



EUI Working Papers

MWP 2008/25

Habermas's Notion of a Post-Secular Society.
A Perspective from International Relations

Mariano Barbato and Friedrich Kratochwil

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

*Habermas's Notion of a Post-Secular Society.
A Perspective from International Relations*

MARIANO BARBATO and FRIEDRICH KRATOCHWIL

This text may be downloaded for personal research purposes only. Any additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copy or electronically, requires the consent of the author(s), editor(s). If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper or other series, the year, and the publisher.

The author(s)/editor(s) should inform the Max Weber Programme of the EUI if the paper is to be published elsewhere, and should also assume responsibility for any consequent obligation(s).

ISSN 1830-7728

© 2008 Mariano Barbato and Friedrich Kratochwil

Printed in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

<http://www.eui.eu/>
<http://cadmus.eui.eu/>

Abstract

How can secular Western IR theory deal with religion? Bringing in the debates on religion in the public sphere, the paper's goal is to foster a deeper understanding of the nexus between religion and international relations.

Religion in global politics challenges the notion of a secular world order based on contract and custom in a system of states, as they had developed since the Westphalian settlement. According to this foundational myth religion mattered only domestically, and there only within the "private" realm. The forces of globalization inevitably transcend the traditional boundaries of the state and also the fundamental distinction between the public and the private. The ongoing IR debate based on terrorism, and asymmetric conflict is decidedly too narrow to understand this fundamental challenge.

It is here that the discussion in political theory which focused on the changing configuration of the public sphere (public/private distinction) attains its importance for the IR debate about religion in a global perspective. It supplements the debate in international relations that addresses the re-drawing of boundaries that had traditionally marked the internal/ external (global) distinction, but offers more than Huntington or Norris and Inglehart. For both of them the decisive breaks in the tectonics of world politics are cultural fault-lines where a secular segment of the world population is facing a religious one. The problem with this kind of argument is that of a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy. Contrary to others who still hope to round up the wagons and fight back the passing raids of the challengers, Habermas has understood that it does not make much sense trying to push religion into the camp of fundamentalism. In our paper we use Habermas's notion of a post-secular society in a global perspective to understand the challenge of the Westphalian system without running into the trap of a clash of civilizations. To do so, we contrast Habermas's suggestion of a post-secular society with Berger's claim of the desecularization of the world and Connolly's deep pluralism and politics of becoming. Based on Chambers's interpretation of Habermas we offer a strong and a weak reading of the concept of a post-secular society and argue that only a strong reading can meet the needs of a global public sphere.

Keywords

International relations, globalization, religion, secularization, secularism, post-secular society, public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, William Connolly, Peter L. Berger

*Habermas's Notion of a Post-Secular Society.
A Perspective from International Relations*

MARIANO BARBATO* and FRIEDRICH KRATOCHWIL♦

Introduction

The “return of religion” as a social phenomenon has occurred in three different debates. One was extensively carried out in the field of international relations focusing on the clash of civilizations¹ (as each civilization was, for Huntington, founded on a religious creed), on “asymmetric conflict” and on terrorists who can no longer be deterred. Huntington’s intervention questioned the Westphalian myth according to which conflicts are the result of the territorial organization of politics. The current situation suggests that religious differences now represent the primary reason for future wars and he warns the West of a potential Islamic-Confucian alliance. There is no need to repeat here the arguments against this type of speculation. Nevertheless, it would seem that the events of 9/11 have provided some credence at least to the first part of his argument.

The other debate concerned the critique of “modernity” which has scrutinized both the notions of a unidirectional “development” of society and the secularization thesis. Here comparative politics, sociology – *vide* Peter Berger’s criticism of the secularization thesis² – and history provided the arenas in which “multiple paths” to modernity³ have been examined.

The secularization thesis has been confronted with disconfirming evidence, such as the emergence of “fundamentalism” in “modern” and many allegedly “pre-modern” societies. In addition to this, the very fact that most of the globe did not seem to follow the secularization path suggested that the European model was the exception rather than the rule. Equally damaging was the fact that this “theory” was not even able to account

* Max Weber Post-Doctoral Fellow (2007-2008) European University Institute, Florence, Italy

♦ Friedrich Kratochwil, European University Institute, Florence, Italy

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997), Samuel P. Huntington et al., *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996).

² Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Washington: Eerdmans, 1999).

³ S. N. Eisenstadt, *Patterns of Modernity Beyond the West* (London: Pinter, 1987).

for the observable differences in American and European social developments.⁴ Thus, the resurgence of evangelical movements in the US was paralleled by a revolt against the secular international elites in many parts of the world. But these revolts were spearheaded not by the “masses” *à la* Hardt and Negri⁵ but by counter-elites and “converted” adherents of secularism, all of whom had been exposed to Western ideas and practices.⁶

These developments not only challenge the notion of a secular domestic political realm but also one of a secular world order based on contract and custom in a system of states as it had developed since the Westphalian settlement. According to this foundational myth, religion mattered – if at all – only domestically, and, even then, only within the “private” realm. It is no wonder that challenges to this myth were conducive to conflict. This is the extent to which Norris and Inglehart’s modified thesis of secularization⁷ links up with Huntington’s predictions. For both of them, the decisive breaks in the tectonics of world politics are marked by a fault-line where a diminishing part of the secular and rich segment of the world population is facing an increasing number of non-secular poor. Underlying this argument is the thesis that the insecurities of life lead to a demand for religion that in turn vanishes when these insecurities can be taken care of by an increase in wealth. While the prospects for the world as a whole are much less rosy than those depicted by the old theories of stages of growth or of “development” where the “sense of cash” *à la* Lerner trumps other concerns, the model itself nevertheless embodies the same logic.

It is here that the third debate attains its importance: the discussion in political theory which focuses on the changing configuration of the public sphere and the public/private distinction. It supplemented the discussion in international relations that had addressed the disappearance (or rather the re-drawing) of boundaries traditionally marking the internal/external (global) distinction. Over the years, thinkers like Connolly, Taylor and, as of late, Habermas⁸ as well – to name only a few of the prominent voices⁹ – have contributed to this debate. While earlier works focused largely on the possibilities of political projects in which religious elements were part of a vibrant public sphere – without establishing orthodoxies of superior insights or revelation – the latest speculations by Taylor and Habermas point to the more general problem that arises out of the emergence of a global public sphere. Here, like it or not, the secular cosmopolitans seem to be the minority and will have to deal with people who have not embraced secularism as such or a world public order which is based entirely and exclusively on Western notions.

⁴ Hartmut Lehmann, *Säkularisierung. Der Europäische Sonderweg in Sachen Religion* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004).

⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁶ Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995).

⁷ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸ William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006), Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007).

⁹ See also: Veit Bader, *Secularism or Democracy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

Although Habermas and Taylor themselves do not explicitly develop these themes further, we believe that rethinking the problem of a secular state and an international order based on the Western liberal project has become imperative. Firstly, it is important because the ongoing IR debate based on terrorism and asymmetric conflict is decidedly too narrow to understand the ongoing change. Understanding the current situation has to come to terms with both the end of communism and its secular utopia and with the challenges to the very liberal project brought about by the forces of globalization. Secondly, the forces of globalization inevitably transcend the traditional boundaries of the state and the fundamental distinction between the public and the private sphere both of which have been constitutive of our understandings of (inter) national politics until now. Raising the question of why and how the “return of religion” challenges traditional notions about the international system and state and society is, therefore, a much further reaching question than that concerning the revolutionary potential of religion based on terrorism or conflict, as important as these latter issues might be.

It is against this background of a vacuum created by the collapse of the traditional political utopias that Habermas's attempt to utilize the semantic potentials of religion for politics in the global sphere has to be understood. He wants to counteract the destructive tendencies of fundamentalism and the visceral reactions it engenders and, at the same time, to provide a counterweight to those developments that are likely to degenerate into an economic dystopia of unfettered accumulation and social pathologies. The possibilities for such a re-conceptualization and its (even more difficult to accomplish) institutionalization have encountered scepticism on the one hand and careful optimism on the other. Here the different positions taken by John Gray and Pope Benedict are instructive.¹⁰ What is required, however, beyond this initial assessment, is nothing less than the formulation of a political project that transcends the “logic of the market.” At the same time, this project has to be attentive to the “deep pluralism” (Connolly) that impacts on the various political and religious traditions that are being brought into ever increasing contact by the forces of globalization.

The degree of difficulty of such a project is apparent in the fact that, on the one hand, civil society – in which, among other things, religion is supposed to flourish – is seen as an important ingredient of a vibrant political system while, on the other, the public space within which the binding decisions are made is supposed to be antiseptically “religion free”. That such a distinction is hardly convincing has been pointed out by Cooke.¹¹ However, it is also clear that religious beliefs, if they are admitted into the public realm, cannot insist on their superior status as “ultimate truths”, but have to subject themselves to discursive deliberation in which validity claims are exchanged and tested. First of all, this rules out the “capture” of the state by religion (or rather by a group of clergy). Second, it counteracts the view that the “ultimate” goal of politics is that “truth” has to subdue “power” and that the theory of the “two swords” can without further ado be reduced to one of the infallible “holy sword”. Third, it also makes inadmissible far-reaching claims to ultimate authority in the social sphere in the name of (religious) traditions, which frequently turn out not be religion-based at all.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict, *On Christian Hope. Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), John Gray, *Black Mass. The Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008).

¹¹ Maeve Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion," *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (2007).

It is the aim of this paper to probe a bit more deeply into this problem. Without claiming to provide a comprehensive assessment of the various debates, we wish to use Habermas as a prism through which we can examine some of the issues ventilated in the debates above. In these discussions, the chances and problems of a “politics of becoming” (Connolly) were appraised by critically examining a project of secularism and by probing the potential contribution of semantics shaped by religious thoughts to a post-secular political discourse.

Our argument proceeds according to the following steps. In the next section we take the secularization thesis and its various criticisms as our point of departure. Then we compare the utopian aim of Habermas’s post-secular society with Connolly’s politics of becoming¹² in an attempt to understand the new role of religion as a challenger of the liberal projects following the decline of communism. Having thereby provided the background we focus in section four on the central arguments of Habermas’s proposal for a post-secular society. Our claim here is that the problematique which Habermas analyzes has to be placed in the wider framework of a emerging global public sphere.

Section five deals with the problem of the place of religion in the political process. Habermas still appears to want to cling to the notion of a “reasoned” treatment of constitutional questions and policies, despite his recent acknowledgement of the importance of “pre-political” notions of morals and conviction, feeding the argumentative process. This raises the above mentioned dilemma of the “spheres.” On the one hand, religious convictions are admitted, for example, in discussions within civil society but must not be invoked in official, institutionalized decision processes. But as Cooke¹³ points out, the problem is not that all religiously tinged arguments have to be eliminated. Only those arguments that are not vetted thoroughly because they are merely taken as revealed truths are excluded, as the establishment of a particular point of view is incompatible with a liberal constitutional order.

Section six follows up on the suggestions of Simone Chambers¹⁴ and develops two possible versions of the Habermasian proposal. One is based on a weaker reading, the other on a stronger interpretation. In the weaker reading the “post-secular” moment can be interpreted as a stage, which eventually leads to a secular society. The task of “post-secularism” would therefore consist in the harnessing of the overlooked moral potentials of religions in order to arrive – after a successful “translation” – at a secular society. The stronger version is based on an appreciation of the importance of religion comparable to that of aesthetics. Like the latter, religion would transmit important impulses to philosophy while preserving its own system of meanings that can never be dissolved or translated without remainder. Central chiffres of religious semantics, such as God, whose inclusion into the political discourse Habermas rejects, would then have a place, even though they could not be instrumentalised for particular purposes or serve as the fundament for everything else. It is this version which would then provide the framework for the discussions within the global public sphere in which religious members could participate instead of being excluded *a priori*.

¹² Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, pp. 47-71.

¹³ Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion."

¹⁴ Simone Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion," *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (2007).

The secularization debate

The central role of religion in sociology, exemplified in the works of Durkheim¹⁵ and Weber,¹⁶ seem to have been displaced in the post WWII era by a fascination with social *systems*. Instead of locating ideas and interests of the actors in the structures of meaning in which religion had held the pride of place, a functional perspective prevailed. The agenda was dominated by questions of modernization, political development and rational action rather than by questions concerning the role of world religions, their civilizations and teachings that had given rise to particular historical forms of sociality (see, for example, Troeltsch's monumental work on the social teachings of the Christian churches).¹⁷ In a way these developments could be interpreted as the logical outcome of Weber's thesis of the disenchantment of modernity where rational modes of action and organization were transforming all spheres of social life. Formal procedures and maximizing criteria – here Lerner's "sense of cash" as a characteristic of modernity and political development comes to mind – rather than comprehensive meaning structures now provided the background for interpretation and for "predicting" future developments. But this perspective repeated, in a way, a secularization move that first appeared in the construction of a "world history" by the Enlightenment. This construction had transformed the old theological conception of "history" as an eschatological narrative of salvation into an immanent telos of progress.

Given this legacy, it became nevertheless questionable whether the indubitable decline of organized religion – noticeable in both the shrinking sector of practicing believers and in the loss of the monopoly over the interpretation of existential questions that all denominations faced – could be pressed into the secularization/modernization scheme. True, the conception of a holy cosmos might have disappeared and the practice of religion showed increasingly individualistic tendencies which emphasized personal beliefs and syncretistic elements rather than common rites or dogmatic exegesis. But, as Stark and Bainbridge suggested, the empirical record was far from providing corroboration for the "secularization" argument. Instead, they persuasively argued that "when religion declines, cults appear."¹⁸ Indeed the emergence of esoteric circles and movements, the renewed interest in the occult and in "foreign" religions showed that the focus on officially constituted churches had misled traditional sociology of religion. There was, therefore, a need to develop a conceptual apparatus which is freed from the traditional European manifestations and their conceptual baggage. Furthermore, the fact that secularization trends diverged considerably in Western societies called into question the heuristic appropriateness of the modernization/secularization scheme, not to mention the difficulties we encounter if we apply this scheme to other regions of the world.

The first question occasioned Luckmann's famous call for a non-church based research program in the sociology of religion as elaborated in his work on the Invisible

¹⁵ Emile Durkheim, *Durkheim on Religion* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper, 1960).

¹⁸ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Religion that appeared in 1967.¹⁹ Bourdieu's plea²⁰ for a "sociologie de la croyance" rather than a sociology of churches repeated this central demand 20 years later. The second question was addressed by Peter Berger in his Rumour of Angels, where he has suggested important modifications to the secularization theory and pointed to the exceptional status of Europe in this respect.²¹ More recently he has argued that, far from representing a universal phenomenon, secularization shows specific stratification patterns that are of high relevance for the future of international politics:

My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today with some exceptions [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was [...].²²

There exists an international subculture composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, that is indeed secularized. This subculture is the principal 'carrier' of progressive Enlightened beliefs and values. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the 'official' definition of reality, notably the educational system, the media of mass communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system. They are remarkably similar all over the world today [...]. I cannot speculate why people with this type of education should be so prone to secularization. I can only point out that what we have here is a globalized *elite* culture.

In country after country, then, religious upsurges have a strongly populist character. Over and beyond the purely religious motives, these are movements of protest and resistance *against* secular elite.²³

The important point here is not only that the traditional focus on Western societies has skewed our perception of the pervasiveness and universality of secularization but rather that the global optic provides us with the best indication of how the secularist project is being challenged and the need to rethink the relationship between religion and politics. After all, some religious movements have become a global phenomenon and the revolt against the secular elite is not just some populist revolt occasioned by redistributive demands – even though calls for justice are seldom missing – but a deliberate attempt at de-legitimizing the existing order. The challenge seems, however, to go even deeper, as it touches upon the very foundational myths underlying the Westphalian state system. Here, supposedly, a secular order was established whereby states increasingly defined their role as a "neutral" one and viewed themselves as secular guarantors of political order. The *res publica Christiana* of old has become the "international system" managed through the pursuit of interests and the balance of power.

Of course both tenets of the Westphalian mythology are in need of significant correction. The religious settlement, based on a modified version of the Peace of Augsburg (*cuius regio ejus religio*), provided for the official recognition of a plurality of creeds. What *did not* emerge from Westphalia was the "neutral" liberal state. Instead, we have nearly everywhere – with the significant exception of the Low Countries – the

¹⁹ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "Sociologues de la croyance et croyances de sociologues" *Archives des Sciences Sociales de la Religion*, 63, no. 1 (1987).

²¹ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969).

²² Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World. A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World* ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

foundation of state churches and religious institutions in both catholic and protestant countries which were charged with important administrative and social tasks. In some cities domestic peace was predicated on some form of "corporate" arrangement which guaranteed Catholics and Protestants parity in decision making. Indeed the notion of a *beatitudo civilis* as an "end" of the state trumping all other ends takes well into the 18th century to emerge. This notion coincided with the advent of absolutism and with the decline of the representative institutions of the old estate system. Not only have historians pointed to the crucial role played by religion in the emergence of the state, for even such figures of the Enlightenment as Rousseau stressed the importance of a "civil religion" for political order, but also "modern" leaders such as Napoleon did not want to forgo the benefits of the aura of the sacred when he himself had been crowned emperor by the pope.

Similarly, the merely "contractual" notion of international politics is rather the result of a positivist reconstruction of the development of international law in the late 19th century than historical reality. The actors of the *res publica Christiana* knew quite well that outsiders, such as the Ottomans, mattered politically but that membership in the European club was predicated on the recognition of the status of a player and his acceptance of certain conventions. Occasionally there were also some common political undertakings which often had a significant religious overtone, for example the fight against the Ottomans. That it took until the Peace of Paris (1856) to accept the High Porte into that club (while all of Latin America had been admitted in the aftermath of their independence) seems to suggest that considerably more was required for the reproduction of "international politics" than the mere interaction among different "units". Finally, in our time we have witnessed the return of religion not only through fundamentalist warriors and terrorist networks but through the forces of globalization. Both have undermined the historical compromises between the internal and external, and between the public and private domains and reopened many of the problems that seemed to have been solved or that had traditionally not made the international agenda. Global justice, human rights, and responsibility for nature and creation are perhaps the most visible areas. But as shown by the collapse of the Soviet empire in which both fundamentalist mujaheddins in Afghanistan and a Polish pope played a crucial part, the interaction between religion and politics has always played a much more vital role than the imagery of hermetically separate spheres suggests.

While these brief historical reflections serve as important correctives for the conventional secularization thesis, there is no doubt that they are at odds with the dominant understandings which inform contemporary discourse. The anxieties which are engendered by this disconnection between actual practice and the conceptual maps we use to orient ourselves are made apparent by Huntington and Inglehart. For Huntington, future conflicts develop along the fault lines of religion whereby both the traditional statist picture of international politics and its secular manifestation are abandoned only to re-enter the picture when he warns the West of a potential Islamic Confucian alliance.²⁴ Similarly disturbing is Inglehart's and Norris' thesis of the consequences for Western secular societies who are living in abundance while facing an increasingly larger segment of poor and religious people in the world.²⁵ Here again the problem between the numerous poor and the childless rich – a traditional opposition, as the use of the term "proletariat" from Rome to Marx attests – is not dealt with in terms

²⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?." p. 48.

²⁵ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular.*, pp. 215-41.

of even the faintest allusion to problems of distributive justice or to particular strategies for poverty abatement. Instead, the crypto-materialism of this approach and the snug satisfaction with the existing conditions by the privileged few is exemplified by the reduction of the problem to one of the bane of differential rates of fertility.

In either case it is not difficult to fathom that neither proposal holds any promise for a solution. Given these problems, the secularization thesis in its original or modified form fails to come to terms with the existing practices and to grasp the legitimization deficit that appears when one tries to base future actions on the old recipes, such as “rounding up the wagons”. Such strategies might once have worked but their preconditions have been fundamentally altered in the meantime. The issue is not only that the actual problems have overtaken the “maps” that are supposed provide orientation, but also that the old representation does not seem to possess the conceptual resources for developing alternatives to the present impasses. The anaemic character of possessive individualism animating the liberal project has become a liability, as critics as diverse as Connolly and Taylor have pointed out.²⁶ It is here that Habermas’s argument for a post-secular political order could contribute to a broadening of the horizon within which new opportunities could be identified.

The politics of becoming after the fall of communism

The brief discussion above hopefully has demonstrated that the “return of religion” to politics in general and international politics in particular cannot be reduced to the repercussions of 9/11, even though that event had a decisive impact which no appraisal can neglect. In the following section we attempt such an appraisal by comparing this specific militant and violent “return of religion” with the eschatological-utopian potential of communism, as it is here that Habermas’s interest in religious semantics has its origin. In other words, we maintain that structurally speaking Islamism has now inherited the role as the principal challenger of the West, as already Barber argued in contrast to Fukuyama.²⁷ Philipott seems to provide the fitting shorthand in this respect:

The ultimate goal of radical revivalists is the Islamization of this order, replacing secular order with divine order, the nation state with an Islamic system, democracy with an Islamic notion of consultation, positive law and human legislation with *sharia* and government of the people with God’s rule.²⁸

This principled opposition is not founded on the territorially based block confrontation resonant of the Cold War but rather derives from a discursive gambit which anchors social order in religion. For the West this means that it is no longer facing a communist a-theistic challenge which militarily dominated a significant part of

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*.

²⁷ „The days of Islam’s cultural conquest, it would seem, are over.” Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 46. Benjamin Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995). For a discussion see: Steve Smith, "The End of the Unipolar Moment? September 11 and the Future of World Order," *International Relations* 16 (2002): pp.174-76.

²⁸ Daniel Philpott, "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations," *World Politics* 55 (2002) p. 89.

the globe and whose influence and activities went beyond the Elbe, but rather an opponent whose “fifth columns” and networks have penetrated its very societies. Today Muslims everywhere have to distance themselves from the militant versions of Islam as formerly socialists or communists had to do with regard to Stalinism. Both are – justifiably or unjustifiably – under suspicion that Islam, like communism, always has to result in a politics of violence. Behind this suspicion lies, of course, the general suspicion towards all religions based on claims of ultimate truth. It is a problem that Assmann identifies, however, with monotheistic religions in particular.²⁹

It seems that while communism formerly was the dominant mode of criticism, religion has now become the dominant discourse for the airing of grievances and for demanding change. This was already apparent in the Iranian revolution where opposition to the regime and the West were made in terms of theological vocabulary, even by people who were, by all accounts, not practising religion and who often appeared thoroughly “Western” at first blush. Similarly today, the original secular and political discourse of Pan-Arabism by which the West was opposed has been replaced by a more fundamentalist “Muslim” criticism of Western society and culture. The collapse of the Soviet empire has also quite obviously affected the persuasiveness of the secular narrative of progress. Communist ideology offered an alternative vision of political order which was opposed to the liberal West and justified the role of the secular socialist movement within world politics.

With this changing of the guards from communism to Islam as the main antagonist the West, or at least Europe, is actually encountering an adversary that is historically familiar. As in the case of communism, Islam also represents a not entirely foreign and hermetically sealed culture. It shares with the West many of the same roots in antiquity and their Judeo-Christian transformation. They have a history not only of conflict but of a great give and take, though these exchanges were hardly ever evenly balanced. After all, Islamic culture bloomed long before the rise of the West – one should remember el Andaluz and the transmission of the ancients via Arabic scholars to the West! Western influence, on the other hand, became most noticeable in later periods that coincided with colonialism, i.e., with periods in which the original political and cultural leadership had been lost. These “facts” get ascribed significance especially when the decline is interpreted in religious terms, i.e. as punishment for the abandonment of a strict Islam. This “secularisation” has emasculated its power and made the community of believers the object of European power politics.

As satisfactory as such a narrative might be in “explaining” the fall from hegemony it conveniently overlooks the fact that the end of Arab predominance was not brought about by the “West” but by the Mongol onslaught and the subsequent consolidation of Turkish power. To the extent to which the historical dialogue is one of secularism, it is rife with the recollections that bring with it serious impediments and liabilities for a fruitful dialogue. Thus, quite contrary to the belief that a secular narrative has to be a “neutral ground” that is uniquely predestined to serve as a basis of communication across the fault lines, we have to understand that history is always a production of memory and not a simple collection of brute facts. Remembering actions and events, however, always proceeds from a present problematique which assigns importance and meaning to the things remembered.

²⁹ Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (München: Hanser, 2007).

Thus far from providing an Archimedean point, due to its “facticity” history is always implicated in the very political struggles of the day and it does not seem accidental that the process of “recovering” one’s history is always the first step towards emancipation among individuals and groups. In this sense, one might overestimate the potential of historical dialogue and forgo the opportunities that arise out of a direct confrontation with the problems of order, where, though different political designs may clash, the exponents can meet at least at the same level and without some of the historical baggage. The “fruitful” dialogue between Islam and the scholastics seems to represent precisely such a case. Here these different voices did not result in a cacophony of recriminations nor in simple idiosyncratic affirmations of possessing “the truth”, despite the fact that the participants to the dialogue brought their own interpretation of the classical Platonic or Aristotelian texts.

It is precisely here that Habermas’s attempt to examine the semantic potentials of religion has to be understood. After the fall of communism, Habermas searches for a counter-paradigm or new opportunities to counteract the claims of unfettered capitalism which has become part of “globalization”. For him, the situation today is characterized by the fact that:

[...] normative consciousness is not only threatened from without by the reactionary desire for a fundamentalist counter-modernity, but it is also threatened internally by the derailing modernization itself. The division of labour between the integrative mechanisms of the market, the bureaucracy and social solidarity is no longer in equilibrium but has been altered in favour of economic imperatives, which rewards the type of interactions which are governed by the self interest of respective actors. The introduction of new technologies which reach deeply into the until now considered “natural” elements of the person reinforce a naturalistic understanding of the subjects and their actions.³⁰

Habermas surmises that within religious communities something might still exist “that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by the professional knowledge of experts alone.”³¹ He believes that he can refer to “adequately differentiated possibilities of expression and to sensitivities with regard to lives that have gone astray, with regard to social pathologies, with regard to the failure of individuals’ plans for their lives, and with regard to the deformation and disfigurement of the lives that people share with one another.”³² Habermas’s interest in the moral sense of religious communities is therefore derived from his recognition of the incoherence of secular discourse which – in its neo-liberal and naturalistic form – has engendered the diagnosed pathologies yet provides insufficient resources for counteracting its derailments. Even though Habermas does not lay all of his cards on the table he obviously wants to recover the potential a “relevant utopia” could have for social and political life. As Simone Chambers put it:

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 247(own translation).

³¹ ———, “Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?,” in *The Dialectics of Secularization*, ed. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2006), p. 43.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

There is a utopian core to religious eschatology that can be harnessed for or allied with this-worldly causes such as global justice. [...] Habermas recognizes the normative potential of religion as a counterweight to instrumentalization.³³

In this reading of Habermas, Chambers follows Wolin who thinks that Habermas recognizes that religion

prevents the denizens of the modern secular society from being overwhelmed by an all-encompassing demand of vocational life and worldly success. It offers a much-needed dimension of otherness: The religious values of love, community, and godliness help to offset the global dominance of competitiveness, acquisitiveness and manipulation that predominate in the vocational sphere.³⁴

It might be one thing to use religion as a provider of new impulses for conventional arguments. However, if religious discourses have the persuasiveness that is necessary to strengthen their potential for criticism they are bound to develop their own dynamics. In this sense, Connolly's approach to a "politics of becoming" and his advocacy of "deep pluralism" go beyond what Habermas seems to have in mind. Both Habermas and Connolly are united in their criticism of Rawls. In addition, Connolly also takes issue with the Habermas of a few years ago, not only because the exclusion of religion-based arguments in the public sphere contradict pluralism but because laicism introduces a particular kind of sterility into the public realm which Connolly dubbed "pure politics". Against this sterile notion he advocates a politics of becoming. Compared to the usual attempts to cement political stability by a basic consensus – here Connolly uses Nietzsche's term of "Winterphilosophie" – the politics of becoming, on the other hand, is supposed to create an opening for change, particularly in those situations in which one party profits from stability while others might suffer from it.³⁵ As he points out:

The most complex ethical issues arise in those contexts where suffering is intense and its visitation upon some is bound up with securing the self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence, or cultural merit of others. That is, the most intense, intractable cases of suffering are political in character. They often revolve around what I call the politics of becoming.³⁶

Although Connolly does not relate this observation to the global conflict between dominant secular thinking and those counter-discourses which challenge its hegemony, he nevertheless describes rather fittingly what is happening in the global sphere after the "return of religion." His objection to pure politics and his advocacy of deep pluralism intend to create through the politics of becoming an ever widening consensus. However, it does so in the full awareness that not all can be included even though increasing numbers can participate in political contestation.

By *the politics of becoming* I mean that paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries. The politics of

³³ Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion," p. 215.

³⁴ Richard Wolin, "Jürgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 2 (2005): pp. 16-17. See Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion," p. 215.

³⁵ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, pp. 19-71, 163-87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

becoming emerges out of the energies, suffering, and lines of flight available to culturally defined differences in a particular institutional constellation. To the extent it succeeds in placing a new identity on the cultural field, the politics of becoming changes the shape and contour of already entrenched identities as well.³⁷

This readiness for a politics of becoming represents in the global public sphere a considerable challenge to the secular West since it would appear that the West could defend its position quite well with the “Winterphilosophie” of secularism. However, the central idea of a philosophy of becoming is that only openness to change makes it possible to have an *argumentative* rather than a *conflictual* transformation. In short, the crucial point for a global politics of becoming is the recognition of others on equal terms. In this context Connolly follows Deleuze by mentioning the case of a religious interlocutor who, on the basis of deep pluralism, accepts that other orientations might be more viable than his own.³⁸ Here Bagge Lausten and Ole Wæver go even further by distinguishing between religion and ideology and do not exclude the possibility that concrete creeds might sometimes be closer to the latter. For them, ideology attempts to “legitimize a given polity and policy by the use of a quasi-religious semantics.”³⁹ The distinguishing characteristic of religion is its openness that militates against all attempts to reduce it to an instrument of policy or legitimation. “Religion constitutes being [...] ideology constitutes identity [...]. Ideologies create an illusion of a fullness of being, while religion stress(es) that there is always a higher being barring the subject.”⁴⁰

If we were to reintroduce this line of argumentation into the debate of Rawls and Habermas/Connolly we could say that a narrow secularism fits far better the template of an ideological comprehensive doctrine than the notion of an open religion. Furthermore, the notion of a global politics of becoming enables us to fathom the critical and utopian potential of religious discourse as a means for meeting a host of challenges that have arisen with the demise of communism and the advent of globalization. Certainly such a commitment to a politics of becoming is not without its risks but it would seem to provide the point of departure for a politics that moves beyond the ossified stability which Nietzsche has rightly criticized as a “Winterphilosophie”.

The linguistic turn in the encounter with the sacred: three dimensions of a post-secular society

The previous sections have outlined the background of Habermas’s thinking with respect to the contemporary post-communist and post-nationalist era. In this section we can now engage with some of the more specific arguments of his and examine their applicability to contemporary “global” politics. As we have seen, Habermas himself has changed his views quite considerably in regard to the place and role of religion. Nevertheless, in 1999 Habermas is for Connolly still the main “secular” sparring partner, even though Connolly already is hinting at the possibility of a change which would bring the Habermasian project within the penumbra of Connolly’s post secular politics of becoming.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 43-46.

³⁹ Carsten Bagge Laustesen and Ole Wæver, "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization," *Millennium* 29, no. 3 (2000): p. 726.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 728.

Now a new Habermas could say: It is impossible to participate in discourse without projecting the counterfactual possibility of consensus; but, hey, since each attempt to interpret the actual import of that counterfactuality in any concrete setting is also problematical and contestable, this stricture does not rule out in advance religious or non-theistic metaphysical perspectives that exceed the terms of the postmetaphysical alternative my younger self endorsed as necessary [...].

In an age of globalization and the accentuation of speed in so many domains of life, a cultural pluralism appropriate to the times is unlikely to be housed in an austere postmetaphysical partisanship that purports to place itself above the fray. The need today, rather, is to rewrite secularism to pursue an ethos of engagement in public life among a plurality of controversial *metaphysical* perspectives, including, for starters, Christian and other monotheistic perspectives, secular thought, and asecular, nontheistic perspectives. A new *modus vivendi* is needed to replace the Kantian achievement in which a few fundamental differences *within Christianity* were relegated to the private realm in the name of a generic rational religion or a generic reason. Here pluralism would not be grounded in one austere moral source adopted by everyone (say, a universal conception of rational religion, or discourse, or persons, or justice). It would be grounded in an ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies honoring a variety of moral sources and metaphysical orientations. Such an ethos *between* interdependent partisans provides an existential basis for democratic politics if and when partisans affirm without deep resentment the contestable character of the fundamental faith they honor most.⁴¹

Even though Habermas has not left Kant behind, within the parameters of his project he has realized many of Connolly's proposals. This becomes particularly evident if one goes back those works Habermas wrote before *Postmetaphysical Thinking*⁴² and which Connolly focused on. In the second part of the *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas formulated his thesis of the linguistic transformation of the sacred, based on his discussion of the sociology of religion.⁴³ With this thesis he means

the transfer of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization from sacred foundations over to linguistic communication and action orientated to mutual understanding. To the extent that communicative action takes on central societal functions, the medium of language gets burdened with tasks of producing substantial consensus. In other words, language no longer serves merely to *transmit* and actualize prelinguistically guaranteed agreements, but more and more to *bring about* rationally motivated agreements as well; it does so in moral-practical and in expressive domains of experience no less than in the specifically cognitive domain of dealing with an objectivated reality.⁴⁴

We need not decide here to what extent these arguments, which push the world religions nearer to the rationalistic language of the Enlightenment and whereby the sacred has to be reduced to the mythical, are still tenable. This attempt of, for example, locating Christian faith in-between linguistic rationality and pre-linguistic mysticism could be compatible with a religious perspective as it comes close to arguments made by Ratzinger.⁴⁵ However, as the inducing of a rationally motivated consensus seems to be obviously a rather heroic assumption by now, Habermas argues that the new focus on language should rather be on the prior task of transmission and actualization. According

⁴¹ Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, pp. 38-39.

⁴² Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

⁴³ ———, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 43-111.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

to Habermas, the left Hegelian project not only of the “sublation” (Aufhebung) of religion in thought but also of the bringing about of the heavenly kingdom on earth – whereby theological concepts have to fit the needle’s eye of critical reason in order to be viable in a profane environment – has been a failure. Hence, he notices a general turn towards some messianic hope ranging from Adorno to Derrida – even if it is a “messianicity, stripped of everything” (Derrida) – a hope which he also seems to share.⁴⁶

But Habermas does not want to become an “easy prey for theology” either, despite the insight into the limitations of his philosophy and its fragile position within “modernity.” He insists on the “generic distinction (which is not at all meant in a pejorative sense) between the secular discourse that claims to be accessible to all men and the religious discourse that is dependent upon the truth of revelation.”⁴⁷ Rather he suggests that “the boundaries between secular and religious reasons are fluid. Determining these disputed boundaries should therefore be seen as a cooperative task which requires *both* sides to take on the perspective of the other one.”⁴⁸ By focussing on the drawing of the boundary he avoids the implicit Kantian and Hegelian evaluation of religion by the standards of philosophy.⁴⁹ Indeed, Habermas supplements the respect for successful life projects with a readiness to learn. He finds such repositories of meaning in religious communities.

Those moral feelings which only religious languages has as yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed. The mode for nondestructive secularization is translation.⁵⁰

Thus, in order to create a climate for active participation in this philosophical translation which provides moral backing for political deliberation and the stabilization of social order, the political discourse must be open for contribution made in a religious idiom in the same way as the non-believing citizens are called upon to examine religion for its semantic potential.

The project of preserving the semantic potential of religion through a procedure of translation – for which Habermas proposes the concept of a post-secular society – has three identifiable dimensions: one moral, one political and one philosophical. Within the moral one, the world religions serve (in their reflexive understanding) as the bastions for preserving moral feelings, articulations, arguments and motivations. The questions whether moral argumentation can function in the long run without religion is elegantly side-stepped by Habermas. He suggests that this is an empirical question and that as far as he is concerned he intends to hold on to his position of what is potentially a “purely” secular moral.⁵¹

In the political dimension, Habermas pleads for a new openness vis-à-vis religiously informed objections, as they, together with the moral dimension, might provide important resources for escaping from the pathologies and derailments of a footloose modernization.

⁴⁶ Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, pp. 111-113.

⁴⁷ ———, “Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?,” p. 41, 42.

⁴⁸ ———, *The Future of Human Nature*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ ———, “Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?,” p. 42.

⁵⁰ ———, *The Future of Human Nature*, p. 114.

⁵¹ ———, “Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?,” p. 38.

The philosophical dimension is supposed to provide via its translation capability the accessibility of the religious messages to those who only use the common public language.

Within these three dimensions various connections can be found. What is important for the realm of international politics is, above all, the link between the political and moral dimension and the consequences of any dependency of political arguing on pre-political religious arguing. Last but not least, there is the connection between the philosophical and the political dimension and the question of how "deep" the postulated pluralism has to be in order to include all relevant forces of a politics of becoming on the global level. These two connections will be discussed in the following sections.

Pre-political attempts of cooptation and the untenable closure of the public sphere.

In a contribution to a debate with Ratzinger, Habermas has addressed the Böckenförde theorem⁵² which indicates that the secularized state is based on presuppositions which the state alone cannot guarantee. In counteracting such cooptation attempts, Habermas insists that one only needs to make weak assumptions concerning the normative content of socio-cultural lifeworlds. For him it is still important that the citizens themselves *constitute* the power of the state rather than simply tame it. Consequently, no pre-constitutional power in need of a pre-political partner or opposition remains. If one sees democratic procedures as "a method whereby legitimacy is generated by legality, there is no 'deficit of validity' that would need to be filled by the ethical dimension". The proceduralist understanding of the constitutional state, inspired by Kant, insists (against the Hegelian view of law) that the basic principles of the constitution have an autonomous justification and that all the citizens can rationally accept the claim this justification makes."⁵³ The "uniting bond" that Böckenförde misses need not be supplied by some pre-political institution but consists rather in the "democratic process itself".⁵⁴

Although Habermas continues to put his trust in reason and democratic procedures there is – as in the case of Rawls – a noticeable tendency to accord increasing importance to the concrete "life-world". Although political virtues play a subordinate role for him, he nevertheless recognizes the importance of the embeddedness of state in a civil society "that is nourished by springs that well forth spontaneously – springs that one may term 'pre-political'."⁵⁵ The consciousness of a post secular society will respect all sources that sustain the normative consensus and solidarity among the citizens, especially religious communities which have integrated universal principles of justice in their orthodox teachings. However, ideally the democratic dynamics should be sufficient to sustain the costly motivations of accepting obligations vis-à-vis other citizens who remain anonymous. Nevertheless Habermas considers plausible Böckenförde's fears of a disintegrating citizenry insisting on its subjective rights, since the increasing autonomy and dominance of social subsystems

⁵² Ibid., Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, "Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisierung," in *Staat, Gesellschaft, Recht.*, ed. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 60.

⁵³ Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?," p. 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 30-31.

such as the economy and the withdrawal from the political into private life are part of a derailing modernization. The social bond can break.⁵⁶

Within this multifaceted discussion Habermas makes an audacious move. He claims that the question of whether communicative reason is sufficient to stabilize the modernization process can be treated quite “undramatically” as an “open, empirical question.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the very treatment of this issue as an empirically open question is everything but non-dramatic. If it should turn out that a secular moral can only function in ideal circumstances but not under “normal” conditions then the project of a secular or agnostic Enlightenment would have to be considered a failure. Irrespective of what position one takes in this regard, there seems to be a consensus reaching from Böckenförde to Habermas that religiously based arguments and attitudes make valuable contributions to the public order and its discourse. This, of course, does not mean that religious persons are *eo ipso* also moral persons; as such a self serving move must be opposed particularly by those who take their religion seriously. The contribution of the believing part of the public to political discourse is independent of the substantive claims or the personal integrity and seriousness with which the beliefs inform the life of the individual. It simply means addressing alternative goals rather than being stuck and reducing public life to the support for rational maximization of what is unreflectively considered individual welfare (*de gustibus non est disputandum*), or, even more narrowly, to capital accumulation in a footloose economy. Thus, quite differently from the strange recollections of many adherents of the Enlightenment, the topics of religious argumentation do not simply contribute to the preservation of the *status quo* – the coalition between the throne and altar has long disappeared – but provide an important alternative vision to the dominant “liberal” or neo-liberal utopia. Very much in the sense of a politics of becoming the task is not the stabilization of the existing narrow discourse but rather the introduction of some dissonant voices to the secular choir.

The decisive question is then how much room one should accord to these dissonant voices. Here the weak point in Habermas’s argument becomes obvious as has been noted both by supporters and opponents of a larger role for religious semantics. As already mentioned, Habermas draws a clear line of separation between the realm of public opinion – in which religious argumentation is desirable – and the sphere of the state with its institutions – which shall remain free of any religious tinge. After all, religious arguments are not supposed to take over but simply make a contribution to moral arguments. Here Habermas follows Nicholas Wolterstorff who had attacked the Rawlsian position on this point. Habermas accepts, however, only the first of Wolterstorff’s points while he rejects a role for religious arguments in the institutional sphere.⁵⁸ For Paolo Flores d’Arcais this separation is little more than an untenable gambit. As he writes

Habermas claims that there are two separate worlds of communication in which mutually incompatible rules prevail. According to this proposal the official Hillary Clinton is enjoined from mentioning God when she is campaigning while her husband Bill can do this in public when he is campaigning for her. The “pragmatic solution” by which Habermas tries to escape

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 35-37.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁸ ———, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” pp.8-9.

from his contradictions is not a practicable one. After all, it is simply a fact that in the public spheres all (or at least a good and increasing number) are invoking God.⁵⁹

The concerns of secular citizens are well founded. But the strict separation between a public and an institutional argumentation – also exemplified by Casanova's proposal⁶⁰ cannot be maintained. The reason is – in line with Habermas's basic assumption – that nowadays the pre-political sphere of public opinion is no longer facing an absolutist state and that constitutional principles and public policy both emerge from the process of public deliberations. To that extent, the division of the public into two spheres cannot function.

However, the fear remains that by giving up this separation, we arrive at an authoritarian state that insists on a common "confessio" as exemplified by the Post-Westphalian developments in early modernity – a fear articulated well in d'Arcais objections. But this fear can be alleviated. As Meave Cooke suggests, the Habermasian conviction of the universal accessibility of the tenets of secular reason is not unproblematic in a world which does not share the Western historical experiences of the genesis of a constitutional democratic state. In accordance with Connolly's arguments of a deep pluralism she argues that it cannot be the task of the public sphere to simply "translate" religious arguments so that they can become part of a secular policy. Rather, the task is the finding of the better argument which can be buttressed by religious as well as secular reasons. Consequently, a post secular state can result from a post-secular society.⁶¹ With Connolly one could hold that religious arguments are not fixed and beyond deliberation as intimated by Habermas,⁶² but that they are, on the contrary, subject to criticism. Religious arguments are different from d'Arcais caricature, and they are not simply limited to tropes like "it is God's will," even if secular citizens fear with some justification his being invoked as an authority. The crucially important distinction here seems to be the one between an *authoritarian vs. a non authoritarian form of argumentation* rather than that between a religious vs. a secular argument. As Cooke points out:

There is no conflict in principle between non-authoritarian reasoning and an orientation towards some "otherworldly", transcendent source of validity (for example, God or the good) [...]. In short, non-authoritarian citizenship is independent of postmetaphysical thinking or metaphysical and religious belief [...]. My contention is that there are good reasons for excluding *authoritarian* modes of thinking and acting from democratic legislative and decision-making processes, but that there are no good reasons, at least in the present context, for excluding contributions *solely* on the grounds that they are formulated in religious terms. [...] Indeed it may help citizens with religious worldviews who hold authoritarian views of truth and knowledge to see that religious faith is not necessarily dependent on such views, encouraging the kind of non-authoritarian approach, not just to knowledge but also to ethics and politics, that I see as a cornerstone of liberal democracy.⁶³

As correct as she might be on this point, we, nevertheless, have to face the fact that religious arguments in the public sphere – ranging from domestic American

⁵⁹ Paolo Flores d'Arcais, "Elf Thesen zu Habermas," *Die Zeit*, 22.11.2007 (own translation).

⁶⁰ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University Press, 1994).

⁶¹ Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion," pp. 227.

⁶² Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," p. 12.

⁶³ Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion," p. 235.

fundamentalism to its Islamic versions in the internal arena – frequently go together with authoritarian forms of argumentation. But here one has to decide: either one considers (as Connolly and Deleuze do) religious citizens as capable of critical argumentation, or one has to deny them this ability practically *a priori*. In the latter case, however, the reason for exclusion becomes obfuscated since it is a flaw of the argumentative style rather than of the arguments themselves that would justify such an exclusion.

Pope Benedict has addressed this crucial point in his controversial lecture at Regensburg.⁶⁴ The return of religion to the political stage can occur and be acceptable to secular citizens only if it is accompanied by an absolute commitment to non-violence. Here the pope is in agreement with the protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur⁶⁵ who identified the renunciation of force and violent means as the precondition for participation in political discourses to which all, and therefore religious citizens as well, have to subscribe. Only thus can religion contribute to public discourse in a post-secular society and to the opening up of its semantic potential.

With this clarification in mind we can now turn to Cooke's last point which has also been addressed by Weiler. Since global modernization is not taking place in conjunction with "secularization" – contrary to the European experience – the project of the democratic constitutional state will have a chance only if it is freed from its connotations of a-religiosity or of active hostility towards religion. In his plea for a Christian contribution to the European Union Weiler⁶⁶ points out that one of the great obstacles to the spread of democracy is the frequently alleged opposition between democracy and religion and the acceptance of the belief that the introduction of democracy has to go hand in hand with the ban of God and religion from the public sphere. This is particularly true of the French model of *laïcité* and also of some trends in US constitutional thinking. But, as Weiler suggests, this does not have to be the message of Europe. The example of a Europe open to religious voices may be more useful to the fostering of democracy world wide than a rigorously secular one.⁶⁷ This might also be the message conveyed by the notion of the post-secular state as introduced by Cooke. After all, the situation "on the ground" is not as hopeless as academic discourses make it appear. The vast majority of Muslims rejects violence, accepts human rights, including the equality of sexes and admires Western achievements even if they are critical of some of its social forms. This is, at least, what several opinion polls show.⁶⁸ Without taking this as conclusive proof, it would be indeed fatal if the practical working out of our differences were impeded by some philosophical argument of a largely ideological character.

⁶⁴ James V. Schall and Pope Benedict, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Welches Ethos Für Europa?," in *Europa Imaginieren*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 1992), p. 120.

⁶⁶ For an abridged English version see: Joseph H. H., "A Christian Europe? Europe and Christianity: rules of commitment," *European View* 6 (2007).

⁶⁷ J.H.H. Weiler, *Ein Christliches Europa. Erkundungsgänge* (Salzburg: Pustet, 2004), pp. 64-65.

⁶⁸ John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

Two possible readings on Habermas – Chambers

“Is the postsecular condition just a detour on the road to philosophy’s eventual success in bringing all important moral institutions under the roof of profane reason? Or is the postsecular condition the manifestation (to some extent) of something more permanent?”⁶⁹ By asking these questions Chambers addresses the crucial but ambivalent point in Habermas’ proposal of a post-secular society. As Chambers aptly remarks, on the one hand Habermas considers translation the central task of a post-secular society. Here formulations like “as yet” or “for the time being” seem to indicate that this task will be finished at some point. Chambers calls this interpretation the *Platonic* one because it assumes that religion represents only a secondary means for communicating truth which is independent of religion and can be grasped only by a few sages. On the other hand, she also notices in Habermas a tendency to accept that:

[R]eligious images speak to us in ways analogous to aesthetic images. While the content of these images might change over time, our essential openness to them does not. Thus, the power of religious language is not due to our level of historical/cultural development, but rather to something about the way we experience the world. On this reading religion (or something like it) will always have the power to communicate truth.⁷⁰

In this context, Chambers proposes to call this the *Aristotelian* interpretation of Habermas, since, for Aristotle, ‘rhetoric’ is not simply the outside wrap for the actual arguments but intrinsically belongs to political argumentation and its *practical* truth claims. Chambers understands this distinction of a Platonic and Aristotelian interpretation which she uses in the fashion of Averroes as a “heuristic device in order to structure the problem in a certain way.”⁷¹ However, in the following section, we use the terms “weak” (i.e. platonic) and “strong” (Aristotelian) when referring to the kind of interpretation.

The strong interpretation accepts religion as a comprehensive and permanent partner in dialogue; the weak one assumes a conversation that is limited both in terms of topics and of time. The strong interpretation implies a stronger acceptance of religion which in the international context seems to be more salient. However, via the issue of “translation,” we are better able to understand how a strong interpretation can also become acceptable to a secular public.

As already pointed out, the task which Habermas as a social theorist tries to tackle consists in the investigation and translation of the semantic potential contained in religious language. In this context the demarcation criterion of revelation becomes crucial. Even if there is a change in the self-conception of a society which moves from a secular to a post secular one, pluralist societies can hardly be said to have the desire of becoming societies of believers. When Habermas is discussing the Kantian notions of God and immortality – topics which he explicitly rejects⁷² – his drawing of the line seems to undermine the cooperative venture between secular and religious argumentation. One could ask whether it is really true that such topics have to be principally taboo. Since Habermas has discussed this problem explicitly with Ratzinger,

⁶⁹ Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion," p. 221.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷² Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 222.

it might be useful to quickly refer to the latter's conception of reason. Ratzinger argues for a concept of reason that does not "overcome" faith but which is in a way compatible with it. In this sense, Christianity can be thought of the fulfilment of the Enlightenment, as Ratzinger likes to argue.⁷³ Of course this claim can then be applied to all religions that have become 'reflexive' beliefs.

We need not decide here whether one should accept Ratzinger's or Habermas's conception of reason. Rather, such a question must be treated in global post-secular society as an open one, if the cooperative dimension underlying this demarcation attempt is to be preserved.

The implications of the two interpretations mentioned above can perhaps best be gathered from examples which Habermas gives. For instance, he tried to use the notion of creation and of man as made in the image of God in his criticisms of genetic engineering and the concomitant manipulation of human freedom.⁷⁴ These two pages provide indeed much food for thought. Habermas is here quite successful in using the religious semantics of creation to buttress his claims of the dangers to the freedom of a being that has been peer-produced rather than given life by a creator. It is significant that he does not provide us with a "translation" into a secular language of the religious terms "creation" or "creation in the image of God." This would have been the task which he also explicitly mentions when he demands that "new concepts able to provide new perspective" can be derived from the religious material available. In this context he provides as an example "alienation" which derives from the conception of "sin".⁷⁵

It is not surprising that he resorts to this rather controversial concept when he criticizes social pathologies. However, he also addresses a deeper problem, i.e. that of a "new beginning" and of "freedom" that is contained in the semantic potential of "sin."

Secular languages which only eliminate the substance once intended leaves irritations. When sin was converted to culpability, and the breaking of divine commands to an offense against human laws, something was lost. The wish for forgiveness is still bound up with the unsentimental wish to undo the harm inflicted on others. [...] In moments like these, the unbelieving sons and daughters of modernity seem to believe that they owe more to one another, and need more for themselves, than what is accessible to them, in translation, of religious tradition – as if the semantic potential of the latter was still not exhausted.⁷⁶

With this admission he far exceeds the limits of secular understanding. This radical "potential" for a "new beginning" points to a reality that transcends the notion of death and sin and for which religious communities have used the cipher of "God."

From these brief remarks it becomes obvious that the two interpretations are indeed distinctive. The weak interpretation forgoes all the semantic potential of concepts that imply explicitly another "reality" and limits itself to less controversial topics. The other interpretation accepts dialogue with religious communities without *ex ante* restrictions so that even questions of the existence of God can become part of a "reasonable" and shared consensus.

⁷³ Joseph Ratzinger, "Eine nichtkonfessionelle christliche Religion?," in *Ohne Wurzeln. Der Relativismus und die Krise der europäischen Kultur*, ed. Marcello Pera and Joseph Ratzinger (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2005), pp. 129-32.

⁷⁴ Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, pp. 114-15.

⁷⁵ ———, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, p. 250 (own translation).

⁷⁶ ———, *The Future of Human Nature*, pp. 110-11.

Irrespective of which concrete religious concepts might serve as a basis for the politics of becoming, it would seem that only Habermas's strong version is rich enough to realize the aspiration towards the deep pluralism characteristic of the global public sphere. This potential is then perhaps, even for the secular citizens of the West and the international elites, important enough for the strong interpretation to be taken more seriously.

Conclusion

Seen from the Western perspective the presence of religion in international relations seems to be a "return." But this view of a return quickly becomes tinged with the odium of a revisionist project particularly when the disappearance of religion and secularization are interpreted as indicators of "progress". However, if one takes Berger's comments seriously, then Europe and international secular elites are in a more precarious position than the triumphalism of progress might suggest. The masses of the global village are resisting and even taking up arms against the secular establishment. Contrary to most international relations experts who still hope to round up the wagons and fight back at the passing raids of the challengers who largely oppose their designs for running the world, Habermas has understood that it does not make much sense to try to push religion into the camp of fundamentalism. He instead recognizes its potential for change and for a relevant utopia and attempts to harness this potential in the interest of a global reform. But what for Habermas in perspective of the domestic public appears as a revolutionary step, i.e. admitting religion to the public discourse, is, for international relations, a rather obvious presupposition. The burden of proof whether a secular or a religious form of argumentation represents the "normal" form of communication seems to be increasingly shifting to the secular sector.

If the global village constitutes itself in these discourses as a world society and if this society is not based on the unbridgeable cleavages *à la* Norris and Igelhart, then Habermas's proposal to accept the religious semantic whose potential can be used beyond the limits of religious communities seems like a promising strategy for establishing a public discourse and for tackling the pathologies of globalization and modernity. Precisely because the global world is also a world of our making, the question of whether a dialogue or a clash shall prevail hinges crucially on the readiness to encounter some, at first, strange, and often even provocative arguments. Only thus does it become feasible to engage in a discussion that is not an appendix to the projections of military strength – whose limits have become all the more obvious as of late – or of a one-sided insistence on the Western way of life as the panacea for all ills. The price for such an adjustment is openness and a critical attitude towards one's own preferences and beliefs in the sense of a deep pluralism. Habermas's notion of a post secular society and of its requirements when applied to the global public sphere could be a promising step in this direction. Perhaps the old adage of Henry IV that in building a viable French community "Paris is worth a mass" could also be applied to the global village.

Literature

- Assman, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Assmann, Jan. *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus*. München: Hanser, 2007.
- Bader, Veit. *Secularism or Democracy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007.
- Barber, Benjamin. *Jihad Vs. McWorld*. New York: Times Books, 1995.
- Berger, Peter L., ed. *The Desecularization of the World*. Washington: Eerdmans, 1999.
- . "The Desecularization of the World. A Global Overview," In *The Desecularization of the World* edited by Peter L. Berger, 1-18. Washington: Eerdmans, 1999.
- . *A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969.
- Böckenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang. "Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisierung." In *Staat, Gesellschaft, Recht.*, edited by Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, 42-64. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Sociologues de la croyance et croyances de sociologues." *Archives des Sciences Sociales de la Religion*. 63, no. 1 (1987): 155-161.
- Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University Press, 1994.
- Chambers, Simone. "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion." *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (2007): 210-23.
- Connolly, William. *Why I Am Not a Secularist*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Cooke, Maeve. "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion." *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (2007): 224-38.
- d'Arcais, Paolo Flores. "Elf Thesen zu Habermas." *Die Zeit*, 22.11.2007.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Durkheim on Religion*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. *Patterns of Modernity Beyond the West*. London: Pinter, 1987.
- Esposito, John L. and Dalia Mogahed. *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. New York: Gallup Press, 2007.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.
- Gray, John. *Black Mass. The Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.
- . *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- . *The Future of Human Nature*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003.
- . *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005.
- . "Prepolitical Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" In *The Dialectics of Secularization*, edited by Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, 19-52. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.
- . "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1-25.

- Habermas, Jürgen, and Joseph Ratzinger. *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilizations?." *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Huntington, Samuel P., Fouad Ajami, Kishore Mahbubani, Robert L. Bartley, and Binyang Liu. *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*. New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996.
- Kepel, Gilles. *The Revenge of God*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995.
- Laustesen, Carsten Bagge, and Ole Wæver. "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization." *Millennium* 29, no. 3 (2000): 705-39.
- Lehmann, Hartmut. *Säkularisierung. Der Europäische Sonderweg in Sachen Religion*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004.
- Lerner, Daniel. *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe. Ill.: Free Press 1958).
- Luckmann, Thomas. *The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Sacred and Secular*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Philpott, Daniel. "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations." *World Politics* 55 (2002): 66-95.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. "Eine nichtkonfessionelle christliche Religion?" In *Ohne Wurzeln. Der Relativismus und die Krise der europäischen Kultur*, edited by Marcello Pera and Joseph Ratzinger, 115-57. Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2005.
- Pope Benedict. *On Christian Hope. Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.
- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Welches Ethos für Europa?" In *Europa Imaginieren*, edited by Peter Koslowski, 108-20. Berlin: Springer, 1992.
- Schall, James V., and Pope Benedict. *The Regensburg Lecture*. South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2007.
- Smith, Steve. "The End of the Unipolar Moment? September 11 and the Future of World Order." *International Relations* 16 (2002): 171-83.
- Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . *A Catholic Modernity?* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. New York: Harper, 1960.
- Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- Weiler, J.H.H. *Ein Christliches Europa. Erkundungsgänge*. Salzburg: Pustet, 2004.
- Weiler, Joseph H. H. "A Christian Europe? Europe and Christianity: rules of commitment." *European View* 6 (2007): 143-150.
- Wolin, Richard. "Jürgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 2 (2005): 16-17.

