies in this interview as distinct from a regulative idea since "democracy" can never be present, in full, but nonetheless exists as a "promise" that its very idea inscribes.[774] Once again, I cannot see any reason why Habermas would reject this position *per se*, so long as certain models (e.g., of law, institutional structure, etc.) are acknowledged as a step in the right direction. In this vein, Derrida affirms what he calls "a new figure of Europe," that seeks to move beyond Eurocentrism without forsaking its own traditions or "its own memory" in the process.[775] Indeed, it would appear that this sentiment is shared by Habermas as indicated by the title chosen for their co-signed letter, "February 15, or On What Binds Europeans Together: A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe," in opposition to the Iraq War.

Another important line of comparison between Derrida and Habermas is the way in which they differ on the classification of religion.[776] In his interview with Borradori, we can get a sense of what kind of work his more cautious use of language does in marking distinctions such as "fundamentalism," "faith," "religious doctrine," and so forth. On the question of what role religion plays in the context of 9/11, Derrida remarks

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771 Ibid., 114.

772 Derrida clarifies this further when he writes: "Of all the names grouped a bit too quickly under the category 'political regimes' (and I do not believe that 'democracy' ultimately designates a 'political regime'), the inherited concept of democracy is the only one that welcomes the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself." Ibid., 120.

773 Ibid., 114.

774 In *Specters of Marx*, for example, Derrida traces the "Greco-Christian" ideal of cosmopolitanism as inscribed in the idea of nation-states and citizenship and tries to think beyond the aporias that it presents. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge), 1994.

775 As Michael Naas observes in his introduction to Derrida's 1991[1992] text, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, regardless of whether one sides with the claim that Derrida had always been political, this text offers a clearer representation of an "emerging Derridian politics," which some will likely see as a "pragrammatological application of deconstructive theory to current politics issues …" See Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Nass (Indiana: Bloomington University Press, 1992), xiv. While not affirming this position *per se*, Naas's point highlights a changing conversation about Derrida's work at the start of the 1990s, where he engages such political questions in a more direct and consistent fashion, affirming certain directions or openings, while tracing their many aporias.

776 See Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, especially his remarks in "Faith and Knowledge."

how these conflicts often take the form, "at least on the surface, of a confrontation between two groups with a strong religious identification." Noting the contradiction between the US's "secular" constitution and its frequent use of theological "and primarily Christian" rhetoric, such as the "axis of evil" or "infinite justice," Derrida observes that on the other side there is "an 'enemy' that identifies itself as Islamic, Islamic extremist or fundamentalist, even if this does not necessarily represent authentic Islam and all Muslims are far from identifying with it."[777] While I would want to push Derrida here on what, exactly, he means by "authentic Islam," and suggest that such phraseology could lead to a problematic rhetorical binary of "authentic/inauthentic Islam," which risks reifying some ideal as "true" in a frozen fashion, his careful language here—noting those who "identify" with Islam, while situating it within other, complex political, economic and military relationships—helps to shift the emphasis away from the kind of macro-model that Habermas subscribes to in his broader generalizations and focuses on the ways in which religious identities are formed in relation to political, economic, and, cultural contexts in which they are taken up and calls attention to how they are always iterated *differently*. As I will come to discuss in the final section of this chapter, when I address an essay by Seyla Benhabib on the politics of veiling, attention to such details is crucial for understanding how something classified as "religious" functions in relation to contexts of cultural, politics, law, etc.

Closing off both interviews in *PTT*, Borradori raises the question of tolerance, which is centrally linked to both the concepts of religion and the public use of reason. Recall that Habermas had described tolerance by first acknowledging its paternalistic inheritance, while going on to critique the "straight deconstruction" of the concept by pairing it with "militant democracy" ("no freedom for the enemies of freedom") and arguing that both ideas fail to acknowledge how a "common standard" can be found today in "the principles of the constitution," which, as he writes, "[o]n the basis of the citizens' equal rights and reciprocal respect for each other, nobody possesses the privilege of setting the boundaries of tolerance from the viewpoint of their own preferences and value-orientations."[778] We may also recall that in cases where groups are not being recognized, and hence not fully tolerated, Habermas's defers to the idea of civil disobedience, which is a practice that should be "tolerated" so long as it is non-violent and is "plausibly justified in the spirit and wording of the constitution and conducted by symbolic means."[779] Habermas's notion of tolerance, as it is connected to his broader theoretical corpus, is here inscribed with a defense of a certain kind of institutional framework and democratic ideal that he will claim in a later essay was the "pacemaker for cultural rights."[780] In a nutshell, this essay looks to trace the development of the concept of toleration since the 16th century, following the Reformation in Germany, and highlights how it paved the way for the advance of certain cognitive presuppositions, without which, a democratic polity and the idea of multiculturalism would not be possible. As he writes:

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777 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 117.

778 Habermas, "Fundamentalism and Terror," 41.

779 Ibid., 42.

780 See Habermas, "Religious Tolerance as Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," in *Between Naturalism and Religion*: Philosophical Essays, trans Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press), 251-270.

> For multiculturalism that understands itself in the right way is not a one-way street to the cultural self-assertion of groups with their own collective identities. The equal coexistence of different forms of life must not lead to segmentation. It calls for the integration of all citizens and the mutual recognition of their subcultural memberships within the framework of a shared political culture. The citizens as members of society may legitimately cultivate their distinctive cultures only under the condition that they all understand themselves, across subcultural divides, as citizens of one and the same political community.[781]

This passage should help to put a finer point on Habermas's notion of tolerance, which is aligned with what we might call a regulative idea that sets the framework for equal inclusion and thus requires a notion of the public use of reason. Recall how in his essay on religion in the public sphere, all citizens must orient themselves to the fact of pluralism, to the authority of science, and to the secular character of the state. In this way, communicative interactions can be grounded upon mutually shared premises that are in agreement on certain necessary preconditions for cutting through those distortions in communication that often plague public debate (e.g., a misunderstanding of science on the issue of climate change). As I have detailed above, however, a "straight deconstruction," as Habermas describes it, is not what Derrida is doing, nor does his position necessarily threaten the model that Habermas wants to uphold, though it is not at all clear that Derrida would affirm it, a point that I will address momentarily. What Derrida's approach helps call into question is what concepts like "tolerance," "fundamentalism," or "religion" are naming, (and hence, what they are repressing) when discourses on tolerance circulate within the public sphere.

Derrida calls attention to the return of discourses on tolerance surrounding the events of 9/11 in the context of "what is called in a rather simplistic and confused fashion the 'return of the religious,' while noting that the "stakes of violence we have been discussing are often, in fact, territorial, ethnic, and so on," adding that religion may or may not function as an "alibi," and is, in any case, "commonly invoked."[782] He goes on to note that while these "dogmatic persecutions all wear the face of intolerance," it is not enough to define them as such, so as to oppose them in some binary fashion (e.g., tolerance is that which they are not).[783] While stating his clear preference for tolerance over intolerance, and thus, we may infer, with the general idea of liberal democracies that Habermas points toward, what interests Derrida on the question of tolerance is the "discourse it organizes"[784] and how it "no longer depends on the same conditions or on the same axiomatic" through which it was iterated from "Voltaire to Zola to Sartre."[785] As he writes:

> Since not all figures of intolerance are new … since they have never been separable from the very movement of culture, of tradition, of processes of legitimation, and of communities in general, and particularly ecclesiastical or state institutions, isn't one of our first responsibilities (intellectual, ethical, political, and even beyond those responsibilities attached to the citizen-subject of a

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781 Habermas, "Religious Tolerance as Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 270.

782 Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 124.

783 Ibid., 125.

784 Ibid., 127.

785 Ibid.

> particular nation-state or democracy) at once to analyze the laws of such recurrences and the emergence of what is new or unprecedented?[786]

One again, I cannot see Habermas disagreeing with these sentiments, especially as he has shown an interest in tracing similar genealogies in his own work—in relation to Schmitt, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and others. Where one fundamental difference between Derrida and Habermas seems to reside, as illustrated in this example on tolerance, is in Derrida's insistence that "[t]olerance is always on the side of the 'reason of the strongest,' where 'might is right,'"[787] and represents a "conditional, circumspect, careful hospitality."[788] Derrida contrasts this idea, which he sees inscribed in the notion of tolerance with "unconditional hospitality," which is described as the very condition of hospitality itself, setting the bar, so to speak, by which rules may follow. As he writes:

> Unconditional hospitality, which is neither juridical nor political, is nonetheless the condition of the political and the juridical. For these very reasons, I am not even sure whether it is ethical, insofar as it does not even depend on a decision. But what would ethics be without hospitality?[789]

It seems to me that this notion of unconditional hospitality, described as outside of juridicial and political decision-making and even ethics, is what Habermas fails to engage in Derrida's work, leaving the impression that he does not (or perhaps cannot?) acknowledge the idea that thinking *beyond* does not necessarily mean thinking *against*, nor the concomitant "logic" that such an analysis can serve to enlarge and keep open otherwise repressed possibilities.

Shortly following the lines quoted above, Derrida goes on to talk about the aporia or "double-bind" that the notion of an unconditional hospitality presents since it requires *both* "unconditional *auto-nomy*," (e.g., autonomy "of the sovereign subject, of the ideal of emancipation and of freedom") as well as *hetero-nomy*, the later signalling that it must remain open if the idea of the "unconditional" (i.e., beyond tolerance) is to retain any meaning. In elaborating these premises, Derrida offers the following remarks, which provides a striking instance where he and Habermas part ways:

> The decision, if there is one, is always a decision of the other, as I have tried to show elsewhere. Responsibility for a decision, if there is any and if one must answer for it, amounts each time, in an irreducibly singular way, *without any normative program* (emphasis mine) and without any assured knowledge, to a transaction between the imperative for autonomy and the imperative for heteronomy, the two being equally imperious.[790]

Although this statement about decision and the responsibility for a decision as an irreducible process that cannot be determined with "any normative program" is meant to point toward an idea beyond pre-calculation that cannot be used as a rule for any juridical or political program, since instantiating a rule already places limits through a recipe that removes the "unconditional" and reduces responsibility to a careful calculus (hence the

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786 Ibid., 125.

787 Ibid., 127.

788 Ibid., 128.

789 Ibid., 129.

790 Ibid., 132.

aporia) this statement might also beg the question: how could such an thought take place—however qualified and aporatic—without a program through which interactions can be guided, based on certain common touch-points or regulative orientations? While I am not sure how Derrida might answer this question, especially at it relates to Habermas's models of discourse ethics and deliberative democracy, it clearly marks a considerable gap between them. While I find Derrida's arguments to be convincing here and have shown the many ways in which they can be critically brought to bear in order to supplement Habermas's work, perhaps part of Habermas's frustration with Derrida is not only with the very real differences in their philosophical projects, (and, as I will discuss in conclusion, with his own inability to effectively assimilate Derrida's insights into his model) but also with Derrida's seeming inability to *explicitly* engage the kind of arguments Habermas has in mind and offer a more affirmative statement on what kind of work it aims to do.

Afterthoughts

The only place that I am aware of that Derrida seeks to clarify his position in direct response to Habermas's concerns is when prompted by Simon Critchley at a conference in Frankfurt in 2000, to which he responded that same year in the journal *Constellations* in a short essay entitled, "Performative Powerless—A Response to Simon Critchley." In reply to Critchley's question as to whether a point of agreement might be found between Derrida and Habermas on the ground of formal pragmatics and of the logic of performativity, Derrida states that he is "more and more suspicious" of "the theory of performativity," noting that even beyond its "Austinian-Searlian tradition" whenever "a given ethical, juridical, political space is given to performative acts," a type of neutralization occurs.[791] Derrida goes on to remark that his main concern is with any ethics, politics, or law that "regulates itself solely on performative power," adding that theories of performativity "are always at the service of powers of legitimation." The crux of the matter, however, is *not* to reduce language and meaning to power-games, but rather an injunction toward acknowledging an invisible third:

> And consequently, in my view, the ethical must be exposed to a place where constative language as well as performative language is in the service of another language.[792]

While there is not much new in these remarks that add to Derrida's earlier statements in relation to the question of performativity, his insistence on measuring constantive and performative language against a type of deconstructive analysis helps to clarify his affirmative yet problematizing approach (*oui*/*pas*). While he does not take up anything specific about Habermas's theory of formal pragmatics, which, in my estimation, marks a missed opportunity, he addresses Habermas directly with a question similar to those I have raised above on the "unconditional," which here is termed "infinite responsibility."

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791 Derrida, "Performative Powerless—A Response to Simon Critchley," *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, 112.

792 Derrida, Ibid., 113.

> Habermas thinks that in the idea of infinite responsibility there is an ethical overload (*surcharge*), but the ethical overload has to be overwhelming (*surchargeant*), it overwhelms (*surcharge*), and the arrival of the other is the overload. One cannot eliminate the overload and control things by norms within discourse. When there are norms, it is finished, everything is done, everything follows from the norms. There is no more responsibility when there are norms.[793]

Derrida qualifies these remarks by acknowledging similarities between Habermas's concept of popular sovereignty (which Critchley had flagged in his questions to Derrida and Habermas) with his notion of the "unconditional,"[794] where the latter must be brought to bear on the former, since any act of sovereignty "is a luxury of power" as it entails the right "to produce the performative."[795] While I find myself in full agreement with Derrida's remarks about leaving space for "another language" and that the condition of the ethical must point beyond its mere performance and instantiation, Derrida seems to miss what I take to be to core of Habermas's argument, however much Habermas failed to underline it; namely, that without referring to clear, norm-oriented guidelines for contexts of communicative interaction (i.e., when dealing with questions of ethics, politics, etc.), a deconstructive move would be without a firm ground upon which it could make its important interventions. That is to say, any deconstruction of the political and the ethical relies on the efforts of such reconstructive models that it can enter into in order to open up and grapple with its aporias—a problem that Derrida is clearly aware of. Without clearly affirming (or stating where he would nuance) parts of Habermas's model, it does not appear that Derrida gives Habermas much of a concession by which he might soften his own position and, perhaps, acknowledge what kind of work deconstruction can actually do. In many ways, this debate remains unresolved.

Habermas's unofficial follow-up essay to Derrida occurred in 2000 at a conference in Paris, later published as "How to Answer the Ethical Question: Derrida and Religion," (2008 [2009]) and revolves around one particular question, which Habermas poses as follows: "At what point exactly does Derrida's thought part ways with that of Heidegger?"[796] Habermas does not appear to be interested in acknowledging the kind of work that Derrida's approach can offer here, but only in returning to his main concern in the first essay in *PDM*, "Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida's Critique of Phonocentrism."[797] The crux of the problem revolves around Derrida's inheritance of Heidegger's idea of the "world-disclosing function" that is found in art, literature, and philosophy. Noting a recent lecture by Derrida on the question of the university, Habermas still detects a similar idea in his work as evidenced in Derrida's statement that, "The force of the event is always stronger than the force of a

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793 Ibid., 113.

794 Ibid., 113.

795 Ibid., 114.

796 To this he adds, "I don't mean this in just a philological sense; the question is as much a philosophical as a political one." See Habermas, "How to Answer the Ethical Question: Derrida and Religion," in *Europe: The Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 17.

797 While acknowledging that he is not all that familiar with Derrida's work "as a whole," Habermas states his aim as one of hoping to provide a marginal contribution to questions that continue to dog their interactions. Texts written by Derrida's cited in this essay include: "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition" and *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*.

performative."[798] Similar to his earlier assessment, Habermas states that he believes that Derrida wants to recognize the "essence" of the kind of humanism that Heidegger rejects, while at the same time assuming his "posture toward the 'advent of the event.'" Expanding on his question to Derrida, Habermas asks:

> Simply put, my question is: How does Derrida's understanding of the advent of a portentous 'event', which nevertheless remains indeterminate, differ from Heidegger's? Is there some difference which explains their positions for and against 'humanism'?[799]

In an attempt to answer this question, Habermas speculates that Derrida finds a telos within humanism that Heidegger does not, which hinges on Derrida's own loyalty to "the monotheistic heritage."[800]

Habermas begins by affirming the modern distinction between morality and ethics, pointing to Rawls's political liberalism as an end point of sorts of the type of political philosophy that privileges certain ways of life, through his development of a theory of the "just society," where people are free to create their own "ethical self-understanding."[801] This orientation to the "moral point of view" leads to a separation between theories of justice and morality and theories of ethics, which is understood as relating to questions of the good life. He continues:

> The moral point of view requires us to abstract from the exemplary images of a successful, or not-misspent, life handed down in the great metaphysical and religious narratives. It may be that the substance of these 'strong traditions' still nourishes our existential self-understanding; but philosophy can no longer intervene in the conflict between these belief systems on its own account. Precisely in the questions which remain of greatest relevance for us, therefore, it shifts to a meta-level and confines itself to examining the formal features of communicative processes without taking a position of its own on their contents.[802]

To this idea Habermas adds that "[t]he most that theories of justice uncoupled from ethics can hope for is that processes of socialization and political forms of life will 'meet them halfway.'"[803] This model of the public use of reason should be familiar, as discussed in chapter four, where procedural justice is understood to offer a point of mediation for persons/citizens acting within formal and informal public spheres. According to this model, there is no greater binding force for postmetaphysical reason since all claims to some non-material ground have long since fallen away.

Habermas traces this legacy of postmetaphsyical reason back to Kierkegaard, who contrasted the "aesthetic" self with the "ethical" self that acknowledges her individuality

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798 From "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition," quoted in Habermas, Ibid, 18.

799 Habermas, "How to Answer the Ethical Question," 19.

800 It is important to note that Habermas does not give any indication that he understands how Derrida conceives of the concept "event." As discussed in "Signature Event Context," and in "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," (below) among other essays, "event" calls attention to the singularity of every context that is always re-inscribed with each iteration, making talk of an "event" *as such* impossible.

801 Habermas, "How to Answer the Ethical Question," 20.

802 Ibid., 21.

803 Ibid., 22.

and freedom through a "leap of faith" in God.[804] In this sense, the individual looks to find a "binding answer" to moral questions through faith in salvation. Noting Horkheimer and Benjamin's philosophical debate on the need for an idea of salvation in the 1930s,[805] along with subsequent attempts to think about this paradox between "faith and knowledge" in the work of Jaspers, Adorno, and Sartre,[806] Habermas proffers his own interpretation of the "unconditional" following the linguistic turn in philosophy as the "binding power" of intersubjective communication, which is "at once fallible and anti-sceptical" as it provides a weak transcendentalism in place of the divine.[807] Habermas goes on to point out that many philosophers had sought to recover the notion of 'God in time' through a secular or rational form of translation after the First World War, where "[t]he point is to translate the Mosaic conception of God into concepts of an impersonal but temporalized Absolute." This, he maintains, is key to understanding both Adorno and Derrida's work, while it was rejected by Heidegger in no uncertain terms. As he elaborates:

> Unlike Kierkegaard's ethical life which constitutes a precondition of moral and social responsibility, Heidegger's methodological conception of authenticity is deeply anti-normative. … Heidegger retains the ontological approach in his later philosophy, when he replaces Kierkegaard's 'God in history' with the history of anonymous being and interprets the defiant self-affirmation of the will 'to want to be oneself' in terms of that single-minded subjectivism which allegedly achieved 'historico-ontological' supremacy through the mentalistic paradigm.[808]

Returning to the question of "event," these remarks point toward Heidegger's conclusion that all one can hinge one's hopes upon is the "uncertain arrival of the foretold tidings," where the goal of philosophy is to diagnose crisis and marks an "assimilation of ethics to ontology." Following this idea we get Habermas's clearest statement on what he means when he speaks of "neo-paganism":

> This work of 'destruction' is motivated by the desire to return to archaic beginnings which are supposedly 'more original' and more illuminating than Socrates and Moses/Christ, the two sources of the West which Kierkegaard admires and Nietzsche attacks. This leads Heidegger to speak of 'gods' instead of God in the singular.[809]

The problem for Habermas, of course, is not to affirm this notion of "God" but rather to show that Heidegger's "neo-paganism" represents a radical break with tradition such that the "remembrance" ['*Andenken*'] of the "egalitarian—individualistic universalism inscribed in the monotheistic traditions" disappears. While Habermas acknowledges that Derrida's approach rests on a "theological" rather than "pre-Socratic," and "Jewish" rather than "Greek" foundation via a Levinasian "self-reflexive relation of the ego toward an other, who expresses himself in the voice of a second person," he wonders if this is enough? As he puts the question to Derrida in closing this short essay:

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804 Ibid., 23.

805 Ibid., 24.

806 Ibid., 26-7.

807 Ibid., 28.

808 Ibid., 31.

809 Ibid., 32.

> Can Derrida leave the normative connotations of the uncertain advent of an indeterminate event as vague as Heidegger does? If not, what burdens of proof follow from the willingness to render explicit these connotations which are not contingent implications of a particular religious tradition?[810]

Unfortunately, Derrida was unable to respond to this question in a follow-up interview that had been planned with Eduardo Mendieta. Here, as with Derrida's reply to Critchley, Habermas was more interested in how Derrida would respond to this "ethical question," which, following his last question stated above, is in search for a more definitive answer to where Derrida stands on his own ideas of communicative interaction. What is clear from this exchange is how Habermas's sees parallels between himself and Derrida over a certain philosophical inheritance that highlight what he takes to be the ethical and existential imperatives inscribed in the "monotheistic" (namely Christian and Jewish) traditions. Since Heidegger is seen to have undermined these premises and, according to Habermas, went well beyond the point of no return, he fears that Derrida's deferral to the likes of a Levinasian ethics is not enough for the tasks of postmetaphysical philosophy and deliberative democracy. Perhaps he is right, though it is not at all clear why he seems to need Derrida to affirm his own project in the first place? Nor it is clear why Derrida could not have come out and affirmed Habermas's model (in its general parameters) as one that he finds strong affinities with, while stating his intention to proceed in the deconstructive manner that he always has in order to point toward aporias and steer the conversation in new directions.

Conclusion

In a sense, it matters little whether Derrida came around to Habermas's position or if Habermas will do the same, now at 85 years of age. While it will be important for future scholarship to delve into these questions of constatives and performatives, "monotheism" and "neo-paganism," along with the inheritance of thinkers like Husserl, Heidergger, Kierkegaard, and Benjamin in their work, for the present it is enough to point out the conceptual fruit that their exchange has brought forward in those who have inherited their work. I will address some of these lingering questions in relation to Habermas and religion in the conclusion of this dissertation, though here I'd like to end on what I take to be a step in the right direction.

In her essay, "The Return of Political Theology,"[811] Benhabib traces the challenge to "secularization" posed by the so-called confrontation between the "West" and political Islam, by focusing on the "head scarf debates" in France, Germany, and Turkey. While affirming certain dimensions of constitutionalism and human rights, she finds that much of the confusion surrounding these debates rests on the use of women's bodies as a "disciplinary object," where the opposing sides of the debate—that it to say, the binary polarizations that have been projected regarding the discourse on human rights and the imposition of a rigid theology—have re-enforced a situation where this "otherness" is

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[810] Ibid., 34.

[811] See Benhabib, "The Return of Political Theology: The scarf affair in comparative constitutional perspective in France, Germany and Turkey," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 36, 3-4, pp. 451-471.

inscribed in a limited sort of way. Benhabib attempts to solve this problem by looking to Derrida's notion of "iterations," in relation to the public sphere of liberal democracies:

> 'Democratic iterations' are processes in which meanings—religious as well as cultural, legal as well as political—are renegotiated in the public sphere of liberal democracies. These negotiations are also learning processes. … In the process of repeating a term or a concept, we never simply produce a replica of the original usage and its intended meaning: rather, every repetition is a form of variation. … In fact, there really is no 'originary' source of meaning, or an 'original' to which all subsequent forms must conform.[812]

Benhabib continues, arguing that some concept of original meaning is important when it comes to laws and institutional norms, however, every act of repetition changes this "meaning." She writes:

> Every iteration involves making sense of an authoritative original in a new and different context. The antecedent thereby is reposited and resignified via subsequent usages and references. Meaning is enhanced and transformed; conversely, when creative appropriation of that authoritative original ceases or stops making sense, then the original loses its authority upon us as well. Iteration is the reappropriation of the 'origin'; it is at the same time its dissolution as the original and its preservation through its continuous deployment.[813]

In conclusion, Benhabib argues that the distinction between juris-generative and juris-pathic politics are confronted today with "religio-cultural" differences in a heightened and troubling way, which is why she points toward the need for a space in the public sphere "when principles and norms which undergird democratic will formation becomes permeable and fluid to new semantic contexts, which enable the argumentation of the meaning of rights."[814]

Habermas's critical theory doesn't seem to provide a space (at least not an obvious one) for the ways in which rhetorical concepts, especially those that have become dominant within a given discourse—say on "terrorism," "Muslim" women or religion—function to shape the logic and direction of our investigations and often immobilize a more critical investigation regarding what is behind a concept and how it produces regimes of knowledge and power that conceal more subtle aspects of what is at stake. Benhabib's gesture toward a Derridian notion of iterations[815] in conjunction with an idea of constitutional principles and a public sphere of democratic will formation, nicely brings together these two models in a mutually productive way. One thing that remains missing in this model, however, is a theory of "religion" that is able to deal with

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812 Benhabib, "The Return of Political Theology," 466.

813 Ibid., 466.

814 Ibid., 467.

815 It is important to note here that Derrida's notion of iterations is tied to his concept of trace. As he discusses in *Speech and Phenomenon*, (1973) among other texts, and as I understand him, trace, like difference, is meant to indicate another "undecidable" concept that is never present but always leaves a mark. Most crucially, it indicates the impossibility of a final or ultimate presence and of an origin, which asks the reader or addressee to always consider what came before the mark, what has been inherited, and how it continues to effect or "haunt" the present. This concept was evident (though not underlined) in Derrida's discussion of "terrorism" and hospitality and marks a clear difference from Habermas who does not seem to acknowledge nor understand what Derrida is aiming at with this idea. Future work on the inheritance of *this* debate will have to consider the idea of trace, among other concepts.

the semantic instability of *this* concept and better account for its theoretical, cultural, and practical uses and how they are always caught between the vagaries of knowledge and human interests—a point that I shall address in conclusion.

Conclusion – Habermas and the Study of Religions

In their introduction to the recent Festschrift *Habermas and Religion*, Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen present a sweeping overview of how Habermas's engagement with religion has changed the shape of his critical theory, noting several conceptual spaces where it has been taken up in light of the shifting ground of "modernity." As they write:

> Religion pressed him to think further about philosophical anthropology, about the prepolitical bases for democratic politics, about the relationship between personal and cultural identity and citizenship, about procedural ethics and substantive morality, about tolerance, about the relationship between faith and knowledge, and about liberalism and its limits. It entered into his examination of the importance and problems of European unification, of differences between Europe and the US, and of the problems of both terrorism and the War on Terror.[816]

In opening this dissertation, I addressed some of these shifts in Habermas's thought by calling attention to his pivotal essay, "Faith and Knowledge," which introduces the idea of "postsecularism" as a new way to think about the condition of modernity and what Habermas takes to be the necessary "cognitive presuppositions" for the "public use of reason." In the intervening years since this essay, Habermas has expanded these ideas by looking at the "prepolitical" foundations of democratic politics and the relationship between faith and knowledge. In the first instance, starting most notably in his debate with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2004, along with a more recent essay in debate with Charles Taylor, Judith Butler, and Cornell West,[817] Habermas's traces the inheritance of the modern constitutional state through the legacy of political theology, especially following the work of Carl Schmitt. In response to the question posed in the title of his essay in debate with Ratzinger, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" his answer is a resounding no. There is no *ethnos* or *theos* that can constitute and uphold modern democratic states, as such a conception would be a regression to ethnocentric and/or theocratic forms of legitimation and thus fall behind the secularization of state power and the development of postmetaphsyical reason. As

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816 Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen, "Introduction," *Habermas and Religion*, 8.

817 Habermas, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds., Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 15-33.

discussed in chapter four, Habermas's strategy seeks to renew the relationship between "faith and knowledge" by laying out certain cognitive presuppositions, such as the fact of religious pluralism, the authority of science in its own domain, and the secular grounding of the state, as a way to create a space for the public use of reason and to avoid the types of distortions that continue to obscure "rational" debate. A crucial caveat to these ideas, which Habermas develops most thoroughly in his essay "Religion in the Public Sphere," is the notion that secular citizens must also come to accept not only the continued existence of religious groups expressing their ideas in the public sphere, but also engage in acts of mutual translation in order to discover what "cognitive" insights (i.e., insights that may potentially be shared by all) may lie hidden in "religious language." As he puts in his debate with Ratzinger:

> In addition, the expression "postsecular" does not merely grant religious communities public recognition for their functional contribution to the reproduction of desirable motives and attitudes. The public consciousness of a postsecular society reflects, rather, a normative insight that has implications for political interactions between religious and nonreligious citizens. In the postsecular society, the conviction is gaining ground that the "modernization of pubic consciousness" affects and reflexively transforms religious and secular mentalities, though not simultaneously. Both sides can then take each other's contributions to controversial public debates seriously for cognitive reasons as well, assuming that they share an understanding of the secularization of society as a *complementary* learning process.[818]

At least two things are important to note here, one productive and one problematic. The first is Habermas's aim to create a space where the claims of religious citizens can be taken up as *normative* and *cognitive* reasons, and not merely *accommodated* by secular citizens in a patronizing fashion. This reflects what Habermas sees as a necessary step for generating sources of shared meaning and motivation in modern, liberal societies in order to avoid intractable conflicts and produce cooperative forms of solidary and collective identity formation. While the parameters of Habermas's proposal are certainly debatable, I find myself in general agreement with his overarching aims. However we might nuance and criticize his model, the aim of establishing a shared framework of cognitive presuppositions in the interest of creating space for mutual understanding and the cultivation of solidary through shared language and shared meaning, is an important task for moral and political theory, among other disciplines, as has clear practical implications that cannot be ignored. The second and more problematic aspect of Habermas's proposal is the way in which he aims to re-imagine "religious language" in cognitive terms through a re-thinking of the relationship between faith and knowledge. Here as elsewhere in his work, his theory suffers from an over-determination of the "is" in the interest of the "ought," which has consequences for both his practical and theoretical aims.

While a thorough investigation of Habermas's more recent developments on the status of this relationship is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a few points are worth noting. In the most general sense, the idea of faith and knowledge as a conceptual idea, especially in the Hegelian tradition, is one that Habermas broadly identifies with.[819] Here

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[818] Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 111.

[819] As he writes in his "Reply to My Critics" in *Habermas and Religion*: "J.M. Bernstein correctly describes us both as 'young Hegelians,' which means that as a postmetaphysically minded student of Hegel

"faith" signifies not only a leap beyond the temporal or phenomenal realm, but also a dialectic that keeps in play important concepts such as salvation, redemption, and messianism, which Habermas finds productively transposed in the work of thinkers like Kant, Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Benjamin, and Derrida, whatever else he might say about their work.[820] For Habermas, the legacy of this inheritance is crucial to keep alive since its "semantic potential" is understood to be an important resource for meaning and motivation in modern, liberal societies. This point is nicely illustrated in a widely circulated quote from a 1999 interview with Eduardo Mendieta, "A Conversation About God and the World," when he writes:

> Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.[821]

On the one hand, Habermas's point is fairly straightforward: ideas that have been inherited within the Western tradition of liberal democracy are inextricably tied to theological concepts coming out of the Jewish and Christian and traditions. Since these ideas help to preserve and lend force to notions of equality, respect, and moral autonomy, their "continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation" is essential in order to maintain a connection with this inheritance such that these resources can be regenerated rather than re-invented anew. While this argument is highly generalized, (begging questions like, for example, which version or iteration of a Judaic or Christian ethic does he have in mind, and what of Buddhism or Islam, etc.?) the general idea of viewing the genealogy of philosophy and religion as intertwined is one that is shared by many contemporary theorists.[822] On the other hand, Habermas's argument is over-determined by his broad "macro" focus on questions of religion in general, which is made all the more problematic by his narrow focus on certain concepts within *particular* Jewish and Christian theologies. To be sure, his more recent work has attempted to nuance this picture, with a recent essay, for example, on the question of Islam in Europe.[823]

I am aware of the long process of mutual assimilation of concepts of Greek and Judeo-Christian origin, though I cannot know whether this process can also be continued." Ibid., 367.

[820] See Habermas, "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion" in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 209-48.

[821] Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World: Interview with Eduardo Mendieta, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, Eduardo Mendieta (ed.), (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 147-67.

[822] Elizabeth Shakman-Hurd offers a useful analogy here when talking about the social construction of secularism in her field of international relations, noting a "laicist trajectory" and a "Judeo-Christian secularist trajectory," where the latter "attempts to claim and reinforce the 'secular' as a unique Western achievement that both distils and expresses the essence of Euro-American history, civilization, and culture. See Shakman-Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 22.

Underlying these political interests, however, is a philosophical-anthropological idea that is grounded in Karl Jasper's notion of the "Axial Age." This concept, which follows the general idea of Habermas's social evolutionary model of tracing stages in social development, is pivotal for two reasons: first, it opens up a space for a "rational" idea of religion to emerge, and, second, it continues to inform (postmetaphysical) philosophy. As he writes in his reply to Maria Pia Lara in *Habermas and Religion* on the legacies of Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, and Carl Schmitt:

> But none of the three parties to the debate considered Jasper's concept of the Axial Age, which was based on the co-originality of monotheism and Platonism and the structural similarity between them. Otherwise, Löwith and Schmitt would scarcely have propagated the wholesale return to either the cosmological thought of the Greeks or to the eschatology of the Church Fathers, and Blumenberg would have felt no need to wrestle with the objection that theology in fact accommodated itself to the advances of modern sciences without having to join with modern philosophy in making the anthropocentric turn. Blumenberg misunderstood the nature of the learning processes out of which modern philosophical thought and a 'reformed' religious consciousness evolved simultaneously. This *simultaneity* enables them to enter into a dialogue in which postmetaphysical thinking can aspire to 'translate' theological contents without having to confront the question of the relative 'value' of the one or the other side.[824]

It should be noted that part of Habermas's strategy here in his appropriation of Jasper's notion of the Axial Age, is not only to conceive of it as a crucial turning point in the genealogy of reason, but also to use it as a conceptual idea that can help to overturn an over-confident Eurocentrism. As he writes in response to Amy Allen in his "Reply to my Critics":

> Jasper's concept of the Axial Age, for example, which asserts that comparable cognitive achievements led to the emergence of similar metaphysical and religious worldviews in China and India to those which emerged in Greece and Israel, stimulates the de-centering of Europe's long-dominant view of itself. This teaches us something about the limitations of our view of the world.[825]

As a practical, pragmatic, and political strategy, one can clearly see the value in positing such an idea, which appears to be historically viable in its most general parameters (i.e., one can trace comparative developments or paradigm shifts occurring in several cultures from roughly 800-200 BCE).[826] In addition to the problem of Habermas presenting an overly "generalized" model of religion, both past and present, his rather narrow view of "religion," writ large, comes up against certain theoretical, and indeed, political

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[823] See Habermas, "What is Meant by a 'Post-Secular' Society? A Discussion on Islam in Europe," in *Europe: The Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin, 59-77. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009.

[824] Habermas, "Reply," 360.

[825] Ibid., 364.

[826] For a comprehensive and more recent account of this idea, see Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011.

problems, when measured against the claims of cultural groups or what Derrida calls *différance*.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Habermas's macro approach to questions of religion, politics, ethics, etc., has certain advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that it offers a broad and encompassing theory of the modern world that, despite its generalizations and blind spots, creates a conceptual space that attempts to account for and incorporate a variety of methods and theories in philosophy, political theory, theology, and the social sciences. In this sense, Habermas's systematic style of "grand" theory can be said to provide a "map" or heuristic of modern reasoning, which attempts to meditate complexity on the level of knowledge and theory, and to grapple with the fact of pluralism on the level of practical politics, aiming to create bridges between different disciplines and cultural groups. Moreover, the strength of Habermas's model, I would claim, is that it provides space for its own self-correction and even radicalization, as evident with Seyla Benhabib's appropriation of Derrida's notion of "iterations." In theory, there is no reason why one cannot take up many of Habermas's conceptual ideas and put them to productive use in different terrains, as other theorists have shown. Where serious problems begin to emerge with Habermas's theory *in general*, and with his theory of religion *in particular*, is when his broader approach is unable to articulate and account for differences that lie outside of the conceptual, post-conventional norm that he upholds as an ideal, which is problematic for both political theories interested in the problems facing pluralism, as well as for theorists of religion, especially those who want to challenge the genealogy of "religion" in critical and even radical ways.

When considering the domain of moral and political theory, Habermas fails to specify that his preferred ideal for religions are, at best, the product of certain theologies, (namely, Jewish and Christian) which are themselves tied to complex processes and iterations of such ideas in relation to particular cultural, ethnic, and political contexts. For example, concepts tied to "liberation theology," such as a preferential treatment for the poor, may be iterated in a progressive or regressive sort of way, depending on their sites of articulation. There is nothing determinate in these ideas in an a priori sense since their performance makes all the difference. Thus it can be argued that Habermas ends up reifying "religion," both within the past and within "modernity," as existing on a continuum from regressive (e.g., "traditional," "conservative," "fundamentalist," etc.) to progressive (e.g., egalitarian, post-conventional, etc.) iterations—a problem that has at least two serious consequences. The first is that more concrete or contextual iterations of religion, or what Maeve Cooke calls "nonargumentative" experiences, get obscured when the primary focus is on "intellectualist" dimensions of "religious language" and when public reason is evaluated based on the ability to come to terms with modes of postmetaphysical thinking. While Habermas's political strategy of "translation" within the informal public sphere of opinion- and will-formation and his more recent attempts to open up a discourse on the imbrications of "faith" and "knowledge" mark an interesting and important innovation in philosophy and social theory, on the level of practical reasoning, where the aim is to establish a procedural and cognitive ground for mutual perspective taking, Habermas fails to underscore the problem of grappling with the hegemony of dominant discursive representations and how the political problem of finding a ground where only the "force of the better argument" prevails, requires an on-

going deconstruction. I take this to be part of Benhabib's argument when she looks to shift the starting point of critical engagement from the "generalized" to the "concrete" other, as well as Derrida's point, albeit from a different position, when he draws attention to processes of "iterations." To put a finer point on it, given on-going struggles for recognition, for example, on questions of racism or cultural prejudice, (e.g., Islamophobia) one cannot expect that a "reasonable" form of argumentation will take place when prejudice, misunderstanding, and significant multicultural illiteracy are in play. Without highlighting and elevating problems of representation of those cultures, groups, and individuals whose identities are not well-reflected or well-understood within the context of a more dominant culture, (e.g., as in the still Euro- and Christian-centric public spheres in North America) then any attempt at argumentation will suffer from a deficit of hermeneutic understanding and, in some cases, proceed in ways that enable more advantaged groups/cultures to dominate and even label these "others" as "backwards," "intolerant," and "irrational," which is precisely what Habermas wants to avoid. In this sense, Habermas's aim toward establishing necessary cognitive presuppositions that can and should be understood and accepted by all, suffers from a major deficit—a point that I will return to due course.

The second problem is that by elevating the legacy of "monotheistic" traditions as co-original with modern reason and thus containing essential ideas that other traditions are presumably lacking, Habermas prejudices groups that fall outside these boundaries, especially those that are associated with so-called "new age" traditions which he aligns with forms of "neopaganism." To be sure, this idea is self-consciously grounded in a type of critique levelled at philosophers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. As he writes in his recent "Reply to My Critics":

> 'Neo-paganism' is the name given itself by an intellectual current in the Weimer period whose adherents followed Nietzsche in identifying the origins of the alienated present in monotheism and an emancipation from the present malaise in a return to the healthy sources of mythical thought. … My critique of 'neo-pagan' thought is directed against the leveling of the cognitive advance from 'myth to logos' that occurred not alone in Israel and Greece during the Axial Age, and against an 'originary thought' that seeks to reanimate supposed mythological 'truths' from the reflective standpoint of modernity.[827]

As discussed in chapter one, Habermas's concern here surrounds the public use of "mythical thought" as an abdication of common forms of reasoning in favour of more obscure and individualistic ideas that cannot possibly serve to ground a shared conception of reason. This appears to be what he was criticizing in his 1999 interview with Mendieta, when he writes:

> In any event, what I see nowadays in the 'esoterica' sections of bookshops appears to me more as a symptom of ego weakness and regression, the expression of a yearning for an impossible return to mythical forms of thought, magical practices, and closed worldviews, that the Church overcame in its battle against 'the heathens.' But history teaches us that religious sects can be very innovative. So maybe not everything on the market is Californian claptrap or neopaganism.[828]

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827 Ibid., 363.

828 "A Conversation About God and the World" in *Religion and Rationality*, 152.

While Habermas acknowledges the performative innovation of "religious sects," and thus leaves room for challenging his more sceptical suspicions, it would appear that he is making the error here of ascribing an "essence" to a broad range of group formations, which are assessed in terms of their general viability for generating collective modes of solidarity rather than the uniqueness of each iteration. This marco approach not only undermines the agency of distinct groups on the level of politics, but also presumes its object in advance of investigation, without considered the many differences of distinct groups that countless sociological and anthropological case studies reveal.

Here I propose that Habermas and those taking up his critical theory of religion would do well to consider the following: 1) the self-descriptions of multiple beliefs and practices that might generically be label "religious," which requires more attention to context of political-practical reasoning and more attention to case studies in theoretical endeavors; 2) the ways in which "religious claims" and "religious language" are taken up in different cultural contexts, creating hybrid discourses that include *theological ideas and practices*, but are neither limited to nor determined by them a priori; 3) paying attention to how all group formations, religious or otherwise, re-iterate concepts and ideas *differently*, which function as discursive technologies within the public sphere that may or may not resemble some ideal form of translation or inheritance *a posteriori*. For example, while many groups who identify as religious might take up some of the concepts that Habermas calls attention to in contexts of deliberation, the meaning of concepts like "universal love" or autonomy that Habermas views as part of the Christian heritage will inevitably be inflected with particular cultural, social, and political ideas that may turn out to fall behind the threshold of postmetaphysical reason. My point here is to suggest that there is nothing inherently progressive or emancipatory about religious concepts or the "monotheistic" heritage *per se*, since they are only given meaning in contexts of interaction, where the innovations that are made by social actors determine meaning. A further and related problem is caught up in Habermas's definition of religion itself, which I will illustrate by drawing on the work of a few contemporary scholars of religions.

In the introductory chapter of their text, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion,"* William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon note how it has become axiomatic in recent years to put the term "religion" in scare quotes. One positive outcome of this tendency, they argue, is that it represents both a shift away from essentialist paradigms epitomized in the work of Mircea Eliade toward studying things like "religion on the ground" and "material religion," both of which suggest a fluidity and a pluralization of the object in question—that is to say, a shift toward studying *religions* and the corresponding "Christianities," "Buddhisms" and "Islams" that follows from this logic.[829] Following in the wake of J.Z. Smith and his seminal work *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, (1982) where he famously wrote that "there is no data for religion," suggesting the wholesale construction of the concept as a scholarly creation, Arnal and McCutcheon argue in their aptly titled chapter, "On the Persistence of Imagining Religion," that while this pluralization has provided an important corrective to the older, phenomenological model of "religion" as a sui generis concept with a distinct "essence" that marks the core of "religious experience," the new paradigm still largely

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[829] William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

retains the category "religion" as a tangible object, which is routinely presented in a naturalized and de-historicized fashion. One example they draw upon brings us in proximity to Habermas's way of thinking. In reference to two North American sociologists of religion whose papers' closed a recent conference in Germany, Arnal and McCutcheon write:

> Instead of predicting the eventual decline of religion, the closing speakers both described the manner in which such notions as church and state, or religion and politics are binary pairs that provide a framework in which modern social actors establish and negotiate their worlds.[830]

They go on to point out that this trend has marked much scholarship in religion over the last decade or so, where the binaries sacred/secular and religion/politics are routinely called into question, and point to the Social Science Research Council's blog "The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion and the Public Sphere"[831] as one notable example.[832] Commenting on these trends, Arnal and McCutcheon state that they do not take issue with the general critique of the sacred/secular binary, but find that the conclusions that these authors draw routinely re-present a naturalized and de-historicized notion of religion as though "such things as, say Christian theology—somehow preceded, and thus caused to develop, the subsequent ability to name those things that were not *religious*."[833]

To summarize their position, Arnal and McCutcheon claim that while it is an important and necessary development that more scholars have begun to recognize that "religion and discourses about it are local, partial, and need to be historicized," very few have taken the additional step to apply this rule when it comes to the discourse that is critical of the category "religion."[834] As a further corrective, they suggest that scholars must re-describe the first order classifications systems[835] of those that they study in order to develop methodologies that consistently theorize "religion" (and by extension "the secular") as an unstable rhetorical category, rather than as a tangible "thing" in the world that is obvious and self-evident. Arnal provides a useful example of this problem, which ties in with themes that Habermas develops, when he observes the following about the third century theologian Tertullian, who asked the question, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

> The question was rhetorical, and the answer obvious: The relationship is one of opposition and mutual exclusion. The wiles and pretences of human philosophy are at odds with the definitive apostolic testimony. … Yet in spite of the bold assurance of his views, there is a measure of irony in Tertullian's radical bifurcation of human knowledge from divine revelation, because his own

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830 Arnal and McCutcheon, *Sacred*, 8.

831 See The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere, accessed September 11, 214, http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/

832 To this list we could add Norris and Inglehart's *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (2004); Jakobsen and Pelligrini's *Secularisms* (2008); and two anthologies commenting on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*; *Rethinking Secularism* (2011) and *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, (2013) among many others.

833 Arnal and McCutcheon, *Sacred*, 8

834 Ibid., xiii.

835 Ibid., xi.

> very extensive writings are enormously indebted both to classical learning and Roman jurisprudence.[836]

For Arnal, this contradictory stance, where Tertullian is forced to rely on the resources of philosophy in order to explicate the Gospel, which he conceives of as divine, results in a closed hermeneutic where theology's task—along with much of contemporary New Testament scholarship, Arnal adds—is one of constantly trying to square a circle by separating true "religion" from "philosophy." The alternative that both he and McCutcheon advocate is one of comparing the first order descriptions of different groups and belief systems as a way to better understand their own acts of identification and authorization. In this way, the study of religion does not look for a tangible object that is called "religion," but rather seeks to explain the reasons and motivations behind calling something sacred or secular in the first place (i.e., the discursive terrain of conceptual possibility). I take this problem very seriously in my own approach and find Arnal and McCutcheon's arguments useful for thinking about any discourses on and about religion. Whether or not we can or should continue to use the term "religion" in our scholarly work is an important question to ask, though one that I will not attempt to solve here.

To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has applied the kind of critique that Arnal and McCutcheon raise to Habermas's work. Indeed, most if not all of his interlocutors are located in sociology, philosophy, and political theory, including some theologians who have taken up his work, along with certain feminist theorists. Given his recent forays into questions of religion and widely publicized debates with the likes of Joseph Ratzigner in 2004, Habermas's position is often mis-characterized, especially for those who identify with the anti-metaphysical, analytic camps in Anglo-American philosophy, along with post-structuralists of the strong social constructionist variety, of which Arnal and McCutcheon belong.[837] One problem with what I will here call the "radical deconstructionist" critique of the concept religion, which seeks not only to problematize the iterations of the concept, but to undermine the very ground upon which we can conceive of anything by that name, (e.g., because it is a Latin concept largely filtered through a Protestant Christian lens) is that it is seemingly unable to acknowledge the practical and political aims of philosophers and social theorist interested in religion as a legitimate pursuit. My suspicion here is that such scholars feel that any norm-oriented program will end up reifying religion and, moreover, it is not the scholars task to engage in such "apologetic" work, which is sometimes conceived of as a barely concealed theology is secular robes. One recent example of this position comes from Hinduism scholar Mike Altman who nicely illustrates this position in a blog on constructions of Islam as "authentic" vs. "false." As he writes:

> As scholars of religion, I don't think our job is to referee these fights or measure what practices or beliefs measure up to the level of "authentic" necessitated by the nation-state. Judges and lawmakers can and will do that. Our job is to come at the issues from another angle, one that probes the where, when, and how of "authenticity." Because authenticity is produced, not manifested. The questions for us is not, is this or that religion or noodle dish authentic? Instead, we ask, how is authenticity measured? On what grounds? By who? To what end? What is

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836 Ibid, 134.

837 By this I mean to suggest scholarship that aims to deconstruct received ideas without any seeming aim or desire to reconnect critique with a positive program in relation to ethics or politics.

> excluded as inauthentic? What's at stake in the authentic? How does the nation-state enforce/manage/discipline/discern authenticity?[838]

While I agree with Altman that one task for scholarship should be to critically interrogate these claims to authenticity and not simply affirm one's preferred model, such a position offers little room for grappling with concepts in political theory and political theology such as "the idea of public reason" and mischaracterizes a norm-oriented and idealizing approach that have a practical intension with a desire for authenticity. While the political or social theorist may fall prey to authorizing contingent claims in an a-historical sort of way, (and should be critiqued as such) her analysis should not be reduced to mere apologetics, but rather acknowledged as looking to address different scholarly aims. Tim Murphy nicely underlines this problem in his essay, "Speaking Different Languages: Religion and the Study of Religion," arguing that scholars of religion would do well to consider the distinction between the "temporal horizons" of scholarship versus those of the public sphere:

> Because it takes as its basis, as its guiding principle, the dictates of practical reason, the temporal horizons of the public sphere are much narrower than are those of the sciences. … Practical questions demand practical answers, answers which may form the basis for concrete plans which can be realized within a foreseeable time frame. The public sphere is necessarily constituted by these demands, and cannot have the patience to "wait and see," a gesture of deferral which is essential to science.[839]

The kind of critique put forward by Arnal and McCutcheon is most decidedly of the "wait and see" variety as it seeks to re-imagine religion along different theoretical lines than those who want to explain "religious" phenomena by privileging (certain) insiders' self-descriptions. The theoretical value of an alternative approach along the lines that they recommend remains to be seen, although a more nuanced and "pluralized" conception, following the critiques of J.Z. Smith, has clearly had some effect, as they happily acknowledge. While Habermas does indeed attempt to theorize religion, and has undertaken significant revisions in his understanding over his sixty years of scholarly work, his theory of communicative action, which is guided by a practical and political intent, by necessity requires the input of insiders' as a way to both understand the cognitive content of their presuppositions as well as to fairly reflect their subject-positions in deliberative contexts within the public sphere. There is thus a peculiar tension between the overlapping aims of Habermas's work, between the "is" and the "ought," which is perhaps most evident in his theory of religion. Amy Allen's observations on Habermas's "problematizing" and "vindicatory" genealogy of religion, which I touch upon in the introduction, subordinates the more "subversive" genealogies that are found not only with the philosophical heirs of Nietzsche that so concerns Habermas, but also in the scholarship of thinkers like Arnal and McCutcheon. Their

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[838] Mike Altman, "Authenticity and the Nation-State, Or Why Thai Food is a lot like ISIS." In Studying Religion in Culture blog: http://religion.ua.edu/blog/2014/09/authenticity-and-the-nation-state-or-why-thai-food-is-a-lot-like-isis/. Accessed September, 29, 2014.

[839] Tim Murphy, "Speaking Different Languages: Religion and the Study of Religion," in *Secular Theories of Religion: Current Perspectives*, eds. Tim Jenson and Mikael Rothstein (Copenhagen, DK: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 188.

concern, which lies almost exclusively with the "is"—that is to say, with subverting our received inheritance of the very idea of "religion" and its dominant iterations, such as the "world religions paradigm"[840]—is useful for thinking critically about the ways in which more long-term, explanatory theories are often caught up in the interests and ideals of contemporary politics and thus overdetermine their object in a de-historical sort of way.[841] By excluding the question of the "ought" from their analysis, however, Arnal and McCutcheon fail to see the ways in which the study of religions must also grapple with practical and pragmatic realities as they are taken up and understood in the public sphere. While this task may be better suited to theologians and political theorists, the study of religion comprises such scholars, whose aims, at best, help to create bridges with different fields of knowledge and lend practical legitimacy to the field. One does not find any obvious bridging points in the work or Arnal and McCutcheon that point toward ways in which the tensions between the "is" and the "ought" in the study of religion can be more productively worked through.

One scholar who has recently attempted to bridge the divide between the philosophy of religion and the critical study of religions is Kevin Schilbrack in his book, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (2014). In the preface to his work, Schilbrack argues that the traditional view of the philosophy of religion has been to engage a limited and narrow set of theistic views as the primary object of inquiry—a charge that Habermas has been guilty of in some measure, the reflexive openness of his model to innovation notwithstanding.[842] Schilbrack also notes that this view has tended to be "intellectualist" in that it is focuses more on doctrines than on the variety of ritual practices that constitute a significant—arguably the most significant—part of religious peoples' lives.[843] Lastly, Schilbrack points out that the philosophy of religion has tended to be insular, relying mostly on Christian theologians and the occasional Biblical studies scholar as its preferred interlocutors, rarely venturing across the river to other areas of religious studies, to say nothing of other, non-Biblical, (mainly Christian, sometimes Jewish, and rarely Islamic) theologies. Indeed, Schilbrack's characterizations here are very much indicative of Habermas's work in the philosophy of religion: his approach is mostly intellectualist (despite his acknowledgement of the importance of ritual praxis), primarily Christian-centric (though with important "Jewish" influences), and is not well versed with conversations in religious studies.

Unlike Habermas, and in ways that are analogous to the critiques of Benhabib, Brown, and Cooke, among others, Schilbrack suggests that scholars of religion need to pay closer attention to the "embodied" and "embedded" practices of groups who identify as religious, which suggests, on my reading, an insistence on paying greater heed to case

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840 For a critique of this paradigm, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

841 For a treatment of this problem in relation to Islam, See Aaron Hughes, *Theorizing Islam: Disciplinary Deconstruction and Reconstruction*. Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2014.

842 Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), xi.

843 Ibid., xi-xii.

studies in sociology and anthropology that deal with such diverse practices in order to better understand them and, in Habermasian terms, to re-construct the "rational" dimensions (read: intelligible and translatable) therein. In addition, Schilbrack proposes a tripartite approach to the study of religions, which urges equal attention to descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative ideas, theories, and interests, and thus provides a useful conceptual bridge for thinking about how to align Habermas's "problematizing" and "vindicatory" approach in relation to more "subversive" methods. For example, while Habermas relies on the descriptions of certain theological ideas appearing in the work of theologians and philosophers, his investigations lack any consistent or close analysis of how different groups take up these claims, innovate, modify, or discard them within cultures. To be sure, Habermas's explanation of religion is unique, especially his idea of the "linguistification of the sacred," which, I would claim, remains an underappreciated model that deserves closer attention. In any case, it remains over-determined and in need of a wider examination in the light of other methods and theories. Arguably Habermas's greatest contribution as a critical theorist is in the domain that Schilbrack labels "evaluation" or "judgment," where questions of ethics, justice, human rights, and democracy are taken up as serious problems in need of critical engagement. Thinking with Schilbrack and Habermas, one important task for scholars of religion, I submit, is to develop ways in which these distinct-yet overlapping methods, theories, and interests can be productively taken up together, without the interests on one domain colonizing and undermining another.

One additional approach that I'd like to propose for the study of religions, which aligns in different ways with the interests and ideas presented by Arnal and McCutcheon, Benhabib, Brown, Derrida, Habermas, Schilbrack, and others, is the need to consistently and systematically interrogate the relationship between dominant representations of religion in the public sphere and the aims and interests of scholarship. One theoretical approach that helps to situate this problem is seen in the work of Bruce Lincoln, especially in his seminal work, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*.[844] Lincoln's basic thesis is that societies are constantly deconstructed and reconstructed on the level of discourse, by which he means the complex interplay of myths, rituals and symbols, which create shifting hierarchies of classification. These discourses are understood to function by creating sentiments of "affinity" and "estrangement," where group formations (on the local and/or national level) are held together, overturned, and subject to acts of persuasion and manipulation through dominant images and ideologies that circulate within the public sphere. One can think of here, for example, of how "Islam" is often signified as inherently violent by certain groups and in dominant cultural narratives within the Euro-West, and how it is commonly linked to various chains of signification, such as "terrorism" and the subordination of women. While Habermas upholds a model of post-conventional identities that rejects such characterizations, his approach fails to interrogate the many ways in which our ideas about "religion" are conditioned through dominant narratives, which set the boundaries for how they are conceived in *practical terms*, presenting problems in both theory and practice. Moreover, a deeper analysis and engagement with the relationship between the study of religions and the broader public sphere can also help to create bridges with those outside of the academy in ways that are

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[844] See Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1989.

mutually productive, especially during a time of increased “religious” radicalization and when the very idea of the humanities itself is under threat.

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