HABERMAS ON RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE:

A POST-SECULAR CONSERVATIVE CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Jürgen Habermas' recognition of the "post-secular" has impacted the debate concerning the role of religion in the public sphere. Not only he has revised his early views on religion, but he has also challenged the secularist public sphere in the West. Habermas' "institutional translation proviso" suggests (1) that citizens are allowed to use religious language to justify the political stances they take in the informal public sphere; but (2) they still must have their religious language translated into secular terms concerning the formal public sphere. This "institutional proviso" purports to overcome secularism by inviting religion back into the public debate. This paper examines Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere, as well as his attempt to make room for religious citizens in the post-secular society. My main argument is that Habermas' desire to welcome religion in the public sphere is blocked by a shortcoming of his own philosophy: namely, an understanding of religion over against the secular, and a concept of neutrality highly informed by the Enlightenment's prejudice against tradition. These limitations prevent him from grasping a "post-secular" notion of religion, and it leads him to dismiss the difficulties involved in the "translation" process. Habermas' attempt to ground his philosophy beyond religious sources also prevents him from realizing that his own political project relies upon the truth-validity of religious presuppositions— i.e. the Judeo-Christian heritage, and in some ways operates in terms of what some have called "political religion." Habermas' democratic revolution of world citizenship cannot affirm a way of life that would enable the ethics of love and justice to be intelligible in the first place. While Habermas' effort to welcome religion is rightly celebrated, he is still not able to articulate a coherent affirmation of the necessity of religion in the public life.

Aos meus pais, Sérgio e Simone.

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INTRODUCTION

Through his idea of "methodological atheism," the German philosopher Jürgen

Habermas advocates that any religious concept must be translated into a secular language as a pre-

requisite for its contribution to public debate.[1] This notion that Habermas developed more directly

in 1990's, has evolved within his project through different labels. For more than a decade now,

Habermas has demonstrated a particular interest in the social benefits of religion.[2] To be sure, after

September 11th, 2001, Habermas has particularly attempted to make room for religion in his idea

of the public sphere. In his recent writings, he has even used the label "methodological

agnosticism" to effect a terminological display of a less "polemical" attitude towards religion.[3]

That is to say, he seems to acknowledge his hostility to religion in his earlier philosophical work.[4]

Habermas' earlier dismissal of religion as a dying social practice prevented him from seriously

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[1] In the 1980's Habermas' used the term "methodological atheism" to express the philosophical task of

[2] The term "recent" must be qualified, since it is relative to the length of Habermas' philosophical work. Habermas has been a significant figure in the international philosophical community since the 1960s. As I will show, up until the 1990s he had very little to say about religion other than that it was an aspect of life. Habermas' articulation of "methodological atheism" dates from mid 1980s. Yet it is only after 9/11 that Habermas started to dedicate a considerable effort to develop a more sophisticated position on religion. To be sure, religion as a major topic of his work can only be observed since the 2000s. Finally, the term *recent* also highlights the latest shift in Habermas' understanding of religion. His recognition that religion plays an important role in society is relatively new.

[3] Habermas' new attitude towards religion has been less polemical and, at times much more open, at least regarding the *informal* public sphere. The term "methodological *agnosticism*" denotes this shift in his theory. See Habermas, Jürgen. "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.1 (2006): 1-25. **Constellations** 14 (2):2007 Pages 224-23. However, for the purpose of this thesis I will refer to Habermas' attitude towards religion in the public sphere as "methodological atheism." As I will explain in section three, despite Habermas' attempt to move from his original articulation, I believe the original term reveals the real content of his theory. Moreover, despite his attempt to make room for religion, Habermas' maintains his original position regarding the *formal* public sphere—the aspects of the public sphere that entail government endorsement such as law-making and state decision-making. Moreover, the term "methodological agnosticism" presupposes an idea of neutrality that I am challenging in this work.

[4] For instance, in *Comuunication and the Evolution of Society,* Habermas dismissal of religion can be clearly observed. Habermas presents religion as a transition that mediates the human communicative evolution from myth to science. He argues that since we have achieved the age of science, we must loose justification based on "revisable theories and constructions that are monitored against experience" (p.103-4) Hence, Habermas was sure that religion was no longer needed in the social democratic state experience. At the time, Habermas was sure that democracy was able to renew its motivation and goals without religion. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979)

grasping the power of religion and its effects on political affairs. In the face of terrorist attacks, the demographic rise of Islam in Europe and other essentially religious conflicts in contemporary political affairs, Habermas has been forced to revisit his earlier views in order to make sense of the presence of religion in the world. Yet Habermas' late interest in religion does not make it clear whether he has substantially transformed his core views on religion. Overall, he still argues that demythologizing religious discourse is a crucial part of making it suitable for the *formal* public debate.[5]

While Habermas has openly spoken in favour of the ideal of a pluralistic society and has spent a considerable amount of his work on articulating a theory of communication that aims at *symmetry* within public debate,[6] his "methodological atheism" presents some difficulties regarding his own goal of equally welcoming all individuals (including religious ones) to fully participate in the life of the democratic state. To be sure, in recent years Habermas has attempt to overcome the secularist features of the liberal theory of public rationality. His critique of Rawls "proviso" has led him do envision a different parading in public communication. This is what he calls the "institutional translation proviso." Even though Habermas' "institutional proviso" attempts to challenge both secularist and religious citizens to engage in a process of reciprocal learning as well as allowing religious speech in the informal public sphere, " institutional proviso" does not substantially changed Habermas' requirement of religious-free language in the *formal* public.[7] The goal of this work is to investigate Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in

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[5] I will deal with the differences between formal and informal public sphere in section two. For now, it suffices to say that the formal public sphere refer to the realm of state deliberative power and decision-making. (parliament, courts, administrative offices, etc.).

[6] By "symmetry" I am referring to Habermas' "ideal speech situation," a term that he has dropped as a result of being dismissed by some of his critics as German idealism. That is what Nicholas Adams has observed. (see Adams, Nicholas. *Habermas and Theology*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print page 29) I will address the issue in more detail in section two.

[7] Habermas' late writings display this tension between his desire to make room for religion and his insistence that *methodological atheism* should still guide formal public sphere. To be sure, in his *Notes on the*

the public sphere and its political implications in the life of the state and in the life of religious

citizens. The way Habermas understands the role of religion in the public sphere is not an isolated

aspect of his philosophical project. To be sure, Habermas' views regarding the role of religion are

the life of the state is informed by and have everything to do with the traditions to which he

subscribes (neo-Marxism and Enlightenment) and with the political goals he wants to achieve. To

make sense of Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere, there are a

number of secondary questions that must be addressed.

First of all, one needs to understand Habermas' philosophical project and what kind of

values he tries to implement within his idea of the public sphere. His views on religion must be

considered in the context of neo-Marxist heritage as well as his desire to advance the

Enlightenment project. Secondly, one must understand Habermas' view on secularization and the

role of philosophy to make sense of the reasons for his exclusion of religious language from

formal public debate. In addition, one ought to understand what Habermas means by religion,

how he frames it, and the philosophical tools guiding his approach. Insofar as "methodological

atheism"—in its more recent form "institutional translation proviso"--presupposes the possibility

of the translation of religious concepts into non-religious language in order to guard the formal

public debate from the dogmatism of religious accents, one must deal with Habermas' concept of

neutrality. Another important question is whether the type of translation Habermas is willing to

advance is even possible. Finally, reflecting more deeply on what it means to move towards the

"post-secular" opens a fruitful possibility of analysing the religious implications of Habermas'

own philosophy. In this context, it is important to frame Habermas' project in terms of political

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Post Secular Society, Habermas concludes the essay affirming that in the age different voices only the *secular translation* will bring clarity "into the formal agendas of the state institutions" *Jürgen Habermas.* "Notes on a Post-Secular Society." *Blätter Für Deutsche Und Internationale Politik (18/06/2008)*. Web. 05 Aug. 2014. (My italic)

religion. All of these elements must be addressed with Habermas' political agenda in mind, because such an agenda underline his philosophy, particularly his views on religion.

Why Habermas

Habermas is acknowledged as the greatest German philosopher alive. While academically celebrated, it is fair to say that Habermas' project has a popular appeal, as he has consistently appeared in popular media. Over the years, his engagement in public debate in topics related to the practical life of society—immigration, democracy, tolerance, religion etc.—has consolidated him as a public intellectual.[8] As an heir to the Frankfurt School tradition, he also has enjoyed academic popularity. His name cannot be dismissed amongst those who aim to understand the development of critical theory. Habermas' work is spread across the academic spectrum, including philosophy of law, political science, theology, literature and so on. His philosophical project presents an odd fit[9] between the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School and the attempt to carry on the Enlightenment project with the recovery of rationality as the tutor for public debate.[10] Habermas is the loudest voice in defense of a pluralistic public arena that excludes metaphysical and religious language as a way to foster rational decision-making in the daily life of the state. His main philosophical efforts hover around the question of how one can foster a solid communicative community in the midst of a multicultural society. In other words, Habermas aims to find rational

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[8] Michael Pusey, for example, affirms that Habermas is the most important sociologist since Max Weber. Pusey, Michael. *Jürgen Habermas*. Chichester: E. Horwood, 1987, 9.

[9] While the Frankfurt School is predominantly suspicious of rationality, the Enlightenment is characterized by a optimistic understanding of reason. Adorno and Horkheimer--Habermas' predecessors in critical theory-- are radical critics of the Enlightenment. Habermas does not completely abandon his philosophical heritage from the Frankfurt School, yet he does reject their critique of reason. Habermas does that because he wants to pursue rationality as a way to foster what he believes to be proper communication and consensus within the decision-making process of the democratic state. Habermas' philosophy embodies this odd fit because he aims to unite ideas that are traditionally against each other. I will explore this in more detail in section two.

[10] I will cover these tensions in section two. For now, it is important to highlight with the Habermas scholar Rick Roderick that many of Habermas' readers fail to realize the tensions within his project. Roderick writes, "some obscure the real tensions in [Habermas'] work generated by the Kantian, Hegelian and Marxian poles in his thought." (Roderick, Rick. *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: St. Martin's, 1986. Print. 3). That is exactly why I used the terminology "odd fit," since these poles within Habermas' project do not go together easily.

grounds beyond the limits of the ethnic and religious traditions that coexist in the democratic state.[11] As a major figure who has drawn so much attention and has set research trends amongst academics in the past decades, Habermas' recent interest in religion has stimulated a change of mood amongst those that see religion as dead. As Habermas has rightly observed in his more recent writings, the secularist hope that the advancement of Enlightenment and the spread of the scientific mentality would eventually lead humanity to overcome religious belief has been increasingly losing support in the last decades.[12] To be sure, religious phenomena have been able to endure despite the prevalence of the secularist praxis of the contemporary state.[13] The Muslim cultural movement in a secularized Europe, the religious language and appeal of significant party of neoconservatives in the US, the Pentecostal revival in South America and other emergent areas of the globe are just some of the undeniable demonstrations of the ongoing presence of religion. This situation has led social theorists to question the idea of a secular society in favour of a post-secular one.

The Post-secular

The term "post-secular," regardless of its varieties of meanings in recent debate, points to the exhaustion of modern rationality to properly comprehend the state of religion in the world. It also indicates the fact that the term "religion" is no longer a taboo in academic and political

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[11] Habermas poses the question, "How should we see ourselves as members of a post-secular society, and what must we reciprocally expect from one another in order to ensure that in firmly entrenched nation-states, social relations remain civil despite the growth of a plurality of cultures and religious world views?" (*Jürgen Habermas.* "Notes on a Post-Secular Society." *Blätter Für Deutsche Und Internationale Politik* (n.d.): n. pag. *Jürgen Habermas: Notes on a Post-secular Society (18/06/2008)*. Web. 05 Aug. 2014.

[12] Habermas, Ibid.

[13] Peter L. Berger has observed that while religion is ever-present, especially amongst the less educated, a highly enlightened secularized elite remains. Even though they are small in number, this elite is rather influential in configuring considerable number state of the bureaucracy. [Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview." in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Center; Grand Rapids; MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 10. Berger's observation makes sense of the fact that, while religion is practiced in a large scale among the masses, the state still operates according to the mindset of an enlightened and secularized elite. For that very reason the state still operates without the need of religion.

discourse.[14] To be sure, still recovering from the modern mode of thought, many theorists are now admitting that, contrary to what once was believed; secular society has never existed apart from the constant presence of religion.[15] The conversion of theorists to this new terminology—the post-secular—exposes the naiveté of the secularist ideal of a society without religion.[16] Moreover, the idea of the "post-secular" also manifests an attempt to find new tools to understand the complexity of contemporary society that, while still operating within a secular mindset, is now aware that religion as a political force will not go away. Finally, the "post-secular" also suggests that the modern understanding of secularization as the privatization of religion no longer represents the status of religion across the globe.[17] Habermas' late interest in religion personifies the academic struggle to overcome modernist methodology in favour of a new way to understand the fact of religion. He presents one of the most sophisticated attempts—or the most celebrated one, at least—of the secular mindset to overcome the problem of religion in the public sphere by drawing boundaries between reason and faith while aiming to present an alternative to the radical secularist option.

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[14] Gorski deals with different meanings of the term "post-secular." He observes that the post-secular at times refers to the academic shift in finding new tools to perceive religion, but can also indicate the state of religion in the world. See Gorski, Philip S. "The Post-Secular in Question." *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*. Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2012. 1-23. Print.

[15] This is what some has called "the return of religion." Jens Zimmermann observes that the "return to religion" follows the exhaustion of secular reason. He points out that 9/11 is a constant reminder to the secularist elite that most of the people in the world are religious. (See Zimmermann, Jens. *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print. Pages 29-35). Zimmermann's observations help one to realize that both the idea of post-secular and the return to religion indicate the academic struggle to make sense of a world that did not conform to the secularist predictions regarding religion.

[16] Earlier in his career, Peter L. Berger was one of the main defenders of the secularization theory. He has changed his mind, observing that the "secularization theory was essentially mistaken. He affirms "the world is just as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (Peter L. Berger, Op. Cit. Pag 2).

[17] José Casanova has made this point in his *Public Religions in The Modern World*. He explain that within the modern framework, secularization entails three main aspects: a) "secularization as differentiation of the secular sphere from religious institutions and norms;" b) secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices;" c)" secularization a of religion to privatized sphere." (Casanova, Jose. *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago, 1994). Page 211. Although Casanova believes the first element of secularization is an irresistible modern trend, the other two (b and c) represent more a theoretical arrangement the manifest the secularist desire then a verifiable reality. In contrary, Casanova make a case that according to his research religious beliefs is ever-present and that religion is expending beyond the private.

While Habermas displays a rhetoric of mutual toleration between secularist and religious individuals, on a practical level his idea of the public sphere as the medium for decision-making in the constitutional state expresses a massive vestige of the secular mentality, especially in regards to his understanding of "religion."[18] The secular colours of Habermas' theorizing prevent him from making room for religious people in the political debate. Here the issue of abortion can serve as an illustration of the limitations within Habermas' theory. It is a fact that the decriminalization of abortion is progressively spreading across the globe. On the one hand, Habermas presents a secular rhetoric of a plural and multicultural society of mutual toleration that indicates, in principle, that he is willing to welcome equally arguments from every political group. On the other hand, Habermas' "methodological atheism" prevents orthodox Christian convictions concerning the infinite value of human life from being admitted in the formal public sphere in virtue of its metaphysical or religious nature. In these political scenarios, Christians lose the debate before it starts.[19] The problem here is that it is impossible for a Christian to articulate the infinite value of human life apart from religious language. I will explore this issue in more detail when I deal with the limitations of Habermas' view on religion. For now, it suffices to highlight that, if one can demonstrate that the issue of abortion is essentially a *religious* one, then whatever answer one comes up for the problem, it must ultimately be founded on *religious* grounds.[20] Hence, both the Christian pro-life articulation and the secular pro-abortionist articulation can ultimately be seen as equally reliant on religious foundations. *If* that is the case, then Habermas'

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[18] I will explore this critique to Habermas' understanding of religion in greater detail in the development of the thesis. For the introduction of the problem it suffices to observe that many critiques of Habermas have pointed out that, while he wants to overcome "secularism" by inaugurating a post-secular thinking, his idea of religion still relies on the modern dichotomy of the secular over-against the religious.

[19] The Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas poses this problem to liberal democracy as a whole, but it certainly applies to Habermas' "methodological atheism." See Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 2001. Print.

[20] My definition of religion differs from the way Habermas' describes it. I am thinking of religious grounds outside of the modern, dichotomised way of seeing it—i.e. over against the secular. I will get to it in more detail in section three.

"methodological atheism" as the procedure to bring religion to the public debate works more as a prejudice against theology and metaphysics than as a justifiable way to promote symmetrical accessibility to the language involved in the debate.[21]

Habermas and Religion in Light of the Managerial Agenda

Most of the critique of Habermas' view on religion has focused on the limitations of his theoretical articulations and philosophical propositions. That is to say, few are those who attempt to read Habermas' view on religion in light of his political goals and ideological commitments. The present work presupposes as fundamental for understanding Habermas' views on religion that his ideas are highly informed by a revolutionary zeal towards the construction of democracy beyond ethnic-cultural roots.[22] Habermas displays a positive view of the state and relies in the usage of government apparatus to advance his agenda. Habermas' philosophical ideas cannot be disconnected from the kind of political engagement he has displayed throughout his career. For instance, Habermas' support of the re-education of Germany after WWII, as well as his radical position regarding immigration[23] harmonizes with his desire to keep religion out of the public dialogue that yields state decision-making.[24] Habermas sees religion in the formal public sphere as threatening his idea of democracy, namely, the democracy of the world-citizen beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries. It is true that Habermas has recognized the West's Christian roots.

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[21] To speak with Gadamer's language, it is absolutely normal for the human condition to have *prejudices.* What is symptomatic of Habermas' project is his obsession to produce a prejudice-free language, or even to trust that "methodological atheism" can guide individuals to produce such language. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* rev. Ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) 277-285.

[22] For instance, in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory,* Habermas uses the example of Eastern Germans in Western Germany as a way to legitimize the thesis that nationality should "no longer based on ethnicity but founded on citizenship." [eds. C. Cronin and P. De Greiff (1998)], 152.

[23] Habermas has consistently argued in favour of opening the borders of Germany for a more multicultural population. Habermas tends to associate pluralism with democracy believing that a society would help Germany to overcome the vices that led the country to fascism. Gottfried, Paul. *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print. ix and 102-103

[24] Regarding Habermas' political agenda and intellectual engagement see the section "The Harbermasian Moment" in Gottfried, Paul E. *The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium*. 1st ed. University of Missouri, 2005. Print.

Yet, as I will clarify, Habermas' denies and interdependency between the Christian roots of the

West and the democratic regime. To be sure, Habermas rejects narratives of pre-political society

as foundational for the identity of the democratic state by virtue of their ethnic and cultural roots.[25]

A fortiori, he rejects these religious roots to be an integral part of the formal public sphere as well.

In other words, Habermas' ideal of democracy of the world's citizens freed from religious and

ethnical prejudices is something he promotes from the top of the state structure i.e. amongst the

elite that manages the state. Here it is important to consider Habermas' role in the formation of the

managerial therapeutic agenda.

Far from being confined to academic debate, Habermas' ideas have, in fact, pervaded

the mindset of the managerial class. Indeed, Habermas' philosophy has not only shaped the

understanding of public sphere among academics but also influenced the therapeutic managerial

agenda over the last few decades.[26] Habermas' academic popularity is exactly what causes his

philosophy to shape the managerial elite. As an academically trained elite, the managerial class is

crucially shaped by hegemonic ideas. James Burnham, the first theorist to articulate the idea of the

managerial revolution in the 1940s observed that, like any other revolutionary class, the

managerial elite also needs ideological articulation to justify its rise and power. However, different

from other revolutionary classes in history, explains Burnham, the managerial class is not directly

responsible for "constructing and propagating their own ideology" but have assimilated the ideas

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[25] Habermas understands that the ethnic and cultural roots of these pre-political narratives are way too provincial and narrow-minded and for that very reason they perpetuate prejudices. He believes these pre-political narratives are the roots of ethnicity. By contrast, he argues for a "state-centered understanding of politics." (Habermas in Fraser, Andrew. op. Cit.) Even though Habermas presents himself as a defender of liberal democracy, his view on pre-political narratives contradicts the liberal assumption that the people are the ultimate source of power. In Habermas' mind, politics is a result of the state framework.

[26] Andrew Fraser has observed that Habermas is to the managerial revolution what Marx was to the socialist revolution. Fraser argues that as a leading light of the academic liberal establishment, Habermas must be seen as one of the major influences in the formation of the managerial agenda. (Fraser, Andrew. "A Marx for the Managerial Revolution: Habermas on Law and Democracy." *Jornal of Law and Society* Sep 28.3 (2001): 361-83. *Jstor*. Web. 17 Sept. 2014. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3657986).

invented, for the most part, by "intellectuals, writers and philosophers."[27] Burnham wrote decades

before Habermas' status of leading philosopher was far from being a reality, yet Burnham was

able to predict the mechanism through which Habermas ended up influencing so effectively the

therapeutic agenda of the managerial state. Overall, the managerial elite assimilates the managerial

agenda. Its values, prejudices and ideas—under the guise of scientifically sound data—are handed

down carefully through academic training.[28]

Developing Burnham's concept of managerial revolution, Gottfried observes in the

2000s the rise of the managerial *therapeutic* agenda.[29] Gottfried explains that the therapeutic

agenda is characterized by the understanding that the state is there to reshape and transform

society not only economically—i.e. through the distribution of wealth—but most crucially the

very mind set of democratic citizens the control of their speech and thoughts. In this new agenda,

society is led to accept without critical discussion concepts such as multiculturalism, universal

nations, open communities, homosexual family units, pluralistic cultures and others. Gottfried

also observes that all of these values are followed by an institutionalized hostility against the

Christian bourgeois past of the West. Accordingly, the managerial elite—through their therapeutic

agenda—aims to transform what they believes to be the social and psychological consequences of

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[27] Burnham, James. *The Managerial Revolution.* 4th ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966. Print. Page 72

[28] In the 1980's Allan Bloom dedicated an entire book to describe what he called a Marxist invasion of American academia. Accordingly, Marxist thought was introduced in literature, social science, history, philosophy, arts, architecture and so on. In this new academic setting, almost every single discipline became a potential field for *ideological* indoctrination. (See Bloom, Allan. *Closing of the American Mind*. Simon and Schuster, 2008. Print.) In *The Strange Death of Marxism,* Gottfried exposes more emphatically how the influence of these leftist intellectuals were able to reform the mainstream political conversation of an entire generation. (See *The Strange Death of Marxism,* Gottfried, op. Cit.)

[29] See Gottfried, Paul. *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Towards a Secular Theocracy*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri, 2002. Print. and (*After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print. ix and 102-103.) In *After Liberalism* Gottfried expands James Burhnam theory of the managerial state and show how democratic liberalism has completely excluded the people from playing a relevant role in the equation of decision-making in the life of the state. That is because, as Gottfried explains, no matter what party is in power—regardless of the result of the elections--the managerial elite finds its way to advance its own agenda. In this sense, the managerial state is almost synonymous with mass democracy. In *The Politics of Guilt,* Gottfried goes deeper in approaching the managerial state present as what he calls the therapeutic managerial state.

the Christian western past. In this regard, the therapeutic agenda has a particular interest in keeping Christianity outside of the public debate as a way to foster a universal democracy. When one analyse the values within Habermas' philosophy—his understanding of the role of the state, his idea of the democratic world citizen, his belief that a multicultural society is the best way of fostering tolerance and overcoming the hatred within Christian bourgeoisie—it becomes clear the ways in which Habermas philosophy crucially informs the managerial therapeutic agenda. It is not a coincidence that while Habermas occupies a hegemonic role in western academia, his ideas are currently carried on within the therapeutic managerial practices of contemporary governments in the west.   Even though the therapeutic agenda is not a constitutive element of the present work, it is important to keep in mind these implications of Habermas' philosophy as a way to illuminate Habermas' relationship with religion. The present works suggests that Habermas' view on religion is better understood under the light of the managerial therapeutic agenda that move towards a global liberal democracy.

Methodology

As a way to proceed with the investigation regarding Habermas' "methodical atheism" and its implications for religion in the public sphere, I will make certain methodological assumptions. The first one is the agreement with philosophical hermeneutics that human knowledge is never neutral, and it always needs interpretation to be actualized.[30] The secularist mindset was developed upon the assumption of objectivist knowledge—that is, knowledge purified from the subjective accents of tradition and religious. Yet, the Modern objectivist approaches to knowledge have been losing ground over the last few decades. That is to say, the

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[30] As Gadamer writes, "Interpretation is not an occasional, *post factum* supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" [Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method,* rev. Ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) 307].

epistemic foundation of secularism is no longer perceived as the unquestionable notion of

knowledge. Recently, numerous philosophers have systematically denied the validity of secularist

reasoning as the sole medium to achieve objective knowledge.[31] All of these contenders of

scientific objectivism share in one way or another the notion that human knowledge can only be

acquired through interpretation. Overall, philosophical hermeneutics has opened the eyes of

contemporary thinkers to the inescapability of tradition.[32] The present work stands in agreement

with the proposition that, while acquiring knowledge, humans are surrounded by a rather complex

universe of conventions, dislikes and *prejudices* that integrate the very fabric of human

existence.[33] The belief of an a-historical vantage point to know the universe, the mythic figure of

the modern scientist willing to know beyond historical and personal bias, has led humanity to a

"deformation of knowledge" and, more tragically, to scientific fundamentalism. This has resulted

in the scientific societies of the twentieth century.[34] The interpretative notion of knowledge not

only helps one to overcome the modern fragmentation between facts and values, but also exposes

the pursuit of unbiased knowledge as a modern myth.[35]

Another methodological presupposition of the present work lies in the claim that

theology and metaphysics cannot be easily dismissed. Despite the secular effort to propose non-

metaphysical philosophizing and non-theological reasoning in the public sphere, both theology

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[32] As Gadamer helps one to realize in his idea of philosophical hermeneutics, tradition is inescapable. One is always receiving given knowledge. Even to criticize tradition, one needs to use it. He writes, "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition." Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* op. cit. 290

[33] Gadamer observes "To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak to us." Gadamer, op. cit, 397.

[34] Jens Zimmermann echoes Gadamer in his analysis of the crises of modern rationality. See " Western Culture after Christendom" in Zimmermann, Jens. *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print. 1-35.

and metaphysics remain a persistent reality in the very structure of human experience.[36]   That is to say, even if one refuses to admit it, at the very moment someone theorizes or even presents a philosophical framework, one is relying in theological and metaphysical presuppositions.[37] That is to say, Habermas' "methodological atheism" as well as his idea of democracy and public sphere can exist only because of metaphysical and theological assumptions. Whether he admits it or not, Habermas' philosophy cannot escape the metaphysical and theological realms of existence.

The third methodological starting point of this thesis is that political ideas must be assessed in light of the concrete forms they take in real life. That is to say, Habermas' commitment to Marxism and his constant preaching on political ideas cannot be dismissed in the equation of any serious analysis of his philosophy. As a Marxist who subscribes to the therapeutic role of the philosopher, Habermas sees that engagement with revolution is part of the task of theorizing or explaining reality.[38] Habermas' understanding of religion cannot be seen as an isolated element in his philosophy. In fact, it makes more sense to comprehend Habermas' view on religion as something that harmonizes with his ideal of the construction of the new democratic world citizen. It is under this methodological basis that I will propose an analysis of Habermas' view on religion through the lenses of Voegelin's notion of political religion. That is to say, while discussing Habermas' views of religion, this thesis' goal is not to lose sight of the ways in which Habermas' political values shape his view on religion as well as his use of religion.

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[36] As Herman Dooyeweerd has observed, modernity has created a dogma according to which the autonomy of philosophical thought is seen as the only "truly critical attitude." Herman Dooyeweerd in Smith, James *Introducing Radical Ortodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* K. A. 144) That is to say, on this modern view, theoretical thought is the only neutral system of rationally.

[37] This perspective indicates that, even if Habermas wants to propose a post-metaphysical and post-theological approach to philosophy, it does not follow from such an assumption that his philosophy does not rely on metaphysical and theological presuppositions.

[38] This goes back to Marx's challenge for the philosopher as I will explore in section two. Marx writes, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." (Marx, Karl, and David McLellan. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978. Print.) This is Marx's 11th Thesis on Feuerbach.

Chapter Summary

In virtue of the established methodological ground I will proceed with the following investigation. First, I will provide an adequate philosophical context for Habermas' understanding of religion by discussing the major traditions that inform his project. Insofar as Habermas openly defines himself as a Marxist and an advocate of the Enlightenment, his thoughts on religion are better understood in light of these traditions. Hence, I will initially explore the type of Marxism Habermas inherits from the Frankfurt School, as well as the type of Enlightenment he is willing to advocate. Regarding his Marxist background, I will show that Habermas is committed to a therapeutic understanding of the social theory heavily influenced by Marx's challenge namely, that theorists must not only describe the world but also transform it. Habermas abandons the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism, as well as the pessimistic understanding of reason of the Frankfurt school. In order to advance the Enlightenment project, Habermas had to overcome the Frankfurt School's demonization of Western rationality by finding rational grounds in the communicative procedure of the better argument. That is to say, even though Habermas subscribes to the Kantian idea of Enlightenment as emancipation, he does not subscribe to the Kantian scheme of rationality and transcendental truth. Habermas understands truth as the rational consensus upon the better argument, as he defines it. After this contextualization, I will end the chapter with a brief analysis of Habermas' notion of public sphere.

In Chapter two I will illuminate Habermas' late shift towards the "post-secular" by exploring the trajectory of his perspective on religion: a journey that starts from the idea that religion was a superfluous and dying aspect of life to the realization that religion is an useful tool to provide meaning for human enterprise. Here it will be useful to reflect on Habermas' approach to religion in the public sphere in light of his recent criticism to the famous American Social-

Contractualist philosopher John Rawls. Rawls is also an important voice regarding the role of

religion in liberal democracy; to bring him into the analysis will provide some perspective

regarding Habermas' ideas. I will finish this chapter by presenting the current state of Habermas'

understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere as well as his understanding of the

relationship between reason and faith.

In Chapter three I will critique Habermas' current understanding of the role of

religion. I will show that, Habermas' recent attempt to solve the identity-split[39] problem is only

different from Rawls's theory in regards to the degree of discrimination towards religious

language. Habermas maintains the same problems within Rawls' proviso in the formal public

sphere.

Having established Habermas' current view of religion as well as his attempt to move towards the

post-secular, I will present a problematization of Habermas theory. Given that Habermas wants to

validate religion while banning it from entering the sacred grounds of the formal public debate

unless it undergoes a translation into secular language, a reflection on Habermas' notion of

religion becomes necessary. In this context, I will highlight some critiques of Habermas'

understanding of religion, suggesting that while he wants to articulate his theory in line with the

awareness of the "post-secular" his understanding of religion and neutrality still operates within a

strong secular mindset. While his philosophy is in tune with the linguistic turn and the heritage of

continental tradition, his understanding of religion and neutrality still operates within a framework

of modern categories. First, I will investigate whether or not Habermas' understanding of

neutrality and secular society finds its roots in Christianity. Then, I will propose a dialogue

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[39] The identity-divide critique to the earlier articulations of both Rawls and Habermas regarding religion indicates that in virtue of "methodological atheism" religious individuals must separate their identity in private (the realm they can be religious) and public (the realm in which their religion cannot participate). The main critique here is that "methodological atheism" imposes a heavier burden in the life of religious people.

between Habermas and Gadamer. Here an analysis of Gadamer's idea of the "hermeneutical circle" will suggest that Habermas' "methodological atheism" fails to escape the prejudice within the Enlightenment's mindset i.e. the "prejudice against prejudice."[40]

When it comes to his idea of public debate, Habermas still relies on modern dichotomised categories such as religious/secular. For this reason, Habermas' idea of communication presupposes a value vacuum freed from traditions and prejudices. In agreement with Gadamer, I will suggest that this idea of neutrality is not only impossible to actualize, but it ends up deforming knowledge—in this case public debate. Habermas' idea of neutrality is guided blindly by its prejudices. To close this section, I will also present a "post-secular" definition of religion[41] to suggest more sophisticated ways to identify religious phenomenon in areas where the philosophical tools of modern mindset could not. Both Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and this "post-secular" notion of religion suggest that Habermas' ideal of a religious-free language in the public sphere is pregnant with Enlightenment *prejudice*.

Despite its rhetoric of openness and dialogue, Habermas rules' for public debate can be seen as a project that objectively shapes society into a predetermined agenda. Insofar as Habermas' theory can be seen as a way to shape culture, in Chapter Four I will propose an analysis of Habermas use of Christianity in light of Eric Voegelin's notion of "political religion." Given that Habermas' project can be seen as operating under the "Gnostic dream,"—the desire to immanentize the Christian idea of "new havens and new earth"--one can properly explore the religious feature of Habermas' project. In this context I will also problematize Habermas'

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[40] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method,* rev. Ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) 277-285.

[41] Clouser's understanding of religion according to which religious belief works as a belief in the core of divinity *per se*—a presupposition that is accepted without a proof requirement or "[has] the status of unconditionally non-dependent reality." Clouser, Roy A. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1991. Print. 24

understanding of translation as a way to salvage religious semantics and make it affective in the formal public debate. Finally, I will discuss Habermas' notion of the "post-metaphysical" as another feature of his political religion that prevent him from justifiably used religious semantics.

Beyond its limitations, Habermas' effort to find a place for religion in culture presents considerable advancement in comparison to crude secularism. Habermas' recent shift regarding the role of religion in the state also helps one to realize that the modern theory of secularization is not sufficient to explain the fact of religion in the social fabric of any existing order. However, as any academic trend happens to make the educated community to reject ideas that contradict it, so does the "return to religion" also make the crude modern dismissal of religion indigestible. It is a fact that Habermas has argued for a more welcoming position of religion into the life of the state. The question, however, must go beyond the form of Habermas' willingness to approach religion in a more friendly way. What really matters is whether or not Habermas' articulation enables him to take religion seriously by materially making room for it in public life, or if such articulation is only a terminological shift that only follows the "post-secular" trend. As I will demonstrate, the former seems to be the case. Ultimately, if Habermas wants to welcome religion for pragmatic reasons—such as the use of moral values only religiosity can bring about—as a way to inform the ethical lifestyle of the universal citizen, then he must be willing to pay the metaphysical and theological price for having it. As this thesis aims to show, that is exactly what Habermas is not willing to do.[42]

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[42] In his critique of Strauss, Grant Havers analyzes Habermas' late interest in religion as an example of how the problems with political thoughts undermine the role of "Jerusalem" in Western politics. Havers summarizes Habermas' and Taylor's project as Christianity without God. Havers highlights the fact that Habermas' project to welcome Christianity for pragmatic purposes lacks a proper understanding that the values within Christianity can only perpetuate in the context of a cultural and theological tradition that enables their existence. As Havers explains, "Habermas does not grasp how important religion may turn out to be in fostering a sense of guilt about past historic injustice." Havers, Grant N. *Leo Strauss and Anglo-American Democracy: A Conservative Critique*. Dekalb,IL: NIU, 2013. Print. 165.

CHAPTER ONE:

HABERMAS IN CONEXT

Habermas' work is in dialogue with a plurality of disciplines. In fact, it is fair to say that Habermas displays an encyclopaedic range of knowledge in his project. In virtue of its interdisciplinary drive, it becomes rather difficult to systematize Habermas' thought. Habermas' philosophy combines concepts and ideas that are in tension with one another. At the heart of his project he attempts to combine Critical Theory—the Marxist critical attitude towards Western rationality—with an urge to fulfill the unfinished project of modernity, ultimately seeking rational grounds for public debate and Enlightenment. Habermas aims to present rational grounds for social critique, and he develops a normative theory of rational communication as a means to foster consensus regarding the ongoing democratic revolution he passionately advocates. Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere is illuminated by the traditions to which he subscribes: namely, Marxism and the Enlightenment. In this section, I will briefly present how (1) Habermas is both a Marxist and a defender of the Enlightenment; and (2) the ways in which his theory attempts to satisfy both traditions. In addition, I will present Habermas' understanding of the public sphere and his notion of the "ideal speech situation." It is rather difficult presenting a comprehensive reading of Habermas' philosophy. Yet I will indicate some of the elements that relate to his understanding of religion. A more meaningful analysis of his idea of the role of religion in the public sphere will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

i. Habermas the Marxist

Throughout his career, Habermas has repeatedly returned to Marxist themes, such as the perversity of capitalism and the problem of ideology.[43] It has been observed that the Marxist elements in Habermas' philosophy have been progressively set aside and softened throughout his career.[44] It is true that since November 11th, 2001, Habermas recent writings exhibit a new interest. Yet from the observation that Marxist themes are being silenced in Habermas' philosophy should not conclude too quickly that Habermas' Marxist animus is no longer part of his philosophical project.[45] Habermas has never rejected his Marxist roots. Indeed, he has openly defined himself as a Marxist.[46] Moreover, while Habermas has not directly engaged with Marxist themes for the past decade or so, one can see his recent philosophical articulations as a way to advance the political values he absorbed from the Marxist tradition.[47] Yet to associate Habermas with Marxism can also be misleading, at times. Overall, what does one mean by associating Habermas with Marxism? What kind of Marxism is Habermas willing to advance? To answer these questions, it is important to contextualize Habermas' Marxism within the historical transformation of orthodox-Marxism in the first half on the twentieth century. During this period, a new way to interpret Marx gained popularity in Marxist circles. This neo-Marxist approach had its momentum in the West with the Frankfurt School.

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[43] Rick Roderick, Op. Cit. p. 18

[44] This is an observation Richard J. Bernstain makes. See Roderick, Rick. Op. Cit. page 20

[45] Bronner observes that despite the fact Habermas changed his positions in many regards, he "remains a man of the left." See, Bronner, Stephen Eric. *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 284.

[46] For instance, in an interview in 1974, Habermas openly defined himself as a Marxist. By that point, Habermas had already rejected the scientific foundations of orthodox Marxism, but still held the Marxist grand picture in the form of equality towards a democratic revolution. He believed the question regarding one being a Marxist or not had to do with "motivational aspects" that ended up being tied to a "revolutionary picture" that serves as means to "mobilize energies." Boris Frankel and Jürgen Habermas, "Habermas Talking: An Interview," *Theory and Society* 1.1 (1974): 37-58.

[47] Stephen Bronner has observed that, despite the encyclopaedic range of Habermas' philosophy and many changes in his theoretical development, his "political convictions have remained constant." Roderick also observes that Habermas' own articulation of communicative theory is a means to provide normative foundations for critical social theory. Rick Roderick, Op. Cit., 73.

The Frankfurt School Heritage

After WWII, the orthodox Marxist-Leninist tradition—known for its radical critique of the capitalistic state, its economic determinism, its optimistic predictions regarding the collapse of capitalism, and its hope that proletariat would soon be emancipated—experienced an earthquake at the core of its philosophical foundations. Marx's apocalyptic predictions about the crisis of capitalism did not come to pass. First, WWII wrought labours around the world taking weapons to fight each other rather than uniting their force against the bourgeoisie. Secondly, capitalist countries began to absorb many of the socialist demands in an increasing tendency to welfarism. Capitalism proved able to tame the revolutionary movements from within. In this context, Marxist theorists were forced to revise many of the theoretical bases of orthodox Marxism.[48] This theoretical shift gave new meaning to many of the concepts within Marx's philosophy. Neo-Marxism is generally characterized by its rejection of historical materialism and the economic determinism within Marx's original philosophy on one hand, and the effort to reinterpret Marx's sociological insights as a way to criticize the pervaded structure of capitalism crystalized in bourgeois culture—religion, morality and law—on the other. The Frankfurt School illustrates the best effort to reinterpret orthodox Marxism,[49] making it possible to use Marx's insights to criticize Western society and late capitalism without having to deal with the theoretical problems within Marx's economic determinism. [50]

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[48] In order to reconcile traditional Marxism with the transformation of the economic and social scenario, many thinkers in the early twentieth century presented the Marxist theory in a new way. This heterodox Marxist theorization, as Paul Edward Gottfried explains, became known as Neo-Marxism. (Gottfried, Op. Cit., 19.)

[49] Gottfried suggests that the Frankfurt School best illustrates "this turn toward an alternative Marxism . . . which carried out its own transposition of Marxist concepts and symbols." Gottfried, *SDM*, 19.

[50] Ben Agger speaks of the Frankfurt School's reading of Marxism as a process of "distilling the essence of Marx's analysis of the logic of domination," enabling contemporary scholars to use Marx's "emancipatory critical theory" detached from Marx's scientific theory. Ben Agger, "Work and Authority in Marcuse and Habermas" in: *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism* (Evanson, IL: Northwester UP, 1992), 172-91; 5.

As the most celebrated representative of the neo-Marxist tradition—for its popularity in academic circles, particularly North America, and the most influential among the new left—the Frankfurt School plays a crucial role in giving Marxism a new breath of life in the West.[51] Generally, Frankfurt School thinkers aim to overcome Marxism as a pure scientific method, finding more sophisticated tools to understand the ways in which capitalism is able to persist.[52] The Frankfurt School did their best to read Marx as a contemporary thinker.[53] Applying Freud psychoanalytical aspect to this new way of reading Marx was crucial.[54] The sociological analysis of Western mentality aimed at investigating culture and ideology as a way to accounting for the reasons capitalism survived the "revolutionary crisis of 1914-1919."[55] Frankfurt School's dialectical reading of Marx and Freud pave the way for overcoming objectivist Marxism. Read alongside with Freud, Marx was no longer a pure scientist but an effective tool to carry a Freudian psychoanalysis of Western society that made sense of the perpetuation of bourgeois hegemony.[56]

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[51] Gottfried describes the Frankfurt School and their cultural Marxism as the theory responsible for planting communist ideas in the heart of the Western society. Writing about the Americanization of the Frankfurt School, he highlights the ties that were developed between these philosophical approaches and "the American academy and the American publishing industry." Adorno, Horkeimer, Marcuse and their disciples found a receptive and open environment in Western society. They taught and sold their books in America, and became intellectual celebrities through the "cultural industry" that the Frankfurt School itself used to condemn as a capitalistic instrument of mass-production. Through cultural Marxism, many communist ideas were spread in a way that led to dramatic effect in the mindset of American society. Gottfried, *Strange Death of Marxism.* op. cit., 73. Moreover, "Critical Theory enjoyed the aid of federal and State agencies and the blessings of the media and entertainment industries, which protested (sometimes after the face) what they considered to be long-lived prejudices." (Gottfried, op. Cit., 77.) Lipshires also confirms that "many of [Frankfurt School] members took up service with government agencies" during World War II. He also highlights the political and financial support of Columbia University's establishment of the Institute of Social Research in 1934, and its importance as a way of "rescuing anti-Nazi intellectuals and guaranteeing them a means of livelihood." Sidney Lipshires, *Herbert Marcuse: from Marx to Freud and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Pub.; distributed by General Learning, Morristown, N.J., 1974), p. 11-12.

[53] For instance Horkheimer wrote to Marcuse commenting on Adorno's way of reading Marx as contemporary in 1946. This represents the Frankfurt School's attempt to bring Marxism to the present academic debate Rolf Wiggershaus, see [*The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*. Trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), 543.]

[54] Gottfried, op. Cit p.70

[55] Lash, Christopher "Introduction" in Jacoby, Russell. *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology*. Bonton, U.S.A: Beacon Press, 1975. Print. P. xii-xiv

[56] Jacoby, op. Cit. P. 79-80

The term "Critical Theory," coined by Horkheimer, can be an indicative of the nature of the relationship the Frankfurt School had with Marxism. As Wiggershaus observed, the term "Critical Theory" became a "camouflage label for 'Marxist Theorist.'" The term combines both a shift from orthodox Marxism as well as an "insistence" upon identifying the project with "the substance of Marxism in principle."[57] The Frankfurt School is composed of a variety of thinkers that followed the path inaugurated by Adorno and Horkheimer.[58] While each of them has their own particularities, it is fair to say they generally understand that Marxism provides a theory that consisted of a "specific criticism of alienated and alienating social conditions." They share the realization that capitalism has such an alienating structure by which it was able to pervert the very consciousness of both the individual and the behaviour of society as a whole.[59] Capitalistic structure instrumentalized "reason and culture" and submitted both to a "profit-driven society."[60] In the face of this alienating structure of capitalism, the Frankfurt School maintained the revolutionary spirit of Marxism in their "anti-fascism banner," which also displayed their sympathy for communist Governments.[61]

While Habermas' project differs in many ways from the first generation of the Frankfurt School, as I will demonstrate, one cannot dismiss his intellectual debt to both Adorno and Horkheimer. Habermas inherited Adorno and Horkheimer's problematizations of Marx's economic determinism. Echoing Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas also sees late capitalism as a much more stable and stronger structure than the one Marx encountered. Habermas is aware that the development of welfare

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[57] Wiggershaus., Op. Cit., 2. Similarly, Sidnney Lipshires also writes that Critical Theory turned out to be an adjective for the Frankfurt School's branch of Marxism. Therefore the dialectic of the Englightenment and critical theory became a starting point from every author that joined this philosophic tradition. Sidney Lipshires, *Herbert Marcuse: from Marx to Freud and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Pub.; [distributed by General Learning, Morristown, N.J., 1974).

[58] Among the most influential Frankfurt School scholars are Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm, and Walter Benjamin, among others.

[59] Gottfried, *Strange Death of Marxism*. Op. Cit., 66.

[60] Ibid., 66-67

[61] Ibid., 71

not only enabled the contemporary capitalist state to control the tensions within class struggle but also

gave the state the power to manage the economy in ways that Marx could not have imagined.[62]

As a member of the Institute of Social Research, the young Habermas worked under Adorno's

supervision.[63] Habermas was seen as having the appropriate skills and interests to develop Frankfurt

School's themes such as "theory of contemporary age" and "the pathology of modernity."[64] Praised by

Adorno for his ability to write, Habermas helped his mentor to map out the political mentality amongst

German university students, classifying the students as "democratic" or "authoritarian." Pursuing this

questionable methodology—because of the quantity of the students surveyed and the bias behind the

questions presented—Habermas' survey concluded there was still a fascist ethos within German youth

mentality. Habermas believed a transformation in the way the general public understood democracy

would be crucial for liberating Germany from the fascist aspects of its bourgeois foundations.[65] There

is indeed something about the Western bourgeois past that does not please Habermas. This is what I

will explore next.

The Anti-Bourgeois Attitude

One of the pillars of the first generation of Frankfurt School Critical theory is the assumption

that within the bourgeois' way of life—its culture, morality and religion—lies the seed of authoritarian

features that led Western society to fascism.[66] Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse generally agreed that

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[62] For instance, In *Theory and Practice* Habermas observes that Marx's metaphor of structure and superstructure is not able to comprehend the dynamics of capitalistic state. Within Marx scheme, Habermas observed, it became rather difficult to place modern state exclusively in either structure or super structure. Edgar, Op. Cit., 5.

[63] Wiggershaus., Op. Cit., 537.

[64] Ibid., 538.

[65] Gottfried., Op Cit., 95-97.

[66] Frankfurt School's vast research led to such a conclusion. Horkheimer and Adorno, for instance, believed that the rationality of Western society oppresses and shapes people through what they call "cultural industry." They also argue that capitalistic rationality paves the way for a totalitarian state, since the Enlightenment project of the bourgeois society "behaves toward things as a dictator toward men" (9). Therefore the totalitarian nature of capitalistic rationality added to the power of the cultural industry through which "[t]he might of industrial society is lodged in men's minds" (127) blocks any hope of democracy. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1997).

in order to change the capitalistic system it was necessary to re-invent Marxism by placing the

bourgeois culture under attack. Contrary to orthodox Marxism, which pursued a revolution involving

the labour class' material fight for state power, the Frankfurt School promotes another type of

revolution against the bourgeoisie: a cultural one.[67] This cultural Marxist attitude of the Frankfurt

School can be described as a "militantly anti-bourgeois stance that operates independently of Marxist

economic assumptions."[68] In fact, the notion of cultural Marxism helps one to contextualize the

Frankfurt School's philosophy and its systematic engagement with popular culture as a way to

dethrone bourgeois values from mainstream mentality.[69]

Immersed in such an intellectual environment, Habermas assimilates the Frankfurt School's

cultural war against bourgeois mentality due to its presumed relationship with fascism. Habermas

manifests this anti-bourgeois *ethos* in a different manner than the first generation of the Frankfurt

School did. It could be said that he has a more constructive criticism to Western society than the one of

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Marcuse in his turn believes that within a bourgeois society freedom is a mere idea rather than a concrete reality, since social organization does not present a materialized disposition of freedom. Marcuse explains that the content of freedom must both include "the worldly happiness of men" and be "understood as mode of real human praxis" in a way that will liberate men from the yoke of capitalist oppressive society (86). Herbert Marcuse, *A Study on Authority*, Trans. Joris De Bres. (London: Verso, 2008).

[67] Gottfried points out some of the reasons that led the Frankfurt School not to believe in the traditional socialistic revolution. Facing a new economic scenario, it was necessary for the Frankfurt School "to find a 'theory of society' that is dramatically different from the one adopted by the young Marx" (67). Gottfried explains that the Frankfurt School's work concludes "no matter how the subject seeks to be liberated from the existing social and cultural situation, a scarred consciousness, which is the product of capitalist reasoning, remains" (66). While for Karl Marx capitalism is a contradictory and outworn system waiting for an unavoidable collapse, for the Frankfurt School tradition capitalism is a strong system that uses every single instance of society in order to cause a "profound and deepening alienation" (67) of people through the mass-production that maintains the capitalistic status quo. From this perspective, the socialistic revolution, as traditional Marxism proposes, is impossible, not only because of the economic transformations (Gottfried explains that, for the Frankfurt School tradition, even with welfare the "emotional disorder was inherent in late capitalism" [70]), but, particularly because capitalism uses rationality as a mere means to forge a cultural disposition at the disposal of capitalism itself. (Gottfried, op. Cit.)

[68] Gottfried, op. Cit., 73.

[69] Cultural Marxism rose as a systematic condemnation of Christian bourgeois culture. As Gottfried highlights, "The Frankfurt School crusade against prejudice achieved widespread American acceptance and was reflected in landmark legislations and administrative directives concerning women's rights, the punishment of anti-Black behaviour, the further secularization of society, and later the obligatory tolerance of gays." Gottfried, op. cit., 77.

the previous proponents of critical theory.[70] Yet, Habermas' advocacy of democracy brings in itself a critique **of** the bourgeois mentality that dominated the Western past. Habermas believes that bringing about a "cosmopolitan mentality" serves as an antidote to this bourgeois hegemony within Western society. In harmony with his mentors, he believes that a "nationalist sentiment" has strong ties with fascism. He attempts to counter this danger by articulating an idea of democracy centered upon the notion of the "citizen of the world."[71] He is particularly bitter towards the German past, and has repeatedly argued in favour of immigration as a means to cleanse the European ideological past. He tends to associate pluralism with democracy, believing that a pluralistic society would help Germany to overcome the vices that led the country to fascism.[72] Accordingly, he believes that the presence of different cultures and foreign nationalities in Europe would be able to annul the supremacy of the old nationalist mentality. Overall, Habermas wants to break "with the traditionalism of nature-like continuities."[73] Fostering a multicultural society serves as a means to that end.

It is important to keep in mind this anti-bourgeois attitude, which Habermas inherits from the Frankfurt School, when analysing Habermas' attitude towards religion. Insofar as Christianity is the bourgeois religion, one might wonder whether Habermas' early dismissal of religion was also related to the Frankfurt School's anti-bourgeois attitude.[74] Habermas ended up distancing himself from the radical critique of bourgeois rationality in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. Yet at least early on, this anti-bourgeoisie attitude might serve as a reasonable explanation for Habermas' enlisting in this

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[70] As I will explain, Habermas' attitude is tied to his sympathy with the Enlightenment project.

[71] Gottfried, op. Cit., 21.

[72] Paul Gottfried, *After Liberalism* Op. Cit., ix; 102-103.

[73] Habermas in: Fraser, Op. Cit.

[74] Habermas' conflict with Christianity can be seen in his tendency—manifested specially in his most recent writings—to speak of the problem of "religion" in the public sphere from a neutral point of view as if the historical experience of the "public sphere" did not carry strong genealogical ties with the Christian philosophical tradition, as well as politics in the West. That is to say, Habermas struggles at times to ascribe to the Christian tradition the merits for its distinctive and innovative contributions for politics in the West— Christian ethics and how it informs Habermas idea of solidarity. (See Adams, Op. Cit., p. 7)

"ideological war against Christianity."[75] Whatever might be the case, it is undeniable that while aiming to advance Enlightenment through his idea of communicative rationality, Habermas seems to believe that true democracy could only happen in a society much more open-minded and multicultural than the one in which the bourgeois mindset was predominant. As Fraser puts it, Habermas' understanding of radical democracy amounts to the triumph of "universalist reason over particularistic prejudice."[76]

Habermas also displays this anti-bourgeois attitude in his critique of neoconservatives in America. He believes neoconservatives in America used the idea of objectivity of moral values and impersonal standards as a camouflage for their political agenda. Habermas blames American neoconservatives for being successful at presenting their ideas as a "universalistic structure," as well as appealing "to generalizable interest."[77] In this particular case, Habermas' argument sounds much like Marx's critique of European bourgeois ideology.[78] Moreover, Habermas' critical approach to conservatives harmonizes with the cultural Marxist agenda: namely, attacking the foundations of Christian-bourgeois ideology by revealing the pervasive logic behind its culture.[79] In sum, there are enough elements in Habermas' career to imply an attack on the bourgeois cultural foundation of Western society is a goal that he has not given up in his thinking. [80]

The Role of the Philosopher

The Marxist tradition has generally inherited Marx's paradigm shift regarding the role of the philosopher. As Marx writes, "the philosophers only interpret the world, in various ways; the point is

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[75] Fraser, op. Cit., 380.

[76] Ibid., 374.

[77] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacom Press, 1975), 22.

[78] Marx understands that the political and religious ideologies of bourgeois society are artificially presented as universal truth. For Marx, this is a mechanism for protecting the *status quo*. He writes, "What does the history of ideas indicate other than that intellectual production changes along with material production? The ruling ideas of any age are always the ideas of the ruling class." Karl Marx and David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), p. 1039.

[79] On Habermas and political correctness, see Jung Min Choi and John W. Murphy, *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1992), p. 30-33.

[80] Gottfried observes that Habermas has advocated the need for a revolutionary change "moving beyond the 'bourgeois' foundation of the German federal Republic." Gottfried, *The Strange Death of Marxism*. Op. Cit., p. 96.

to change it."[81] He believed that the role of the philosopher was not only to describe reality but also

mainly to transform it.[82] Marx's formulation has led a whole tradition to give up the classical

understanding of philosophy as the pursuit of truth. He urges philosophers to use theoretical

articulation as means of revolutionary engagement. This therapeutic understanding of the role of the

philosopher is present in the Frankfurt School's attempt to engage in Cultural Revolution as a way to

transform Western society, i.e. cultural Marxism. Arguably, Habermas' philosophy does not present

the same radical features as the therapeutic approach had in Marx or even in the first generation of the

Frankfurt School.[83] Yet from Marx, Habermas inherits this double-edged approach to theorization as

means of description and transformation. To be sure, Habermas' project displays both a "descriptive

dimension" concerning the real state of society, and a "normative" one that refers to the

transformations society must undergo.[84] In other words, Habermas' social theory is designed not

simply to understand society but mainly to revolutionize it according to his idea of democracy.[85]

The Freudian element in this therapeutic aspect of Habermas philosophy is too obvious to be

dismissed. As noted before, this is something Habermas also inherits from the Frankfurt School. In

Knowledge and Human Interest, Habermas develops a hermeneutic reading of Freudian

psychoanalysis. Habermas applies Freud's theory, as a way to find meaning where it appears to be

only nature.[86] He calls it "depth hermeneutics."[87] Habermas uses an interpretative psychoanalysis as a

tool for social critique. His main claim is that pure theory is not sufficient to account for emancipatory

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[81] McLellan. Op. Cit.

[82] Nathan Rotenstreich explains that Marx distorts the classical understanding of truth that "was not framed to emphasize in particular the facet of practical activity." Nathan Rotenstreich, *Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

[83] Habermas' version of critical theory provides a more constructive approach then the radical revolution within orthodox Marxism and the pessimism of the Frankfurt School. Habermas also has a more optimistic view of the state, and wants to use it for his democratic revolution.

[84] Gary Simpson, Op. Cit., 101.

[85] Adams, op. Cit., 23.

[86] Edgar, op .cit. p. 94

[87] Habermas: Ibid. P. 101

communication. Knowledge, he contends, is intrinsically affected by interest.[88] In Habermas, the Marxist drive to theorize as means of revolutionary engagement finds in Freud a tool that takes the role of culture more seriously. Inspired by Marx, Habermas wants to *transform* the subject of study rather than simply *describing* it. Inspired in Freud, he sees his task as a social theorist in relation to society in terms of therapist and patient.

It is in light of this therapeutic element—Marx/Freud synthesis--that one can properly grasp the reason why Habermas is comfortable in articulating democracy in a revolutionary fashion. Democratic revolution, he clarifies, "is not a possession we simply accept as our fortunate inheritance from the past. Rather, it is a project we must carry forward in the consciousness of revolution both permanent and quotidian."[89] I will deal with the metaphysical problems within Habermas' understanding of democracy as a constant revolution later on my essay. For now, it is important to notice that this therapeutic drive within Habermas' philosophy liberates him from the philosophical demand to define what he really means by democracy—that is, beyond its revolutionary character. Overall, from this therapeutic perspective, democracy is where Habermas wants to arrive. Hence, his definition of democracy has less to do with a philosophical effort to describe a concept than a practical engagement to change the political reality. It is this revolutionary feature of Marx's philosophy that causes Habermas to hold onto Marxism despite his strong commitments with the project of Enlightenment. Habermas wants Enlightenment yet he frames it within Marxism.[90] His idea of Enlightenment is vividly motivated by a radical and constant revolution towards the democracy based on a "world citizenship."[91] What Habermas means by "Enlightenment" I will attempt to clarify next.

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[88] Ibid. P. 101
[89] Habermas, Jürgen. *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. C. Calhuon (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 472.
[90] Fraser, Op. Cit., 374.
[91] Ibid., 381.

ii.   Habermas and Enlightenment

Habermas' initial writings had a lot to do with his critique of modernity. Following the

Frankfurt School tradition, he criticized the capitalistic society and the philosophy this society

produced. Superficially, it would make sense to expect Habermas to side with postmodernism in its

critique of the Enlightenment as being obsessed with universal reason and therefore leading to

totalitarianism. [92] However, the influence of the Frankfurt School's radical critique of rationality on

Habermas did not prevent him from articulating a defense of Enlightenment and rationality. Following

his attempt to find rational grounds for public debate, Habermas aims at advancing the political project

of modernity. For this reason, he distances himself from the radical criticism of rationality of his

Marxist mentors.

A More Optimistic Critique of Reason

Habermas' ambitions regarding the possibility of completing the Enlightenment project him

to compromise some of the core beliefs of the early generation of Frankfurt School, i.e. the

pessimistic understanding of Western rationality. The tension between Habermas' desire to advance

Enlightenment in one hand, and his ties with the radical critic of rationality within Critical Theory, on

the other hand, are only addressed in the 1980s, when he carefully analyzes modernity.[93] Habermas

scrutinized *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, criticizing both Adorno and Horkheimer. This is an important

analysis because it is through criticizing his masters that Habermas refines his own understanding of

Enlightenment. Overall, Habermas' commitment to the values that characterize the Enlightenment

leads him to see the departure of Adorno and Horkheimer from modernism as anathema.[94] Habermas

qualifies the dialectic of Enlightenment as "incomplete," "one-sided," and "oversimplified." He

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[92]Andrew Edgar, Op. Cit., 189.
[93] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: The MIT press., 1987).
[94]Andrew Edgar, 189.

explained that a theory like the dialectic of Enlightenment "fail to have anything in reserve to which it might appeal."[95] Habermas outlines the great problem that the dialectic of Enlightenment faces:

> Horkheimer and Adorno regard the foundations of ideology critique as shattered – and they would still like to hold on to the basic figure of the Enlightenment. So what Enlightenment has perpetuated on myth, they apply to the process of Enlightenment as a whole. In as much as it turns against reason as the foundation of its own validity, critique becomes total.[96]

In other words, Habermas contends that the dialectic of Enlightenment must include itself in its own conceptual critique. That is to say, Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of modern rationality cannot escape from the consequences it imposes on the whole Enlightenment process. Moreover, Habermas sees Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of reason as nihilist, and in one way it shares the "embarrassment" of Nietzsche.[97] The dialectic of Enlightenment "pays a high price for taking leave of modernity" because it finds no other way to justify its own project.[98] In sum, the dialectic of Enlightenment leaves no helpful alternative but the total destruction of rationality. Habermas wants to get something liberating out of critical theory—as opposed to critique for its own sake.

While Habermas attempts to make it clear that he does not take part in the "moods and attitudes" of the Dialectic of Enlightenment in its totalizing critique of rationality,[99] he does not reject the Frankfurt School's critical theory as a whole. Habermas' biggest problem with Adorno and Horkheimer's version of critical theory is that it is so radical that it "consumes the critical impulse itself."[100] Habermas understands that one cannot advance critical theory apart from rationality, and that was exactly what both Adorno and Horkheimer did not wanted to admit. Habermas observes that

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[95] Habermas, op. cit., 118.
[96] Habermas, op. cit., 118.
[97] Ibid., 110-26.
[98] Ibid., 336.
[99] Ibid., 106.
[100] Ibid., 120.

their critique of instrumental reason suggests a "concept of truth" that their own theoretical method

does not allow them "to explicate," but only to "suggest."[101] This is because in order to sustain their

thesis that all reasoning is instrumental, they must use a non-instrumental rational analysis—precisely

the rational analysis both Adorno and Horkheimer deny.[102] Habermas wanted to find a more stable

theoretical ground for social critique, and the radicalism of the dialectic of Enlightenment seems far

too self-contradictory for providing such theoretical stability.

Habermas' critique of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does not imply that he became an

unconditional defender of modernity. He recognizes that modernity is an incomplete project. The

Enlightenment was not able to understand the significance of its own potential, and therefore

modernity is not to be rejected, as in postmodernism, but rather finished.[103] Clarifying Habermas'

position, McCarthy observes that, for Habermas, "the defects of Enlightenment can only be made good

by further Enlightenment."[104] In sum, Habermas believes there is no way out of Enlightenment. Here

one could say that Habermas brings a "sense of responsibility" to critical theory, thereby making room

for a more optimistic phase of critical theory in which social critique aims to harmonize with a

constructive notion of reason.[105]

Modernity, an Unfinished Project

When presenting his understanding of reason and modernity, Habermas loosens his theoretical

ties with Marxism. He adapts his construction of modernism not from the Adorno/Horkheimer

pessimistic critique of bourgeois rationality, but from both Kant and Weber. From Weber, Habermas

borrows the understanding of "modernization" as something that depicts "not only the secularization

of Western *culture*, but also and specifically the development of modern *societies* from the view of

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[101] Ibid, 382.
[102] Simpson, Op. cit., 67.
[103] Edgar, op. cit., 190.
[104] McCarthy, Thomas. "Introduction" to Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, op. cit., xvii.
[105] Bronner, op. cit., 283.

rationalization."[106] Habermas wants to avoid an inadvertent justification of modernity—the uncritical attitude towards inequality and oppression within modernity. At the same time, he refuses to dismiss modernity's ability to provide rational resources to stabilize social criticism—as radical postmodernists are inclined to do.[107] It is by using this Weberian understanding of modernity that Habermas attempts to find a more balanced attitude towards modernity. As Snedeker clarifies, Habermas uses Weber's concept of autonomous cultural spheres—empirical science, autonomous art and theories of morality and law—as a "framework of the theory of social evolution."[108] That is to say, Habermas sees cultural modernity within the Weberian idea of the process that takes the substantive reason[109] within religion and metaphysical thinking and transfers it to one of the three spheres— science, morality and art.[110] That is to say, detaching the concepts from its original set of presumed values of religion and metaphysics is an essential element in the process of modernization. Habermas believes this definition is consistent with the project of the Enlightenment, and Kant's attempt to present a transcendent justification of science, morality and art.[111]

Kant is fundamental to Habermas' understanding of the Enlightenment. To be sure, when Habermas speaks of Enlightenment he does not refer to the British (Bacon) nor French (Rousseau) but rather to German Enlightenment.[112] Kant's idea of Enlightenment informs Habermas' definition of reason. Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?" is rather important. Advocating the proper use of

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[106] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse*, Op. Cit., 1.

[107] Edgar, Andrew. Op. Cit. P. 233-4

[108] Snedeker, George. "Defending the Enlightenment: Jürgen Habermas and the Theory of Communicative Reason." *Dialectical Anthropology,* 25.3/4 (2000): 244.

[109] Weber categorizes rationality into four types. Practical (means to a end), theoretical (scientific pursue of creating a comprehensive view of the universe in form of though. Yet have potential to create form of life), substantive (orders produced by a larger system of human values- religion, metaphysics, Capitalism, Calvinism etc.) and formal (it is the automate role in the process of rationalization and it has to do with bureaucratic domination) (see Kalberg, Stephen. "Marx Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History" The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 85, No. 5 (Mar., 1980), pp. 1145-1179)

[110] Ibid., 245.

[111] Ibid., 247.

[112] Ibid., 246.

reason, Kant argues for the need to break the shackles of dogmas and the laziness which suppresses

autonomous rational thinking in order to achieve Enlightenment. Kant believes that the practice of

reason means thinking independently and getting rid of the dogmas and tradition. In addition, Kant

believes that in order to lead to the Enlightenment, reason must be practiced in the public sphere.[113]

Habermas is particularly attracted to the idea of intellectual freedom and the possibility of public

dialogue guided by the compelling force of the better argument rather than the dogmatic constraints of

tradition.[114] Thus, just like Kant, Habermas frames rationality within the emancipatory task of

enlightening and freeing humanity.[115] Yet, in contrast to Kant, who grounded rational discourse in the

abstract and idealized consciousness, Habermas attempts to ground rational discourse on inter-

subjective rational dialogue.[116] This is what Habermas does with his theory of communicative action

and his idea of public sphere.

Public Sphere

Before dealing with Habermas' view on the role of religion in the public sphere, it is

necessary to understand what he means by public sphere. Habermas' understanding of the public

sphere finds its roots in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere—what

he believed to be an "epoch."[117] He notices that the bourgeois public sphere broke down the system

of "representative publicness" within medieval, renaissance and absolute monarchies, opening the

possibilities of democratic discussion in the West.[118] By "representative publicness," Habermas

means the capability of an elite to exist in the realm of the public based on birthright, political power,

status etc. For Habermas, the economical factor within the mercantilist era played a fundamental role

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[113] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in: Lawrence E. Cahoone, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2007), 45.
[114] Snedeker, Op. Cit. 247.
[115] Rick Roderick, Op. Cit., 18.
[116] Snedeker, Op Cit., 246
[117] Habermas in: Adams, Op. Cit, p. 42
[118] Simpson, Op. Cit., 103.

in the democratising transformations in European social life. The bourgeois public sphere is the apex of this evolution. It is the "sphere of private people come together as public" in which they make "public use of their reason." [119] Hence, Habermas sees in the bourgeois public sphere a paradigm-shift from "representative publicness" to the "public use of reason" in a Kantian sense.[120] He recognizes that the participation of this public sphere was not as inclusive as Habermas himself wants it to be. This is because the bourgeois public sphere was limited to the participation of only the educated and the bourgeoisie. However, a crucial innovation within the bourgeois public sphere is that it is private in the sense that it is independent of the state, household or church.[121]

Habermas believes that, while it enabled the public use of reason, the bourgeois public sphere was never able to actualise its potential for the "rational formation of the public will."[122] In a way, as innovative as Habermas thought it was, he also believed the bourgeois public sphere brought an underlying problem in itself:[123] namely, the fact that within the public sphere, information becomes a commodity. This problem renders the public sphere of the nineteenth century as a "feudal feature" in its governance of "public relations." As he puts it, "Publicity once meant the exposure of political domination before the public use of reason; publicity now adds up to the reaction of an uncommitted, friendly disposition."[124] Thus, Habermas sees the decay of the public sphere increasingly tainted by the economic demands of late capitalism that transformed a debating-public into a consuming-public. In sum, capitalistic development increases the gap between the bourgeois concept of the public sphere regarding its potential and the actual embodiment within its social and historical aspects.[125]

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[119] Habermas in: Simpson, Op. Cit, 105.
[120] Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992), 2.
[121] Simpson, Op. Cit., 105.
[122] Roderick, Op. Cit., 42.
[123] It is interesting to compare Habermas' critique of the decay of public sphere with the pattern within the dialectic of Adorno and Horkeiner in the sense that every new transformation brings in itself the problems of the next crisis.
[124] Habermas in: Simpson., Op. Cit., 106.

One might observe that, because it was originally presented in the 1960s, Habermas' account of the public sphere's formation is rather pessimistic. Indeed, at that time Habermas was still under the influence of the Frankfurt School's radical critique of reason.[126] This is a valid point, and it helps one to understand why Habermas did not include the religious public as part of the realm of the public use of reason.[127] It is also true that in his more recent phase Habermas has recognized the critical use of reason in other areas of human interaction, including religious publics. Whatever the differences might be between Habermas' earlier understanding of the public sphere and his present conception, one must agree that his general definition of the term remains very much the same. Basically, by public sphere, Habermas refers to the realm of social interaction in which "something approaching public opinion can be formed."[128] It exists when citizens communicate with one another by expressing themselves on matters of general interest submitting their opinions to rational scrutiny.[129] Thus, a democratic spirit in the sense that the access to the public debate should be open to all is essential in Habermas idea of public sphere. Accordingly, within the public sphere all individuals should be treated as equals and there should be no discrimination.[130]

Habermas sees the public sphere operating in a "two-track" mode: formal and informal. The formal public sphere is the realm of "the parliamentary will-formation institutionalized in legal procedures and programmed to reach decisions." It refers to the institutionalized deliberative bodies of the state. The informal public sphere is the realm of "political opinion-building … of political communication."[131] While the informal public sphere represents the "context of discovery," the

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[126] Simpson., Op. Cit., 106.

[127] I believe Habermas' strong prejudice against religion at that stage indeed prevented him from fully grasping the historical value of intellectual debates within the religious academic environment of scholasticism as contributing to the development of the public sphere.

[128] Jürgen Habermas, Op. Cit., 31.

[129] Ibid., 31.

[130] Edgar, Op. Cit 31

[131] Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 274-5.

formal public sphere represents the "context of justification."[132] Habermas believes there must be a

division of labour between the two spheres so that they can overcome the weakness of each other. On

the one hand, the formal public sphere entails deliberative power and for that very reason it is more

restricted due to the high density of its communicative procedures, formalities and rules. On the other

hand, the informal public sphere is the realm of greater freedom and accessibility for its participants.

It does not have the capacity to deliberate; yet it "is charged with producing the normative reasons

necessary for the rational treatment of political questions."[133] As I will show in the next chapter,

Habermas' understanding of formal and informal public sphere plays an important role in the way he

sees religion in the public sphere. As for now, it is important to notice that Habermas sees formal and

informal public spheres as equally important and as having complementary role in deliberative

democracy.

The Ideal Speech Situation

Habermas presents a normative understanding of the public sphere.[134] His theory of

communicative action sets the boundaries for how dialogue should be performed. Habermas believes

that rational discourse only occurs in an environment freed from "domination and linguistic

pathology." In such an environment dialogue produces "intersubjective understanding and

consensus."[135] In envisioning the public sphere, Habermas has in his mind an ideal for rational

communication that would produce ways for the scrutiny of truth claims and their consensual

validation. This ideal is what he has called "the ideal speech situation." At the heart of this idea is the

notion of symmetry between partners in dialogue.[136] Habermas' idea of dialogue is articulated in part

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Kenneth Baynes, "Democracy and the Rechtsstaat: Habermas' Faktizitat und Geltung," 316.

[132] Jeffrey Flynn. "Communicative Power in Habermas' Theory of Democracy." *European Journal of Political Theory* 3.4 433–454; 440.

[133] Ibid., 441.

[134] Adams, op. cit., 23.

[135] Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the public sphere*, 8.

[136] Adams, op. cit., 27.

against the Nietzschean critique of reason that equates knowledge with power. Habermas does not completely dismiss Nietzsche's insight that violence and corruption can disguise communication, but he wants to find better ways to recognize when violence does taint reason. As Adams clarifies, from Habermas' perspective, if reason is only "violence and its masks," as the Nietzschean tradition wants it to be, then even these particular claims cannot be made argumentatively.[137] As presented above, Habermas sees that the radical critique of reason does not do justice to the universal desire that humans express when engaging in dialogue. Every argument, he believes, ultimately presupposes genuine argumentation. It is in this expectation of genuine argument that Habermas aims to locate the notion of "ideal of the speech situation."

Due to various criticisms, Habermas has given up the label "ideal speech situation." Overall, the label was quickly dismissed as an idealism that led readers to associate Habermas' theory with elements of the German idealist philosophical tradition that Habermas did not want to embrace. Aiming to articulate the idea in more pragmatic ways, Habermas has used the term "presupposition"—pointing to the human universal expectation of genuine dialogue—to refer to the "ideal speech situation." [138] He has also referred to it as a "detranscendentalised" Kantianism to affect a greater distance from German idealism (or any language that resembles metaphysical philosophizing), while at the same time putting himself closer to American pragmatism. In any case, what is important for further discussion is that Habermas does embrace this ideal of how dialogue should proceed. Moreover, Habermas' understanding of such an ideal does not need to be historically actualised. In fact, Habermas makes a case that while not historically real, the "ideal speech situation" is presupposed in every individual argument presented in dialogue; for whoever presents an argument wants to be understood by other participants. In addition, whoever presents an argument

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[137] Ibid., 26.
[138] Ibid., 26.

expects that individuals involved in the conversation will display an ethical commitment to it—transparency, solidarity and so on.[139]

Habermas' notion of the "ideal speech situation" is what drives him constantly to pursue a refinement his communicative theory. To be sure, in regards to the role of religion in the public space, the notion of the "ideal speech situation" is what ultimately forces him to create room for religious citizens in the public sphere in light of the identity-split problem. Accordingly, if it is true that religious citizens are not equally welcome in public debate or are overly burdened with the demand to present non-religious justification for political stances they take, then the contemporary public sphere falls short of fostering the equality that the "ideal speech situation" demands. Hence, factual inequality forces Habermas to correct his theory. Even if the label "ideal speech situation" had a short life,[140] the notion of these optimal conditions for public dialogue persists in Habermas' philosophy. In a way, it continues to be a guiding idea—even if unspoken--for the development of his theory of communication. When one analyses the trajectory of Habermas' view on religion, one can see that the constant transformation in his understanding of the role of religion has to do in part with his desire for equality in public discourse. That is why the "ideal speech situation" is still a central idea in Habermas work.

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[139] For a useful outline of Habermas' understanding of the ideal speech situation, see Adams, Op. Cit., 29. I will deal with the ethical agenda behind Habermas' "ideal speech situation" when challenging Habermas view on neutrality (Chapter 3) and more directly when I criticize his political use of Christianity (Chapter 4.)

[140] Adams, Op. Cit., 36.

CHAPTER TWO:

HABERMAS AND RELIGION: FROM OMISSION TO UTILITY

If there is one remarkable characteristic of Habermas' work, it is that he has not been afraid of changing his perspectives on matters that he has held unquestionable at certain points in his career.[141] The relevance of Habermas' current understanding of the role of religion in the public space cannot be properly grasped without considering the changes he has displayed regarding this issue throughout his career. In this chapter, I explore the trajectory of Habermas' views on religion. Early on in his career, he thought religion was bound to become obsolete; in fact, he did not devote much of his time trying to understand it. In the 1990s he revisited some of his earlier positions on religion, trying to present a more nuanced understanding of religion through his idea of "methodological atheism." However, it was not until the decade of 2000s that Habermas began dedicating a considerable amount of work to dealing with the role of religion and its positive input in the public sphere. While I describe the development of Habermas' view on religion, I shall provide the current state of Habermas' views on religion, his latest articulations regarding religion, and his attempts to make room for religious citizens in his idea of public sphere.

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[141] To list just a few of Habermas' philosophical shifts: i) His encounter with the speech-act theory, which resulted in what many call the "linguistic turn," a fundamental theoretical shift in Habermas' articulation in the theory of communicative action. ii) His pursuit of the unfinished project of modernity led him to depart from the Frankfurt School's radical critique of rationality as presented in the first section. iii) More directly related to the scope of the present dissertation, Habermas develops a view of religion that was brand new in his thought—one that I am to present in this section.

I.   Habermas' Early Views on Religion

Earlier in his career, Habermas demonstrated very little interest in the role of religion in the state. Primarily, he saw religion as an obsolete tradition. Like the vast majority of social theories in the second half of twentieth century, Habermas subscribed more or less to secularization theory. Generally, secularization theory affirms that, as Enlightenment progresses, rational thought tends to replace religion. It also believes that religion will be increasingly restricted to the private realm of life.[142] Hence, to Habermas' credit, the fact that early in his career he did not have particular interest in understanding the role of religion in the contemporary public sphere could be understood more as the mainstream mentality of social theorists of his time than an individual refusal to take the matter seriously.[143] Yet Habermas had some other theoretical reasons to believe religion was obsolete and superfluous. As William J. Meyer has observed, Habermas' evolutionary interpretation of modernity and especially his understanding of modern rationality led him to see the modern structure of rationality as far more logically advanced than metaphysical or religious structures of rationality. [144]

Habermas displays this evolutionary understanding of rationality when observing that after the collapse of metaphysical and religious worldview the only thing that could be recovered from religion was "nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of the universalist ethic of

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[142] As already discussed in my introduction the introduction, secularization theory has a very particular understanding of rationality. It sees rationality over against religious thought. I will explore this point in greater detail in the next section. (Casanova, Op. Cit.)

[143] Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt observe that in this first stage of Habermas' philosophy his understanding of religion "are clearly influenced by secularization hypothesis." "Habermas and Religion" in: *An Awareness of what is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age.* Translated by Ciaran Cronin, Polity Press, Cambridge 2014: 1-14.

[144] Meyer, William J. "Private Faith or Public Religion? An Assessment of Habermas' Changing View of Religion." *The Journal of Religion, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Jul. 95).*

responsibility."[145] Habermas' explanation relied on the understanding that what was valid in a

religious and metaphysical worldview was already present in modern rationality, i.e. that religion is

no longer necessary. The same idea can be seen in Habermas' analysis of the human ego's

development. Building on Piaget's four stages of ego development, Habermas proposes a correlation

of the stages with the progress of human worldviews.   In this analysis, Habermas ends up presenting

a short sample of his account on the development of Western rationality. He writes,

> Mythology permits narrative explanations with the help of exemplary stories;
> cosmological world view, philosophies, and religion already permit deductive
> explanations from first principles… modern science, finally, permits homological
> explanations and practical justifications, with the help of revisable theories and
> constructions that are monitored against experience[146]

Here, Habermas sees an evolutionary development of human rationality that begins as myth,

improves into the form of religious and metaphysical thinking, and finally arrives in its most

sophisticated form i.e. modern communicative rationality. This evolutionary narrative of rationality is

mainly what grounds Habermas' perspective on religion. In other words, insofar as Habermas saw

religion only as a stage within the development of human rationality that has already passed, he

concluded it is no longer necessary to devote so much effort to understand the role of religion in the

public sphere. Analysing Habermas' criteria to reject religion, Donald Jay Rothberg explains that

Habermas measures development in term of "reflexivity," or the ability one has to revise questions

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[145] Jürgen Habermas, *Die Neue Unu   bersichtlichkeit* in Habermas, "Transcendence from within, Transcendence from This World" Note that even though "Transcendence From within" was published in 1992, Habermas is quoting his earlier volume from 1985, a work that refers to his early philosophical stage.
[146] Jürger Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* trans. And introduction by Thomas McCarty (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 103-4

and criticize fundamental assumptions and claims.[147] Rothberg observes that, for Habermas,

reflexivity entails the possibility of questioning and problematizing "any explicit or implicit claim"

investigating such claim without "coercive, dogmatic or unconscious constraints."[148] To be sure,

Habermas is certain that contrary to metaphysical and religious thinking, modern communicative

rationality creates an atmosphere freed from dogmatism in which one is finally able to verify the

validity of philosophical claims without constrains. Hence, Habermas understands modern

communicative rationality as superior because he assumes it independence from dogma makes it

more efficient in verifying claims.

Another important theoretical element that justifies Habermas' early views on religion relates

to his differentiation between types of discourses[149] (theoretical, moral-practical and aesthetics.)[150]

Accordingly, Habermas explains that these instances of discourse entail different aspects of human

reality. The theoretical discourse deals with truth claims, moral-practical discourse addresses the

good and the rightness of one's affirmation, and finally aesthetics discourse aims at the evaluation of

a work of art, for example. Habermas believes that only within modern communicative rationality

can these aspects of discourse be properly differentiated, i.e. allowing for an appropriated process of

verification of implicit and explicit claims.[151] In contrast, Habermas understands that within a

mythical, religious or metaphysical worldview, there is a "confusion of nature and culture" that in

fact signified a "deficient differentiation between language and world."[152] For Habermas, the lack of

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[147] See Donald Jay Rothberg, "Rationality and Religion in Habermas'Recent Work: Some Remarks on relation between Critical Theory and the Phenomenology of religion"*Philosophy and Social Criticism 11* (Summer 1986): 222-23

[148] Rothberg from Willian J. Meyer. Op. Cit.

[149] In "A Reply to my Critics," Habermas writes, "Discourses are islands in the sea of practice." As Bronner explains, for Habermas, discourse aims at presenting a "regulative idea" relating concrete ideas and "criticizing repression." (Bronner. Op., Cit.,296)

[150] See Habermas, Jürgen. *TCA*. Op. Cit., pp. 38-43. Habermas explains these three discourses in his introduction.

[151] Meyer, J. William., Op. Cit page 373.

[152]Habermas, Jürgen. TCAI. Op. Cit., page 49.

differentiation within the pre-modern or sacred life-world displays an opposition to critical thinking. Habermas concludes that religious and metaphysical thinking present opinions and claims in such way that they "cannot be perceived as interpretation of the world that is subject to error and open to criticism."[153] As Simpson clarifies, for Habermas the mysticism and sacred tone of religious and metaphysical thinking presents at its core an "immunization" from any criticism or communicative argumentation. In sum, Habermas assumes that the "sacred authority" within pre-modern life-worlds turns out to be "sacred authoritarianism." [154]

Moreover, Habermas contends that religious and metaphysical worldviews are highly ideological. That is because they serve on a practical level to justify injustice such as unequal distribution of wealth.[155] Habermas is not interested in the truth claims of religious and metaphysical rationality, but he points out the fact that in such life-worlds there is no way to bring the dogmas into question apart from a communicative rationality.

Habermas recognizes an element that enables a transition from metaphysical and religious rationality to modern communicative rationality, and he calls it the "linguistification of the sacred." He describes it as "the transfer of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization from sacred foundations over to linguistic communication and action oriented to mutual understanding."[156] That is to say, communicative action that aims at substantial consensus replaces the unquestionable dogmas of the past. In simple terms, the "linguistification of the sacred" is the possibility to use language as a way to criticize sacred dogmas. In this context, Habermas believes that language increasingly serves as a way to "motivate agreements" towards consensus. In the modern world, language is no longer there to transmit indisputable, "pre-linguistic" agreements as it once did to in

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[153]Ibid. page 50.
[154] Simpson, Gary M. *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*. Fortress Press, 2002. P 109.
[155] Meyer, Op Cit., 374.
[156] Habermas, Jürgen., TCA Op. Cit. page 107.

the mythical midst.[157] Thus, insofar as mythical language was seen as something beyond criticism, it was never "linguistic" according to Habermas' definition of this term. In sum, then, in his earlier philosophical writings Habermas understood religion as an impediment to critical thinking and communicative rationality, since within religious and metaphysical mentality there is no place for questioning God and dogmas.[158]

In addition, Habermas also thought that the totalizing drive within religious and metaphysical thinking—their obsession with presenting a total and unified explanation of reality—blended together different aspects of culture and reality. This is what he recognizes as a lack of "differentiation."[159] Hence, Habermas' early views on religion consist of criticism of its lack of differentiating rationality. As a result he also turned out to be disinterested in religion. Insofar as Habermas' analysis led him to understand religion as a single stage of human rationality, there was not much more to be said about it. Religion, concluded Habermas, was simply superfluous to carry on the continuation of modernization.[160] Overall, Habermas thought that everything valid and positive within religion—such as ethics--were already absorbed by modern communicative rationality. In other words, the good in religion was not something exclusively religious, but in one way, it was there *despite* religion—or proved most beneficial when detached from religion.

It could be said that in his anxiety to declare religion as superfluous; Habermas dismiss some key elements of mythic language as simply "pre-linguistic." The prophetic tradition of Judaism, for instance, can be understood as a strong tool for criticizing rabbinical authority and even the king's misuse of power in Ancient Israel.[161] The fact that Habermas dismisses the social criticism within

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[157] Ibid. 106.
[158] Habermas, Jürgen TCAII. Op. Cit. page 188.
[159] Meyer. William J., Op. Cit. page 374.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Think of Nathanael confrontational conversation with David in (2 Samuel 11:1-15 ESV) and a variety of other examples in the Old Testament in which prophets, at times even under persecution, dared to bring the monarchs back to divine authority as a way to keep them accountable of their doings. (I thank Dr. Grant

prophetic tradition also points to his understanding of religion as something separated from the realm of politics.[162] Of course, in Habermas' early understanding of religion if such prophetic criticism were found to be positive it was already assimilated by modern rationality in philosophical terms e.g. Marxism. In any case, religion, concluded the early Habermas, was not necessary to keep such criticism alive.

ii. Reconsidering Earlier Dismissals

Towards the beginning of the decade of 1990s, Habermas began to modify his views on religion. Habermas began to admit that his early criticisms of religion were much too strong. Responding to criticism against his *Theory of Communication*, Habermas was forced to refine his articulations on religion as well as to develop his theory of the role of religion in the state.[163] It was during this period that Habermas elaborates upon his own idea of "methodological atheism." Habermas' elaboration of "methodological atheism" contains a tension within his thought, i.e. his shift towards the recognition that religion had an important role in society on one hand, and his strong denial of religion's rationality and its ability to participate in the public arena on the other hand.[164]

Perhaps Habermas' most emblematic paper in this period of transition is "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence from This World," published in 1992. In this paper, Habermas attempts to distance himself from his earlier understanding of religious and metaphysical rationality as

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Havers for pointing out Prophetic tradition as a way to problematize Habermas' early understanding of religion)

[162] Arguably Habermas was not able to overcome such compartmentalized view of religion, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter.

[163] Habermas begins his article "Transcendence from Within…" by highlighting the amount of criticism he received for his early comments on religion. He acknowledged that for many years theologians had included him in their discussions and reacted to his writings. Habermas sees the necessity to address these criticisms. Op. Cit., page 303.

[164] Adams, Nicholas., Op. Cit., page 1.

legitimization of injustice and government authority. Responding to criticisms by both David Tracy

and Helmut Peukert of his early views on religion, Habermas goes as far as to affirm that the world

religions "do not function exclusively as legitimation of government authority."[165] Habermas also

admits that early on in his career he had submitted too quickly to Marx Weber's theory of the

privatization of religion. This admission could be seen as Habermas' initial attempt to move towards

the idea of the "post-secular," since he gives the impression that the modern prediction regarding the

progressive privatization of religion was no longer able to account for the state of religion in the

world. Habermas goes on to recognizing that religion would have a continuous impact on the realm

of politics. Yet, such understanding will only become clearer in his writings in the decade of

2000's.[166]

More crucially, Habermas revisits his early statement that the only thing that could be

salvaged from religion was "the secular principle of universalist ethics of responsibility."[167] In

contrast to his early position, Habermas affirms that the possibility of more edifying contributions

coming from religion "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." [168] Habermas argues for an ongoing possibility of philosophical appropriation of concepts

coming from religious and metaphysical traditions. Whereas earlier Habermas was certain that

everything good in religion was already absorbed by modern communicative rationality, he now

begins to understand that religions can be seen as a constant provider of semantic resources for

society. As he cautiously admits, "[t]he process of critical appropriation of the essential contents of

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[165] Habermas, Jürgen in Mendieta Op. Cit., page 312.
[166] This is an embryonic stage of the idea of the post-secular since Habermas would only articulate this idea after September 11th. (See Habermas, Jürgen., "Religion in the public sphere" Op. Cit.)
[167] Habermas, Jürgen, From Mendieta Op. Cit., page 313.
[168] Ibid.

religious tradition is still underway and the outcome is difficult to predict."[169] Habermas begins to

think that, *in the present*, religion is relevant and still has the potential to provide semantic

contributions to society. Such a shift in Habermas philosophy is accompanied by an increasing

awareness that the secularist mindset is not able to generate the goals and motives it wants to

advance. Habermas turns back to religion as a way to nurse the goals of society.

Methodological Atheism

Within his new *attitude* towards religion,[170] Habermas goes on to affirm that religion is

"indispensable in the ordinary life for normalizing intercourse with the extraordinary."[171] For this

very reason, Habermas sees religion as irreplaceable, since philosophy by definition is closed to the

relationship with the extraordinary. That is to say, religion has a place in the "ordinary life." That

does not mean Habermas is inviting religion to participate in the public debate, however. Many

tensions arise here within Habermas' thought. While he starts to see religion as an important source

of meaning to inform the goals of society—such as the sense of guilt and justice[172]— Habermas

maintains strong limits for the possibility of religion's participation in the public sphere. He believes

that only religious concepts that undergo a process of translation to a language accessible to all can

enter the public sphere. This philosophical attitude towards religion, as well as the philosophical role

of translating religious concepts into a non-religious language, is what Habermas calls

"methodological atheism." As he explains, it is a "program of demythologization" that aims at

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[169] Ibid, 313.

[170] I use the term *attitude* and not *perspective* because as I will explore latter on, even though Habermas' mood towards religion defiantly changes he does not makes much room for religion in the *formal* public sphere. That is to say, in practice, Habermas still confines religion to the realm of private life.

[171] Habermas, Jürgen in Mendieta Op. Cit., page 313.

[172] Habermas sees religion, as a back up for the secular project because he believes religion is able to provide meaning when secular mentality is exhausted of such possibility. (Habermas, Jürgen *Between Naturalism and Religion.* Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity (2008) page 102) He does not care so much for the truth claim nature of religious concepts. Over all his understanding of truth is ground in the ideal of consensus anyway. Habermas is interested in the *use* of religion for the sake of his project of democracy. As he said once the idea of God is useful when it comes to mean "freedom of the lowliest in the spiritual communication of all."(Mendieta, Eduardo. Op. Cit., page 333) I will explore Habermas use of religion in my final chapter.

making religious concepts accessible to non-believers. IN the words of Miguel Vatter, "methodological atheism" relates to Habermas' thesis that philosophy is there to act as an "interpreter and translator of semantic content it receives from extra philosophical sources."[173]

Philosophy and its Role as Translator

Why does Habermas associate philosophical discourse with this task of translation? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand what Habermas means by religion and theological discourse, and why he believes both of them are incapable of making their claims intelligible to all individuals in the public sphere. Habermas defines religious discourse (RD) as discourse "conducted" within the community of faith and exercised in the "context of a specific tradition with substantive norms and as elaborated dogmatics." That is to say, RD occurs in a highly dogmatic atmosphere. Habermas continues affirming that RD is related to a "common ritual praxis," and is based on the "specifically religious experiences of the individual."[174] As one can see, Habermas' understanding of RD is strongly grounded in the assumption that religion belongs to the realm of the private (personal or restricted to a smaller community).[175] Habermas also sees RD as "non-objectifying" meaning that it does not have the goal of presenting claims with enough clarity as to be treated as verifiable statements. Accordingly, RD displays a "metaphorical use of words such 'redemption,' 'messianic light,' 'restoration of nature' etc." Habermas insists that religious literary "mode of presentation" cannot be measure by truth claims.[176] Finally, RD is "closely joined to a ritual praxis that, in comparison with profane everyday praxis, is limited in the degree of its freedom of communication in a specific way." Contrary to philosophical discourse, RD is "protected against

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[173] Vatter, Miguel Op. Cit.
[174] Habermas, Jürgen in Mendieta Op. Cit.308
[175] I will discuss Habermas' notion of private and public in the next chapter.
[176] Habermas, Jürgen From Mendieta Op. Cit.309.

radical problematization."[177] As Meyer clarifies, Habermas' main point is that RD lacks "reflexivity,"

meaning that RD's "underlining convictions and presuppositions" are not open to debate. Meyer also

points out that Habermas sees that RD presents claims that are valid in a specific community of

faithful while "profane practice of everyday life" tend to raise "universal valid claims"[178]

Habermas goes on to make a distinction between religious discourse and theological discourse

(TD). He believes the distinctive element within TD is that it separates "itself from ritual praxis in the

act of explaining it."[179] Habermas sees TD as having the goal of objectivity and precision in

analysing religious concepts. Similarly to the validity claim discourses of modernity (moral,

theoretical and aesthetical), TD also wants to deal with truth claims. However, Habermas explains

that with the collapse of metaphysical reasoning, TD must operate in the level of the three possible

discourses of modernity. That is to say, for Habermas, while TD aims to deal with truth claims the

collapse of metaphysical reasoning frustrates theologically objectifying aspirations. In sum,

Habermas believes the collapse of metaphysics causes TD to lose its original "identity" because,

unlike Philosophy, TD is not able to cite religious experiences without "[acknowledging] them on

their own basis."[180] In other words, while TD aims for a certain level of objectivity, TD would never

be able to provide the objectivity of philosophical discourse because TD still operates within the level

of unquestionable religious claims.

Note the tension in Habermas' articulation: while he recognizes the importance of RD and

TD—as he recognizes a particular role for RD and TD—he completely denies their capacity to

communicate with the world beyond the borders of a community's rituals and cults that RD and TD

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[177] Ibid. page 310
[178] Meyer, William J., Op. Cit.
[179] Habermas, Jürgen From Mendieta Op. Cit., page 310.
[180] Ibid. page 311.

refer to. [181] That is exactly why Habermas believes philosophical discourse is left with the task of translation. Habermas argues that philosophical discourse constitutes the only discourse that is able to make a bridge between religious concepts and the language of profane everyday praxis. Within the post-metaphysical age, philosophy is responsible for taking religious claims and treating them as fundamentally non-religious, making these claims accessible to non-believers.[182] To be sure, Habermas argues that philosophy can translate religious claims that are only valid to a specific and limited community into universal claims enabling them to undergo a rational verification regarding their validity. As Habermas writes, "philosophy cannot appropriate what is talked about in religious discourse as religious experience." This is because after modernity, philosophy no longer borrows "from the language of a specific religious tradition, but from the universe of argumentative discourse that is uncouple from the event of revelation."[183] In other words, Habermas believes philosophy has the freedom to articulate its own ideas apart from dogmatic constraints.

Hence, in the context of post-metaphysical philosophizing, Habermas believes "methodological atheism" is what enables the philosophical translation of religious concepts. In sum, Habermas still sees religious and theological discourse as limited to the private realm of life. He does see that they can contribute to public debate, but only when they undergo the scrutiny of philosophy as a way to enter the public sphere. Philosophy, Habermas believes, has the task of neutralizing the

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[181] It could also be said that Habermas understanding of RD's and TD's incapacity of producing verifiability seems to dismiss some important aspects of Christianity. Arguably Christianity is centered in the historical affirmation that Christ rose from the dead. The Christian fathers understand such fundamental statement of their faith as being a verifiable claim. Orthodox Christianity would retrieve from treating the idea of resurrection as something allegorical or poetic. Yet Habermas dismisses this vital element in Christianity preferring not to differentiate the nature of the Christian nuclear claim from whatever he has in mind when describing RD and TD. For a interesting study on the historicidity of the claim of Christ ressurection see (Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. First Edition edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. Print.)

[182] Ibid page 311

[183] Ibid. page 314.

religious accents within religious concepts, enabling these concepts to be articulated in a language that is essentially free of religion.

iii. The Post-Secular, Methodological Atheism After September 11th

In the first decade of the 2000s, particularly after September 11[th,] Habermas begins to display an increasing interest on the topic of religion. He starts the decade refining his articulation of "methodological atheism" as the proper philosophical attitude towards the translation of religious concepts into non-religious language. He also insists on post-metaphysical philosophizing as the solution for the tension between reason and faith. Meanwhile, Habermas realizes that, contrary to the modern theory of secularization, religion was not showing signs of death, but was persisting as a politically relevant social phenomenon. With this reality in mind, he is led to revise his theory of the role of religion in society. Aware of the shortcomings within his secularist project, Habermas begins to realize that the liberal state ended up being unjustifiably hostile to religious citizens' participation in public life.

The Identity-split Problem

In 2001, Habermas delivered a speech entitled "Faith and Knowledge,"[184] in which he seems to recognize a problem within his earlier articulation of "methodological atheism." Accordingly, his requirement that religious language must be translated in a "non-religious" or atheistic fashion places a burden exclusively on the lives of religious citizens. As Habermas notices, within the boundaries of secular debate, "only citizens committed to religious beliefs are required to split up their identities…into public and private elements. They are the ones who have to translate their religious

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[184] This was his speech delivered when he receive the Peace Prize in October 14, 2001. Habermas, Jürgen "Faith and Knowledge" in Mendieta, op. Cit, 327-37.

beliefs into a secular language before their arguments have any chance of gaining majority support."[185] Habermas realizes that the secular public debate is more burdensome to believers, and he attempts to solve this problem. In order to do that, he first aims to distance his own idea of public sphere from the secularist project, developing a more complex notion of state neutrality. Simultaneously, he tries to make more room for the religious citizen to participate in the public life of the constitutional state.

The identity-split problem becomes more central to Habermas as he interacts with critiques of the liberal politics. I will deal more directly with Habermas understand the identity-split problem in my next chapter, as I will critically engage with Habermas critic to Rawls's "proviso." Whatever might be the reason Habermas does tackle this problem and I believe he should be praise for recognizing the identity-split as a problem it in the first place. In time of secularized religiosity it seems more than natural to conceive life as a combination of compartmentalized spheres. In this scenario, religion seems to be naturally separated or not connected to politics. It is fair to say that in a modernized world the identity-split is not perceived as a *problem* but the *norm*. Habermas recognition of the identity-split as a problem demonstrate his willingness to include in the debate those citizens who are not willing to submit to this modern notion of religion as an aspect of private life. Later on I will argue that Habermas' solution to the identity-split problem demonstrate his inclination to embrace the modern notion of religion—that is, confined to the private real of life and over against the secular. Yet his effort to overcome the problem must be recognized.

Habermas attempts to make room for religious citizens in the public sphere. He does that by criticizing the secularist project while speaking from a perspective of neutrality towards solidarity and, more importantly, by criticizing Rawls' idea of "proviso." Habermas believes that the shared concerns of religious and non-religious citizens should be equal regarding the cognitive engagement

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[185] Ibid 332.

in public debate. Therefore, both religious and non-religious, Habermas insists, should engage in a

mutual learning process as a way to help to solve the issue. At the same time, he wants to make sure

religious people can speak in the public sphere with integrity, i.e. without having to provide

motivations outside of their religious experience.

Beyond Secularism Towards Solidarity

Habermas argues that "worldview neutrality," in contrast to a secularist mindset "guarantees

equal ethical liberties for every citizen" and it is "incompatible with the political generalization of a

secularist worldview."[186] Habermas' affirmation implies two things. On the one hand, he realizes that

secularism is highly ideological and does not succeed in providing the type of neutrality it promised

in the first place. That is to say, secularism turned out to be just another worldview. On the other

hand, Habermas does not give up on the ideal of neutrality.[187] He envisions neutrality beyond

secularism, as he repeatedly criticizes the secularist hostility against religion. For instance, in his

debate with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2005, Habermas challenges both religious and secularist

citizens to engage in a "complementary learning process" in the post-secular state.[188] As one can see,

Habermas attempts to speak from a perspective beyond both religious and secularist worldviews.

Habermas wants to place non-religious and religious citizens in a more equal position, enabling "both

sides…[to] reciprocally take seriously, for cognitive reasons, their contribution to controversial topics

in the public sphere."[189] This vantage point from which Habermas wants to speak is directly

connected with his idea of the "post-secular" society. He sees the post-secular as a society in which

"religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularist certainty that religion will

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[186] Habermas from Mendieta, op. Cit, 348.
[187] Whether he is able to fully distance himself from the secularist project and fully provide the type of neutrality he wants is a discussion I will grapple with later on.
[188] Habermas, Jürgen "On The Relation between the Secular Liberal State and Religion" op. Cit, 348
[189] Habermas from Mendieta, op. Cit.

disappear worldwide in the course of modernization" loses its ground.[190] Such a society demands that social theorists rethink the role of believers in the public sphere. If religion is here to stay, so are religious citizens. Thus, it becomes crucial to rethink how they can interact and participate in the public sphere. In other words, aware of the crisis within the secularist project and realizing the undeniable persistence of religion in the world as a public phenomenon, Habermas uses the notion of "post-secular" as a platform for the critique of secularism without having to advocate a complete return to religion.

Returning to the problem of the identity-split of non-believers within Habermas' idea of public sphere, Habermas displays a terminological shift regarding his idea of methodological atheism. As Maeve Cooke has rightly observed, from the mid-2000s to the present, Habermas has attempted to restate his "methodological atheism" in terms of methodological agnosticism.[191] This move manifests Habermas' willingness to be less hostile to religion. The main transition in Habermas' articulation, as Cooke clarifies, relates to the degree of "epistemic restraint" that philosophy must display regarding truth claim of religious concepts. Habermas emphasizes the possibility that religious claims could be true in a new, particular way. Habermas recognizes a difference between ethical conceptions of the good, and of religious convictions. Accordingly, he observes that while ethical conceptions of the good are restricted to individuals or groups, religious believers have the potential of presenting concepts that could be valid for everyone.[192] Habermas' observation raises the level of importance he gives to religion in the context of communicative rationality insofar as the now post-metaphysically-minded citizens must take religious beliefs seriously. They must be willing to learn from it. [193] In

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[190] Habermas, Jürgen. "Notes on a Post-Secular Society." Op. Cit.,
[191] Ibid
[192] Ibid
[193] See Habermas, Jürgen, "The political' The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology" Habermas says that non-believers should at least have a "genealogical awareness of the religious origins of the morality of equal respect," reminding non-believers to treat religious citizens with due respect." From Butler, Judith *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. New York Columbia UP, 2011. Print. 15-33.

sum, Habermas criticizes the secularist mentality which declares religious concepts irrelevant, and also begins to urge non-believers to take religion seriously. In this way, Habermas aims at balancing the cognitive burdens between believes and non-believers.

Habermas' critique of Rawls' "proviso"

While Habermas challenges non-believers to envision the possibility to learn from religious concepts, he also attempts to make more room for religion in the realm of public sphere. In his earlier writings, Habermas expressively placed religion in the private sphere. With the rise of the "post-secular" society, Habermas is forced to elaborate upon a more complex account of religion in the public sphere. His critique of John Rawls' understanding of religion within the 'public use of reason' is a clear demonstration of Habermas' new position.

Habermas' earlier articulation of the role of religion in the public sphere is similar to Rawls's understanding of the participation of religious ideas in the liberal state. According to Rawls, religious concepts can only be integrated into the realm of public debate if they submit to what he calls a 'proviso.' As Rawls explains it, "[R]easonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons—and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines—are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support."[194] This is to say that religious concepts must be translated into political language. In practical ways, Rawls' 'proviso' sounds similar to what Habermas understands as the philosophical duty to translate religious concepts into a language that all citizens would have access to, namely methodological atheism. However, Habermas qualifies the Rawlsian idea of the role of religion in the public sphere as "rather restrictive."[195] Habermas argues that the principle of separation between church and state—that the

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[194] John Rawls, from Habermas, Jürgen "The Political" Op. Cit.
[195] Habermas. "Religion in the public sphere" op. cit,

state should operate with "strict impartiality vis-à-vis religious communities; parliaments, courts, and the administration," in such way that would not "privilege one side at the cost of another"—should be distinguished from laicism. By laicism, Habermas means the demand that the state should never take a political position that "would support or constrain religion *per se."* Habermas believes that if both of these elements are together, it creates an overly narrow notion of separation between church and state. [196] He believes this is exactly what Rawls' theory does. Habermas is no longer satisfied with the liberal demand expressed in Rawls' 'proviso.' Habermas does not completely abandon Rawls' paradigm, but he aims at modifying it by articulating what he calls an "institutional translation proviso." Habermas does that as a way to avoid two major problems with "proviso": a) the empirical objection—"many citizens cannot or are not willing to make the required" split between their secular and religious life as a way to "take political stances";[197] and b) the normative objection—because the liberal state is committed to the freedom of religion, it should not "inflict" an "asymmetric" burden on its religious citizens."[198]

Aiming at address this empirical objection to 'proviso,' Habermas argues that the liberal state should avoid transforming the *institutional* separations of religion and politics into an excessive surveillance of religiosity at the "mental" and "psychological" levels. Habermas agrees with Rawls that within the "parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations," decisions must be preceded on the basis of non-religious language in such way that rational support for every argument should be provided in language accessible to everyone.[199] However, Habermas moves away from Rawls' perspective insofar as Habermas sees that articulating one's idea in non-religious language should not be a requisite for participation in the *informal* public sphere. In other words, when speaking in town

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[196] Ibid.,
[197] John Rawls in Habermas, Jürgen "The Political" Op. Cit., 25
[198] Ibid.,
[199] Ibid

meetings, talk shows, newspapers, etc., individuals should not be required to speak in non-religious language.[200] As he clarifies, the recognition of the "institutional translation proviso"[201] should not force religious citizens to cut off their religious identity while participating in public discourse. Habermas points out that every *ought* presupposes a *can*, but in reality not every citizen is able to provide non-religious justification for his or her political stances.[202] He concludes that religious citizens "should be allowed to express and justify their convictions in religious language if they cannot find secular translation for them."[203] In sum, Habermas is introducing an element of choice with regards to Rawls' 'proviso,' enabling citizens to present their thoughts in the informal public sphere with religious language if they need or want to. Habermas is concerned with the inclusion of those citizens who have not received the communicative skills to participate in the formal public sphere, as well as individuals who pursue integrity in what their faith requires them to do regardless of their level of education. In addition, Habermas has in mind the role of religious institutions that understand as part of their vital calling the duty to emit moral and spiritual opinion in the public sphere. They should not be precluded from being heard and from having political input in the public sphere; for, as he explains, as "members of civil *terrena*," they are still empowered to be authors of the laws they subject to.[204]

While Habermas is opening the possibilities of religious concepts from within the informal public debate, he is not willing to negotiate the essence of 'proviso' within the boundaries of the *formal* public sphere. Overall, he argues that by being part of the liberal state all individuals— including religious individuals—have agreed to a particular way decisions are made in modern

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[200] See Lafont, Cristina. "Religion in the Public Sphere: Remarks on Habermas' Conception of Public Deliberation in Postsecular Societies." *Constellations* 14 (2): 2007 pages 239–59.
[201] John Rawls in Habermas, Jürgen "The Political" Op. Cit.
[202] Ibid
[203] Habermas, Jürgen., "Religion in the public Sphere" Op. Cit.
[204] Ibid.

politics when it comes to the public sphere. They submit to the "institutional translation proviso" as the procedure for communicative rationality within the liberal state's decision-making.[205] Hence, while explaining the rationale for avoiding non-religious language as a requirement to offer opinions in the informal public sphere, Habermas establishes a condition for this freedom. The condition is the recognition that every religious concept will have to be translated into non-religious language to enter the realm of the *formal* public sphere. In other words, the freedom of religious citizens to express themselves publicly using religious terms rely on the hope that their voice will be translated in order to be effectively participating in the debate. The religious language still wants the cooperation of other "fellow citizens"—religious or non-religious—that translation for making it possible for those religious concepts to affect the world of politics.[206] That is to say, if a "fellow citizen" does not do such translation, then a particular religious concept cannot enter the realm of formal public debate.

Habermas finds room for his theoretical shift in his observation that within the post-secular society, "the political… has migrated from the level of the state to civil society." That is to say, while the secularist project tended to see the political as a phenomenon restricted to the state, in the post-secular society—because religion persists in the public realm and aims at taking political stances— "the political" entails the informal public sphere. Here, Habermas differentiates between "the political" as a reality that embraces the informal public sphere and "politics and policies" as the realm of the formal public debate. Habermas understands that "the political" realm of informal public debate is the realm of "communicative freedom" that keeps the institutionalized politics alive and feeds it "from below."[207] Hence, he sees the informal public debate as the appropriate place for the

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[205] Ibid.

[206] Habermas, Jürgen "The Political" Op. Cit.

[207] Ibid., 25

friction between "religious and secular voices."[208] The debate within the informal public debate nourishes the formal public debate at the end of the day.

Addressing the normative objection to the liberal "proviso," Habermas reaffirms his idea that religious and non-religious citizens should engage in mutual learning. This is not the idea that shows up originally in the context of Habermas' critique to Rawls' "proviso," but rather something Habermas has consistently emphasized after September 11th. Habermas stresses the fact that "in democratic discourse, secular and religious citizens stand in complementary relation." He believes both of them have mutual "epistemic" duties regarding the other's perspective.[209]

Faith and Reason

As an advocate of deliberative democracy, Habermas knows that finding ways to implement a cooperative rational debate in the context of a multicultural society—a society whose citizens share conflicting ethical and religious beliefs and motives for their lives—is crucial to his project. Overall, because it is founded on the idea of democratic legitimation—i.e.that citizens should be the authors of the laws they subscribe—deliberative democracy necessarily relies upon the assumption of solidarity. In other words, citizens who stand upon different epistemic grounds should be able to carry on a dialogue for the purposes of public deliberation. Habermas' theory of communicative action is his best attempt to display a procedure for this public dialogue. He is aware of the radical features of secularism, but he also does not propose bringing back religion to formal deliberation. Hence, Habermas has an internal tension to resolve. On one hand, He does not want to advocate for the continuation of the secularist understanding of rationality; on the other, he does not wants completely abandon religion. Habermas is aware that without faith or religion, an "uncontrolled' secularization"

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[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

could lead society to suffer a loss of its sources for motivation.[210] Habermas is forced to reconsider

the millennial debate regarding the boundaries of reason and faith.[211] Habermas never gives up on

the idea of the unity of reason, and at the same time he recognizes a plurality of worldviews.

In his essay "Faith and Knowledge," Habermas articulates his hope for the unity of reason

through "democratic common sense" that keeps itself distant from religious language.[212] Hence the

essence of Habermas' "methodological atheism" is maintained insofar as religious concepts still need

to be translated into non-religious language in order to enter the realm of "democratic common

sense" or the unity of reason.[213] At this stage, Habermas is already looking for religion as a source of

meaning that "democratic common sense" is not able to provide, i.e. the "normative substance" that

feeds the public debate and the goals of the state.[214] Here one has to consider that Habermas' grasp of

"post-secular" society pushes him to recognize faith as a constant source of normative substance for

religion that will not go away. Yet Habermas' commitment to deliberative democracy and his

understanding of common sense or common rationality leads him to associate reason with post-

metaphysical thinking; therefore he still sees faith as something external to rationality.[215] Habermas

understands when religious concepts are translated "in term of philosophical concepts," they are

preserved in a universal, accessible language and therefore ready to enter the realm of knowledge.[216]

That is to say, while Habermas sees religion and secular thought in constant interaction, he also sees

faith and knowledge as parts of different realms. That is because when the "boundary between faith

and knowledge becomes porous, and once religious motives force their way into philosophy under

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[210] Habermas, Jürgen *Between Naturalism and Religion.Op Cit.* page 102.
[211] This is a problem addressed early on in the Christian tradition in the patristic period expressed in the question of Tertulian " What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?"
[212] Habermas, Jürgen from Mendieta, Eduardo., Op. Cit., page 332.
[213] Habermas, Jürgen from Mendieta, Eduardo., Op. Cit., page 332.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Reder, Michael., "How can Faith and Reason be Distinguished?" page 41.
[216] Habermas, Jürgen "Faith and knowledge" Op. Cit

false pretences, reason loses its foothold and succumbs to irrational effusion."[217] Philosophy yields rationality and should act as a shield against the religious threat to common rationality. Hence, Habermas establishes a split between faith and knowledge (reason), and although he sees that religion has its relevance, philosophy has the last word regarding the argumentative procedures within deliberative democracy. What Habermas means by philosophy is rather vague. As I attempted to show in the first chapter, Habermas notion of "philosophy" is highly influenced by his political commitments with Marxism and his project of advancing Enlightenment. There is much to discuss here regarding the kind of philosophy Habermas envisions as having the last word as I will explore in my final chapter. Whatever might be the case, for deliberative purposes, Habermas argues, philosophy should take over religion via methodological atheism—or agnosticism. This is an idea that Habermas has never dropped, at least in his view of the realm of the formal public sphere.

Habermas has observed that the status of faith in post-secular society and its role in the deliberative process demands from the secular world an "awareness of what is missing."[218] Even though religion is outside of the realm of public scrutiny, it fits the pragmatic purpose of feeding the public debate with meaning. Habermas' willingness to validate religion for its genealogical relationship with Western rationality puts him at odds with his understanding of state neutrality, as I shall explore next chapter.

I have attempted to demonstrate the trajectory of Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in the public space. In his early stages, Habermas did not have a lot to say about religion except that as an obsolete social phenomenon—a mere stage in the evolutionary process of human rationality. Facing critics of his theory of active communication, Habermas was forced to consider the topic of religion more seriously. It was during this phase that he came to the basic understanding

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[217]Habermas, Jürgen., *Between Naturalism and religion.* Op. Cit., page 242-3
[218] Habermas, Jürgen., *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular.* Page 18

of his methodological atheism. From this point on, he was aware that religion has more to give to society then he once thought. Religion began to have an ongoing role of providing meaning and goals to individuals. However, Habermas still endorsed the liberal requirement that religious concepts needed to be translated into non-religious language in order to be accepted in public debate.

After September 11^{th,} 2001, Habermas displayed a particular interest in the topic of religion. He realized that, contrary to the secularist prediction, religion is not going away. In this post-secular society, religion assumes a greater political role. Aware of this fact, Habermas wants to find ways to include religious citizens in the public sphere. His critique of Rawls' "proviso" aims to allow religious citizens to speak publicly with integrity, resolving the identity-split problem. Habermas also challenged non-religious citizens to take religion seriously by intellectually engaging with religious arguments. As much as Habermas wants to include religion in the public sphere, then, he never gave up the "institutional proviso" that stipulates the translation of religious concepts to non-religious language in the realms of formal public debate. As one faces Habermas' current account of the role of religion in the public space, it seems legitimate to wonder whether Habermas' alternative to the identity-split problem is a real solution to the problem. This is the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE:

BETWEEN THE SECULAR AND THE POST-SECULAR:

HABERMAS' UNDERSTANDING OF NEUTRALITY AND RELIGION

Habermas' position that the public sphere should be an arena of equal accessibility of the parties involved[219] puts him at odds with his own idea of "methodological atheism"—the requirement that all citizens must translate religious concepts into political language in order to engage in public debate. If it is true that such a requirement imposes an unequal "cognitive burden"[220] for religious citizens when they take political stances (because they are not able to translate these religious concepts, or simply because the political reasons are not available), Habermas is forced to believe that there is something problematic within the liberal public sphere. Habermas' "institutional proviso" aims at including religious individuals in the public sphere, as well as overcoming the identity-split problem within the Liberal "proviso." However, it is not clear whether Habermas' solution to Rawls' 'proviso' has been sufficient for solving the problem.

In this chapter I will analyse Habermas' solution to the Rawls' "proviso" as a way to expose some fundamental limitations within Habermas' philosophy. Accordingly, I will present the contradictions of Habermas' "institutional proviso" as indicating a much deeper issue in Habermas' thought, namely his idea of neutrality and religion. I argue that Habermas' understanding of neutrality (in his idea of state neutrality and the attempt to escape tradition), as well as his notion of religion (as over-against the secular and outside of rationality), ultimately undermines his own attempt to make room for religious citizens in his understanding of the "post-secular." Without overcoming these theoretical impediments, I believe Habermas is not able to grasp properly what is at

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[219] See the first chapter above regarding Habermas' understanding of public sphere and his notion of "ideal speech situation."

[220] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" op. Cit., p 13

stake in the identity-split problem. For this reason, he cannot give a satisfactory solution to the identity-split problem.

I shall divide this chapter in three sections. In section (i) I interact with Cristina Lafont's critique to show that, according to Habermas' own standards, his "institutional proviso" repeats the problems with Rawls' "proviso" in a more restricted space, i.e. the formal public sphere. I use Lafont's critique as an indicative of the problems within Habermas' understanding of religion and neutrality. I close the section by revisiting the identity-split problem through the lenses of Stanley Hauerwas to agree with Habermas that the liberal proviso is a problem, while suggesting an alternative way to understand why and how it is problematic. In section (ii), I analyze Habermas' understanding of neutrality within his idea of the state and the "ideal speech situation." His idea of neutrality is closely tied with his concept of equality among the participants of the public sphere. I explore the nuances of Habermas' idea of neutrality and his dialogue with Gadamer to suggest that although Habermas is aware of the hermeneutic critique of neutrality, he defaults to the Enlightenment's prejudice against tradition. In section (iii), I analyse Habermas' understanding of "religion" as being incompatible with his recent awareness of the "post-secular." I present some different voices (Nonbgri, Milbank and Clouser) who challenge the modern understanding of "religion" that still informs Habermas' philosophy. In light of these alternative ways to conceive "religion," one is able to grasp the *theological and religious* features of the "secular" and from this awareness it becomes rather confusing to speak of "religious citizens" versus "non-religious citizens," as Habermas does. Finally, I conclude the chapter by presenting ways in which a "post-secular" development of the idea of neutrality and religion can illuminate some ways to more fruitfully approach the identity-split problem.

i)   **The Limitations of Habermas' "institutional translation proviso"**

Whether Habermas was able to address the problems within Rawls' 'proviso' by simply

proposing a limited application of the concept within institutional boundaries is the subject of much

heated scholarly debate. It could be said that Habermas' solution for the identity-divide problem

within Rawls' 'proviso' has displayed nothing more than an anticlimactic *finale*.[221] While Habermas'

critique of Rawls' proviso aims for greater inclusion of religious citizens, Habermas' solution seems

to simply avoid what is truly at stake with respect to what underlines the identity-split. Before getting

to what I believe is the real problem within the identity-split, I shall propose an analysis of the self-

referential problems in Habermas' "institutional proviso"—that is, an analysis of Habermas'

"institutional proviso" according to the terms of his own philosophy.

Christina Lafont has raised the objection that Habermas' solution to Rawls' 'proviso' simply

moves the identity-split problem from the informal public sphere to the *formal* public sphere.[222]

Accordingly, if it is true that the normative objection is indeed a problem because it undermines the

value that the "cognitive burden" of all citizens should be equal, then why should citizens be forced

to submit to the "institutional proviso" when they are invested with political power?[223] If what

Habermas really wants is to address the cognitive problem within the "proviso" in the sense of

cognitive dishonesty—i.e. that religious citizens are forced to "follow an argumentative path that

does not correspond to their own religious cognitive stance,"[224] thereby compromising their

integrity—then there is no reason for dismissing ordinary citizens[225] from the duty of providing non-

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[221] My account of Habermas' solution to the problem is mostly taken from his most recent articles on the issue, as I showed in the chapter above.
[222] Lafont, Cristina. "Religion in the Public Sphere: Remarks on Habermas' Conception of Public Deliberation in Postsecular Societies." *Constellations* 14.2 (2007), 239–59.
[223] Idid., 245.
[224] Ibid., 251.
[225] By ordinary citizen I mean those who do not have the status for participating in the formal public sphere.

religious justification for their political stances without extending the same principle to politicians.

Given that every *ought* implies a *can* in the informal public sphere (as Habermas rightly observes), it

seems logical to imply that the same should be valid in regards to the formal public sphere. [226]

To Habermas' credit, his solution helps ordinary religious citizens not to violate their beliefs

when justifying policies they might support, especially when such justification is not available.

Moreover, Habermas is able to counter Rawlsian radicalism, according to which "only secular reason

count beyond the institutional threshold."[227] However, Lafont argues that Habermas' solution,

"though less demanding" than Rawls's, falls into the same problem when "over-determination fails."

By over-determination, Lafont means the possibility of "arriving at the same results by different

epistemic means."[228] It refers to the democratic demand that, on an institutional level, believers and

non-believers must agree upon practical political decisions even if they don't share the same

epistemic grounds. When there is actual conflict between secular and religious reason, Habermas'

solution is rather inconsistent because politicians who happen to be believers in the formal public

sphere would still be under a heavier burden by facing the same identity-split problem.

As pointed out before, Habermas' "institutional proviso" releases ordinary citizens from the

duty of presenting secular justification—"accessible to all"[229]—for the political stances they take

within the *informal* public sphere only because he believes "fellow citizens" will translate these

religious ideas as a necessary step to enter the *formal* public sphere.[230] Given that such translation is

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[226] Habermas uses the logic that "every ought implies a can" to justify his critique to Rawls' proviso in the sense that Rawls' *ought* regarding the requirement to translate religious concepts in the *informal* public sphere implies the possibility of such translation. Habermas understands that the translation at times is not possible and therefore he advocates f the non-obligation of such translation in the informal public sphere. See Habermas, op. cit., 8.

[227] John Rawls in: Lafont., op. cit., 245.

[228] Ibid., 245.

[229] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere". Op. Cit., 10

[230] Ibid

possible,[231] it seems that the identity-split problem persists in the formal public sphere. What happen

when over-determination genuinely fails in the formal public sphere? Where could the translation

come from? Notice that it is in the formal public sphere that the problem matters most, due to its

deliberative capacity.[232] Lafont's critique could be paralleled to the observation that, while Habermas

has been able to envision a "post-secular" society, he has not advocated for changes in the

deliberative system to fallow up with his own realization that religion will not go away.[233] One must

question whether Habermas' idea of post-secular society will ever advance beyond a notion of a post-

secular state. Habermas' "institutional proviso" is not an indication that he is willing to go that far.

Whatever might be the case, if the cognitive objection refers to a real problem, then this problem

pervades every aspect of the public sphere, especially the *formal* one.

The objection to 'proviso' can be dissected into different aspects regarding the liberal ethics of

citizens: moral, political and cognitive.[234] Habermas believes the cognitive objection is the most

compelling one.[235] Habermas takes this objection from Wolterstorff. Accordingly, the cognitive

objection to Rawls' "proviso" refers to the imposition of an asymmetrical cognitive burden on

religious citizens. With that in mind, Habermas aims at encouraging the idea of solidarity between

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[231] There is an important question here regarding the very possibility of the translation of religious concepts into a neutral language "accessible to all." I will suspend the question for now and return to it when I present a critique of Habermas' critique of his political use of Christianity in my final chapter. For now I will explore Habermas' "institutional proviso" as if such translation were able to semantically preserve religious symbols.

[232] The understanding that it is the formal public sphere that has the prominence regarding state deliberation has led some to discuss the identity-split problem at a constitutional level—envisioning a deliberative process that would take seriously the reality that religion is here to stay.

[233] See Maeve, Cooke. "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Post-metaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion" 14.2 *Constellations* (2007), 224. Cooke's critique points to a post-secular idea of the state in which religion is no longer restrained from the formal process of democratic deliberation. Through a different focus both Lafont and Cooke are highlighting the same fact here, i.e. that Habermas' idea of "institutional translation proviso" affirms a problem within the *informal* public sphere while being oblivious to the fact the same problem exists in *formal* public sphere.

[234] The moral objection understands that Rawls' "proviso" is immoral because it prevents religious citizens from fulfilling their personal duty to go against what they believe to be immoral policies when the justifications are exclusively religious (Michael Sandel). The political objection affirms that Rawls' 'proviso' is politically illegitimate because it imposes a one-sided exclusion of many citizens. See Wolterstorff in "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues," in: Audi and Wolterstorff, eds., *Religion in the Public Square* (London: Rowman&Littlefield, 1997), 105.

[235] Habermas, op. cit., 8.

religious and non-religious citizens. The "institutional proviso" corollary requirement that non-believers should restrain their secularist attitude—namely, hold a cognitive prejudice against religious citizens—is part of his solution.[236] Yet, Habermas' proposal is rather contradictory. Surprisingly, Habermas' requirement ends up restricting non-believers from adopting publicly their "epistemic stance," i.e. that religion has no cognitive substance.[237] Habermas' solution to Rawls' 'proviso' is inconsistent. While Habermas wants to end the requirement of non-religious language in the *informal* public sphere, he has not been able to justify why the same does not apply to the *formal* public sphere. Moreover, while Habermas wants to include religious citizens in the informal public sphere, his corollary requirement that non-religious citizens should take religious claims seriously creates an identity-split for non-religious citizens. Hance as it turns out, Habermas' "institutional proviso" makes everyone—religious and non-religious--unhappy.

I read Lafont's critique as an indirectly indicating the limitations of Habermas' understanding of religion. As Lafont rightly observes, Habermas' 'institutional proviso' ends up imposing an identity-split to secular citizens—on that holds the belief that "religion has nothing to teach."[238] Think of a citizen who holds the strong belief in naturalism,[239] i.e. one who sees religion as a dated stage of human social evolution, and useless for that reason—or even a citizen who holds the *neo* atheist belief that religion is evil. Habermas' requirement that these citizens must take religion seriously is as burdensome as Rawls's 'proviso' for religious citizens. Lafont's observation indirectly

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[236] Ibid., p13
[237] Lafont, Ibid 247
[238] Lafont., Op. Cit. p.
[239] Hart uses the term naturalism as a qualification of metaphysical materialism framed in a Darwinist way. That is, existence came out of nothing; existence is restricted to material reality and it unfolds through an evolutionary process. In other words it is an attempt to present a total account of existence through the evolutionary theory.(Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. Print. p. 17)

helps one to see that both the so-called religious citizens and the non-religious citizens bring religious

assumptions to the public debate, as I shall explore in my section three.[240]

In a very odd way, the limitations within Habermas' 'institutional proviso' reveals that

everyone in the public sphere is *religious* in some sense; for they cannot help but bring to the public

sphere their assumptions that, according to Habermas own standards of public debate, are outside of

the realm of rationality.[241] I am aware that this can be seen as an ambitious claim, especially because

there are individuals and groups who deliberately refuse to be associated with any religion while

participating in the deliberative process. Of course, what is at stake here is the very definition of

religion. To explore my claim, I will present what I see as a more sophisticated theoretical radar to

enable one to sense religion where modern mindset tends to dismiss it. In any case, Lafont indirectly

raises a relevant discussion regarding Habermas' definition of religion. Habermas' narrow

understanding of religion prevents him from foreseeing the contradictions in his "institutional

proviso."

As a way to find alternatives for Habermas' inconsistencies, Lafont attempts to show that

having a more demanding cognitive burden is not necessarily a problem if one agrees that liberal

democratic deliberation is still the best way to solve problems.[242] Lafont's solution to the problem

does not demand from Habermas that religious citizens be allowed to speak religiously in the *formal*

public sphere, as her initial critique seemed to suggest. Instead, Lafont downplays the cognitive

objection to the 'proviso', questioning whether deliberative democracy should accept such objections

in the first place. She refutes Habermas' solution, but she is in agreement with him that democratic

deliberation depends on communication in a language accessible to all. In some sense I believe

Lafont is not mistaken in her observation that the uneven cognitive burden is not necessarily a

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[240] The very category "religious" and "non-religious" are rather fragile, as I will try to demonstrate later.
[241] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and religion*, op. cit., 242-3.
[242] Lafont, op. cit., 251.

problem.[243] However, she dismisses the uneven cognitive burden as a problem without acknowledging that the liberal democratic ideal of public debate as Habermas conceives it[244] does promise a type of equality in the public sphere that is incompatible with such a reality. This idea of equality meshes well with Habermas' notion of neutrality.[245] What Lafont's solution does not consider is that Habermas would have to give up much of his notion of the "ideal speech situation"-- regarding the neutrality of the public sphere in the way it must affect equality and accessibility within public debate-- for him not to see the uneven cognitive burden as a problem.[246]

Regardless of what it rightly addresses and for what it misses in Habermas' "institutional proviso," I find Lafont's critique particularly helpful for illuminating Habermas' theoretical limitations in the ways I just mentioned above. For what it rightly criticizes, Lafont's critique helps one to see how Habermas' understanding of religion is narrow. Missing in Lafont's critique is the fact that Habermas' theory of neutrality is what moves him to see the identity-split as a problem. His "institutional proviso" is a way to foster the equality of treatment that his theory promises.

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[243] Regarding classical liberalism, the Lockean idea of the public sphere is not particularly sensitive to Habermas' obsession with a state that would equally validate the notions of "the good life" within a pluralistic society by means of suspending a judgment concerning its truth. I take Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* as evidence that the classic liberal regime was aware that not every belief was compatible with it. Locke was not afraid to reject ways of life that did not match with classical liberalism. Moreover, Locke ties the idea of tolerance to the value of Christianity. I don't want to endorse Locke's political use of Christianity, but simple highlight his awareness of the necessary connection between the classical liberal regime with a set of core of values that should be maintained. See John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Bailey, Andrew in: *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought: Volume 1: From Plato to Nietzsche*. Annotated edition (Broadview Press, 2008). In this particular regard I think the communitarian critique of liberalism tends to misread Locke's philosophy. It is possible to understand Locke's theory as an attempt to envision a political regime in light of the values his community took to be true, i.e. Protestantism. He is aware that not every idea is compatible with the Liberal State as he even points out the risk of Muslin obligatory submission to religious authority as political authority. It is true that he imposes a limit for the state toleration as defined by the limits of civil law. Yet, arguably, it is rather difficult to separate the predominant Protestant mindset from the constitutional structure that this particular nation displayed. For compelling cases of classical liberalism as a political system that takes virtue seriously, see Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford : New York: Oxford Univ Pr on Demand, 1990).

[244] See the "ideal speech situation" in chapter one above.

[245] Ferrara, A. "The separation of religion and politics in a post-secular society." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 2009 : 77-91.

[246] I will deal with this aspect of how Habermas' own idea of neutral space for public debate conditions him to see the unequal burden as a problem when I discuss Habermas' understanding of neutrality.

Given that Habermas' solution to Rawls' 'proviso' reviews some limitations of his notion of neutrality and religion, it is necessary to access them and propose some more nuanced philosophical tools to understand them. Habermas "institutional proviso" reaches an *aporia* caused by the limitations of the idea of "religion" and "neutrality" to which he subscribes. His idea of religion and neutrality causes the problems he means to solve. But if this is true, then one could say Habermas himself lacks the theoretical means to overcome the identity-split problem. Dealing with new ways to conceive the notion of neutrality and religion becomes a necessary step in the direction to solve the problem. However, before advancing in my criticism of Habermas' idea of "religion" and "neutrality," I would like to address the argument present in Lafont's critique of Habermas' theory, i.e. that the identity-split is not really a problem. I am convinced it is a problem—not for the same reasons that Habermas sees it as a problem, however. I believe there are more coherent ways to understand the identity-split problem, as I shall explore now.

The Identity-Split: Why is it a Problem?

One might ask to what degree Habermas' "methodological atheism" in the frame of the "institutional proviso" determines the outcome of deliberations in the public sphere. The possibility of Habermas' methodological bias becomes more apparent when the *neutral* public debate focuses on topics that could be defined as essentially religious. The situation of abortion in contemporary public debate might be relevant here. The Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas has observed that pro-abortionists have been right to claim that anti-abortion movements presuppose religious convictions.[247] He points out that one makes a decision about abortion by virtue of his or her perspective on "what human beings are" and "what human beings should do for one another." [248] That is to say, precisely those elements that transcend the boundaries of neutrality according to the

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[247] Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character*, 213.
[248] Ibid., 212-229.

liberal state are what define one's perspectives on abortion. If that is true, then Christians have already lost the battle, since the secular agenda dictates the epistemic rules of the debate. This prevents Christian convictions from being raised, since a reference to Christian conviction already excludes one from the debate.[249] That is to say, Christians are "morally and politically required to express [their] presuppositions in a pluralistic society" in a way that forces them to defend abortion apart from Christianity, where their rationality essentially operates. As he puts it, "Christian prohibition of abortion is a correlative to being a particular kind of people with a particular set and configuration of virtues."[250] Apart from these notions of virtues and way of life, there is no way to faithfully condemn abortion as a Christian.

One might justifiably question the relevance of bringing Hauerwas to such discussion. Indeed, Hauerwas is clear about his position that the church does not need the state's approbation regarding the way it should speak in the public realm. Moreover, he believes Christianity is essentially not interested in the question of "order."[251] That being said, one has to acknowledge that Hauerwas' point of view raises interesting questions regarding the liberal goal of solidarity. Overall, what could "solidarity" possibly mean in the vacuity of liberal narrative? Yet Hauerwas helps one to see when one submits to the liberal 'proviso' one leaves behind the context in which his or her political claim can even be rational, i.e. religion. Not only that, Hauerwas suggests that the political values of Christians are inextricable from the Christian narrative. Thus, from such perspective, the most serious objection to the liberal "proviso" is that it imposes on particular groups its artificial separation between rationality and faith to the point that it steals from people the intelligibility of the political stances they want to defend. I take these elements as indicative that the identity-split problem is not

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[249] Ibid., 214.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Lee, Hak Joon. *Covenant and Communication: A Christian Moral Conversation with Jürgen Habermas.* (Lanham, MD: U of America, 2006), 161.

so much related to the fact religious individuals are prevented from experiencing equality in the public sphere.[252] Rather, what is truly at stake is that liberalism advocates an idea of rationality that proposes an artificial separation between religion and politics. This prevents individuals from being part of the political debate if their religion does not match it, which contradicts the liberal promise of neutrality in the public debate.

Habermas recognizes that the case of abortion raises difficulties regarding the participation of Christians on this particular issue. He understands that the difficulties of reaching agreement in such debates remain in the "self-description" of some groups; for they are not willing to accept the ethical-political distinction.[253] Habermas believes that the first aspect of the debate of abortion refers to how to order conflicting ethical views.[254] That is to say, he wants to encourage groups who see the debate directly related to their way of life to understand that the issue must be resolved from the perspective of pluralism. Habermas' realization regarding the difficulty within a debate of abortion has not prevented him from insisting upon the position that "methodical atheism" is actually the way to preserve religion and prevent dogmatic language from determining public debate. He used to require that the individuals in a communicative community suspend their personal beliefs as a way to engage in dialogue, since the argumentative praxis entails consensus as a requirement for truth.[255] Now, with his "institutional proviso," Habermas has limited the same requirement to the *formal* public sphere. Habermas is still confident that within communicative action "we have no choice but

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[252] Contrary to other critiques of Rawls' and Habermas' understanding of public rationality that still operate under the idea standard of equality (see Audi and Wolterstorff, op. cit. 105) Hauerwas has very little hope that the very definition of equality could exist apart from a particular ethical narrative. As he advocates, one has to experience the "Kingdom" to even understand what equality means. This suggests that the notion of equality must be qualified by a particular *religious* view. See Stanley Hauerwas, John Berkman, and Michael Cartwright. *The Hauerwas Reader* (Duke University Press, 2001), 389.

[253] According to Habermas they are fundamentalists because they cannot see their way of life as one among others. See Lasse Thomassen, *Deconstructing Habermas* (Routledge, 2012),74-5.

[254] Habermas in McCarthy, Thomas "Legitimacy and Diversity: Dialectical Reflections on Analytical Distinctions" in Rosenfeld, Michel, and Andrew Arato. *Habermas on Law and Democracy: Critical Exchanges* (University of California Press, 1998), 126.

[255] Habermas in: Mendieta, op. cit, 311.

to presuppose the idea of an undistorted intersubjectivity."[256] This previous affirmation is now still

perfectly valid in the realm of the formal public sphere. As he argues, "In a constitutional state, all

norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated and publicly justified in a language that

all the citizens understand."[257] This reinforces Habermas' optimism regarding the possibility of truth

as requiring communal consensus guided by neutrality.

Habermas recognizes that the identity-split is a problem insofar as it forces individuals to

artificially compartmentalize their cognitive lives into private and public.[258] For him, this is a

cognitive problem because the participation of religious citizens in liberal societies becomes more

burdensome than the participation of non-religious citizens. Yet Habermas' "institutional proviso"

reinforces Rawls' 'proviso' in the formal public sphere. Such inconsistency leads one to question

what principle Habermas is actually enacting when calling the identity-split a problem.[259] One cannot

know for sure whether he sees the cognitive burden as a problem because the principle of equality is

violated. This is the case insofar as Rawls' 'proviso' forbids religious citizen to have a voice with

integrity in the public sphere—or because religious articulation is excluded *a priori* from the

conversation as irrational. I believe a systematic reading of Habermas leads one to see that he

perceives the identity-split as a problem because it goes against his idea of neutrality illuminated by

the value of equality, i.e. that every party in the public sphere is to be equally welcomed.[260] This

helps one to see Habermas' position is not too far from Rawls's 'proviso.' Habermas himself has

classified his differences with Rawls as "familial." His criticisms of Rawls' are to be seen as

"objections directed not so much against the project as such but against certain aspects of its

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[256] Ibid., 315.
[257] Habermas, "Notes on the Post-Secular Society" op. Cit., p 28
[258] Habermas, "Religion in the public Sphere" op. cit. p.21
[259] There is indeed some vagueness here. Lafont, for instance, has observed that it is difficult to know what Habermas have in his mind when he calls the identity-split a problem. Lafont, Op. Cit
[260] See Ferrara, op. cit

execution."[261] It is true that Habermas wrote that in the decade of 1990s, before his development of "institutional proviso." Yet Habermas' critique of Rawls can still be understood within the same framework. To be sure, Habermas' solution does not present a critique of Rawls' understanding of public reason *per se*, but simply a critique regarding the appropriate limits of such public use of non-religious rationality.[262]

Due to the aforementioned inconsistencies within 'institutional proviso', it makes more sense to understand Habermas' welcoming of religious language in the *informal* public as not taking seriously the necessity of revisiting the idea of the public reason and its relationship with religion. His critique of the liberal 'proviso' is a refinement of Rawls' idea of public reason with respect to its "execution." In sum, Habermas is not demanding a redefinition of public reason. The position that individuals are able to be rational apart from their religious beliefs is reinforced in the formal public sphere, and therefore they do not seem to be essentially problematic. Instead, it is a violation of the principle of equality within the parties that engage in the public spare that jeopardizes Habermas' notion of the "ideal speech situation."[263] On the other hand, Hauerwas' perspective tends to understand the identity-split as a problem; for even if religious convictions were allowed in the public sphere, the liberal "proviso" automatically dismisses them as irrational. If this is the case, then it seems more plausible to think that reason best functions within the context of religion and tradition. In this scenario, Habermas' notion of neutrality and religion seem problematic. I shall focus on these aspects now.

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[261] Jürgen Habermas, "Reconciliation through the Public Use of reason: Remarks on John Raws' Political Realism," The Journal of Philosophy, 92 (March 1995) page 110.

[262] Ferrara speaks of their differences in terms of size of restriction as opposed to nature of restriction. See Ferrara, op. cit.

[263] See chapter one above.

ii-Habermas and Neutrality

One of the greatest ambitions of Habermas' project is to advance neutrality in the public sphere. As observed, Habermas envisions neutrality beyond secularist neutrality. While it is certain that Habermas recognizes secularism as just another worldview, he insists state neutrality should be beyond that. Habermas seems to share the liberal ambition of neutrality, yet he attempts to repel the secularist version of it. In his own idea of neutrality, Habermas presupposes a vantage point from which to criticize both religion and secularism. But what does he actually mean by neutrality?

Neutrality and the Constitutional Democratic State

The question regarding the self-sufficiency of the secular state is essential to Habermas' idea of neutral public sphere. He is aware that to attach the secular state to a particular tradition "would indeed bring the state obligated to world-view neutrality into trouble."[264] This is because if one proves that there is a necessary interdependence between the democratic constitutional state and any particular religious tradition, it would denounce the implicit bigotry in the idea of "state neutrality" because such a fact would deny the principle according to which all ideas must enjoy equal value within the democratic state.[265] As Habermas observes, "against religion, the democratic common sense insists on reason which is acceptable not just for members of one religious community."[266] The main idea within the general liberal understanding of neutrality to which Habermas is committed to is that the state should not favour or promote a particular understanding of "the good life" as a way to equally manifest its respect and openness to each citizen.[267]

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[264] Jürgen Habermas, "On The Relation between the Secular Liberal State and Religion" op.cit., 339.
[265] As Andre Edgar argues, Habermas defends the position that access to the public sphere should be open to all, and within the sphere all are treated as equals." Edgar, op. cit., 27.
[266] Jürgen Habermas, "On The Relation" op. cit. p. 332.
[267] Baynes, Op. Cit., 222.

Habermas does not deny Christianity as a relevant influence in the rise of the democratic

state,[268] but he insists that it is only through the philosophical work of translation of Christian

symbols into a language accessible to all individuals (methodological atheism) that democracy can

flourish.[269] Indeed, there is something innovative about Habermas' idea of neutrality. As pointed out

in the last chapter, Habermas believes that secularism turns out to be just another worldview, and

therefore it is not able to foster the type of neutrality that must prevail within the constitutional

democratic state. It is true that Habermas has been sensitive to the "post-secular" reality within

society in which it becomes more and more clear that religion will not go away.[270] Yet as far as the

state structure goes the German philosopher has not given up the idea of a secular worldview.[271]

According to Habermas, despite the fact religion contributes to provide values and forms of

life to modern citizens it does not necessitate the democratic state's dependency on religion or

particular traditions. Rather, the influence of religion in modern life testifies precisely to the self-

sufficiency[272] of the constitutional democratic state insofar as the religious symbols require

translation guided by philosophy in order to become suitable to integrate public debate.[273] From this

perspective, the real source of the social democratic state is the very public sphere based on nothing

but better arguments.[274] Habermas believes that the constitutional state is able to renew its own

sources from the argumentative action of its individuals. The public sphere guided by neutral,

rational discourse is the only means of mediating the pluralistic and multicultural state. From

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[268] Jürgen Habermas, "On The Relation" from Mendieta, op. cit. p 343.

[269] Ibid. 334.

[270] Habermas, "Notes on the post-secular..." op. Cit.

[271] Cooke, A Secular State. Op. Cit.

[272] By Self-sufficiency I mean that according to Habermas the Constitutional Democratic state is not dependent upon the truth value of Christianity. Moreover the Constitutional Democratic State is able to renew its semantic sources apart from Christianity

[273] In fact, the self-sufficiency of the public debate points to the role of language in Habermas' philosophy, as I will explain later. It functions as an absolute in Habermas' philosophy.

[274] Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Fortress Press, 2002), 133.

Habermas' perspective, multiculturalism is a practical problem and once he believes neutrality is the way to deal with it he chooses a very peculiar narrative of the process of secularization in order to legitimize his view of neutrality.

Indeed, Habermas presents a peculiar narrative of the process of secularization, affirming it was actually 17th and 18th century philosophy that educated Christianity on "the state power that is neutral between world views."[275] He explains that the neutral state can only be defended by "non-religious and post-metaphysical justification."[276] He takes this perspective as seriously as to suggest that the church must "internalize" the logic of the neutral state as a way to resolve the conflict between its different groups. For him, the development of European Enlightenment has a lot to teach the church,[277] especially fostering "those ideas that must prevail as much in democratic multicultural societies as in relations of acknowledgements… between the peoples and cultures of this world."[278]

In any case, what is remarkable is that Habermas' obstinate desire to defend liberal neutrality results in a fragile version of the process of secularization. Adams has characterized Habermas' narrative of secularization as "mythic." He observes that it is very difficult to understand where Habermas learned the story he tells, in which "religion was superseded by philosophy and art."[279] As Adams explains, the fact that Habermas describes modernity as essentially post-Christian is also related to his poor understanding of theology. [280] Habermas' use of Christianity seems to overlook the

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[275] Habermas "On the Relation between…" op. cit, 340.

[276] Ibid.,

[277] Many Christian theologians have accepted Habermas' challenge and have attempted to articulate a theology within the boundaries of his philosophy in response. For instance, Gary Simpson explores how the latest development regarding Habermas' critical theory and argumentative action can provide alternatives to the church regarding the way to understand missions in a multicultural society. Simpson expresses confidence that Habermas' philosophy is crucial to the contemporary church, not only for missions, but also for ecclesial politics. He writes, "I offer the communicative turn of critical social theory as a formidable companion for installing prophetic imagination in missional congregations" Simpson, op. cit., 141.

[278] Ibid., 300.

[279] In my chapter one I suggested that Habermas' debt to Marx has a lot to do with his narrative of secularization

[280] Adams, Op. Cit., 107. John Milbank also highlights Habermas' precarious understanding of theology. Milbank even noticed that the average type of theologians Habermas is willing to engage in dialogue – from

fact that, without affirming such religious practices and values Habermas wants to borrow, they could simple get lost in translations.[281] Now, I will analyse Habermas' and Gadamer's debate regarding tradition and prejudice.

Habermas vs Gadamer: Prejudice and Tradition

It is important to avoid oversimplifications regarding Habermas' notion of neutrality. Even though Habermas is generally in agreement with Rawls' 'proviso', there are many elements in Habermas' philosophy that suggest he is aware of a more nuanced understanding of the role of the interpreter in a dialogue that conflicts with a purified idea of neutrality. As I pointed out already, Habermas' intellectual relationship with the Frankfurt School gives him a strong critical attitude of modern scientism, particularly in regards to sociological methodology.[282] Another aspect that cannot be dismissed is Habermas' interest in the hermeneutic tradition, especially his interaction with Gadamer. As a philosopher whose major project necessarily relates to the role of language and communication, Habermas is a major force in the "linguistic turn" and has interacted with thinkers who strongly contest the liberal ideal of neutrality.[283] Habermas has assimilated aspects of hermeneutical thinking in his notion of communication action.[284]

Habermas has agreed with Gadamer's challenges to objectivism regarding interpretation. For instance, with regards to Gadamer's notion of "effective history" Habermas has observed that "meaning is an aggregate of the meanings that are continuously sedimented as the result of new

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liberation and political theology – already denote this fact. Both Milbank and Adams make it clear that Habermas is simply not aware of Trinitarian theology. That indicates what Habermas perceives as Christianity might not harmonize with Christian Orthodoxy. I will touch this point nets chapter.

[281] I will deal precisely with this aspect in greater detail in the next chapter.

[282] To be sure, Habermas' major disagreement with Marx had to do with Marx's scientism within the idea of historical materialism. Bohman, James. "Habermas, Marxism and Social Theory: The Case for Pluralism in Critical Theory" in: Peter Dews, *Habermas: A Critical Reader* (Wiley, 1999), 62.

[283] Jacques Derrida and Gadamer are the most influential among them.

[284] Holub explains that, though Habermas' use of the term hermeneutics is his early essays is rather imprecise, it could be said that his use of hermeneutics as a critical tool against positivism is what differentiates him from Adorno. It is only latter on that Habermas finds out the role of hermeneutics in his communicative theory, when dialoguing with Gadamer. See Holub, op. cit., 49- 77.

retrospective viewpoints."[285] Habermas has also agreed with some aspects of Gadamer's notion of the hermeneutical circle. He has reinforced the idea that the "anticipation of meaning," which is so fundamental for human understanding, is not simply an "act of subjectivity" but points to a common and dynamic connection with tradition.[286] Yet there are some elements of Gadamer's philosophy that Habermas has strongly refuted, namely, the notion that one can never escape tradition and the universality of hermeneutics.

  Habermas sees Gadamer's theory as problematic insofar as it perpetuates the supremacy of tradition over rational argument.[287] Gadamer's view of tradition collapses within Habermas' notion of Enlightenment, in which the idea of public reason is only conceivable when a community thinks apart from the dogmatic shackles of tradition.[288] Moreover, it is rather difficult to harmonize Habermas' "ideal speech situation" with Gadamer's notion of prejudice. Habermas' fear of tradition leads him to read Gadamer's philosophy as if it suggesting that dialogue would be no longer guided by the power of the best argument, but instead defined by the inevitable presence of tradition is refuted by Habermas' very notion of public reason.

Gadamer, in his turn, has challenged the Enlightenment pursuit of public rationality apart from tradition as a modern myth. He develops Heidegger's notion that understanding is ontological—in the sense that humans only experience reality through understanding[289]--into a "theoretical attitude towards the practice of interpretation."[290] His project calls for the abandonment of the primacy of

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[285] Habermas in: Simpson, Op.cit., 84.
[286] Ibid., 85.
[287] Adams, op. Cit., 64.
[288] See chapter one above.
[289] As Gadamer writes, "Interpretation is not an occasional, *post factum* supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method,* rev. Ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 307.
[290] Gadamer in: Johnson, Patricia Altenbernd. *On Gadamer* (Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000), 14-5.

self-consciousness in favour of a re-examination of the notions of tradition and prejudice.[291] By

studying the fore-structure of understanding, Gadamer realizes that tradition and prejudices are an

essential element in the experience of understanding. He argues for a notion of hermeneutic

universality.[292] Gadamer notices that the Enlightenment attitude against tradition "undertake[s]

historical research" while inflating its confidence in the motto, "we can know better."[293] He classifies

the Enlightenment's position that every prejudice should be overcome as a prejudice itself.[294] He

aims to rehabilitate the concept of prejudice by pointing out the Enlightenment's mistake to treat

tradition with the same critique it has to authority. In this sense, the Enlightenment saw tradition as a

power that oppressed individual rationality. By contrast, Gadamer insists that tradition can never be

separated from human experience of understanding.[295]

　　　Habermas is not particularly challenged by the notion of historical dynamism of

understanding and the role that tradition plays in this process. As Adams has observed, Habermas'

understanding of 'reflection'[296] implies a constant reassessment and transformation of the traditional

norms in the sense that the questioning itself becomes part of the meaning of tradition.[297] Overall,

Habermas believes that it is this process of 'reflection' that causes societies' transition from

traditional to post-traditional stage, in which tradition loses its authoritative role in the notion of

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[291] Ibid., 15.

[292] Holub, op. Cit., 67.

[293] Gadamer., Op. Cit., 272.

[294] Gadamar op. cit., 277.

[295] It has been observed that Gadamer's critique is unfair insofar as it is directed to a caricaturized version of Enlightenment. Habermas, for instance, argues that Gadamer does not understand the Enlightenment in a dialectical fashion. The implication here is that Gadamer would be criticizing a version of the Enlightenment that has long being rejected even by those who currently claim to be in favour of Enlightenment. (see Simpson, op. Cit.) In addition, some also point out the role religion played--and for that matter tradition itself--in the development of Enlightenment. In this context one could point out Enlightenment's figures that used the authority of scriptures to advance their philosophical project. Whatever might be the case, what is fundamental in Gadamer's critique is not that Enlightenment did not need tradition, but the fact Enlightenment was oblivious to the presence of its own traditions and prejudices. That has to do with the Enlightenment's obsession with universal a-historical rationality.

[296] Reflection here is a technical term in German Philosophy. "It means a the process of becoming conscious of something that previously one did or thought unconsciously." Adams, op. Cit., 51.

[297] Adams, op. Cit., 64.

knowledge.[298] However, what really troubles Habermas within Gadamer's notion of tradition is how it conflicts with the "power of reflection" itself. Habermas is able to track with Gadamer's philosophy for a while, but when tradition is seen as displaying an ontological presence in human experience, Habermas is in strong disagreement; for he believes that "authority and knowledge do not converge."[299] Gadamer, in his turn, is aware of the abuses of traditions, yet he understands that one needs tradition even to criticize tradition. What is really at issue between Habermas and Gadamer is the relationship between of human rationality and tradition. For Gadamer, tradition is where the past and present of a people stand, and therefore reason unfolds within a particular tradition. Habermas, on the other hand, sees reason as an emancipatory force that frees human consciousness from the authority of tradition. Habermas wants to conceive of an agent of reflection as someone able to place him or herself within a certain distance from tradition as a methodology to question tradition itself. As he puts it, reflection "requires a system of reference that transcends the context of tradition as such."[300] Adams clarifies that Habermas "insists that reason's absoluteness produces a 'distance' from tradition."[301] For this very reason, the goal of Habermas' project has been to purify public sphere of "non-rational or irrational appeals" of tradition, so communally represented by religious statements.[302]

It is worth noticing that Habermas' late interest in religion is accompanied by an increasing awareness of the crucial role religion plays in furnishing the semantic material that drives social life. To be sure, Habermas has challenged the secular mindset to display an "awareness of what is

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[298] See chapter 2 above.

[299] Simpson, op. Cit., 87.

[300] Habermas, Jürgen. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), 170.

[301] Adams, op.cit., p. 57.

[302] Eduardo Mendieta, "Spiritual Politics and Post-Secular Authenticity: Foucault and Habermas on Post-Metaphysical Religion." *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2012), 309.

missing" as a strategy to overcome the exhaustion of secularism.[303] Once more, Habermas'

willingness to make room for religion stumbles over the obstacles of his own theory. Habermas

knows that moral discourse is always tied to a particular tradition, and therefore the most obvious

problems with contemporary democracy are related to accounting for the way particular and

divergent traditions are to be negotiated in the public sphere.[304] As noted above, Habermas' idea of

the neutral public sphere is an attempt to solve the problem of the multitude of voices that coexist in a

system demanding cooperative deliberation. Habermas wants to welcome these voices into the public

sphere. Yet, from Gadamer's perspective, Habermas seems to prevent the traditions that make these

voices intelligible from entering the sacred realm of public sphere. Habermas does this because he

understands it is in these traditions that resides the nonrational or irrational appeals from which he so

eagerly wants to "salvage" the public sphere. However, if philosophical hermeneutics serves as a

better way to describe human understanding, then Habermas' idea of the public sphere as a space

where tradition is prevented from entering is not only detrimental to the very idea of dialogue, but

also impossible to realize.

Gadamer's notion of the inescapability of tradition exposes neutral dialogue to be a liberal

democratic myth, and calls for a hermeneutical engagement with the traditions in which moral

discourse finds its own intelligibility. Habermas himself demands an ethical engagement of the

individuals involved in democratic deliberative process, i.e. ideal speech situation.[305] This is to say

that his very notion of the neutral public sphere cannot do without a particular philosophical and

religious tradition. In any case, Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy challenges Habermas' idea of the

public sphere because true dialogue never occurs in a vacuum. This is because one cannot eliminate

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[303] Habermas, op. cit., 19.
[304] Adams., op. cit., 49.
[305] Lee, op. cit. 20-25.

his or her own concepts while interpreting. "Interpreting," explains Gadamer, "means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us."[306]

While Habermas is aware of Gadamer's critique of neutrality, Habermas defaults to the Enlightenment's notion of neutrality in his conception of public dialogue. It is this notion of neutrality that motivates his obsession with the value of equality in the public sphere. In this scenario, Habermas sees the identity-split as a problem because it reveals an uneven cognitive burden among the citizens. Overall, the identity-split refers to an inability of the liberal system to *equally* welcome all worldviews into the public sphere. Habermas wants a symmetrical balance of parties involved in the dialogue, even if at a high cost. As we have explored above, as far as Habermas' solution goes, he demands an artificial equalization: allowing religious citizens to speak freely and requiring non-religious to overcome their prejudices against religion.[307]

The Authority of Habermas

The interactions between Habermas and Gadamer are blurred by the different emphases of their respective projects. At times, the two thinkers seem speak past each other.[308] Even thought Habermas and Gadamer are both interested in the role that authority and tradition play in language indicates that, although the authors face similar themes, they tend to arrive at rather conflicting results. As I argued in the first chapter, Habermas has a particular interest in developing Marxian themes. For this reason, Habermas' analysis of language accommodates and develops Marx's critique of ideology and

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[306] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Op.cit., 358.

[307] Here one can see that Habermas' perspective is close to Rawls' obsession with value equality in the sense of "fairness." Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* is a good example of trying to build a social order upon the value of "fairness". Rawls' interest in social fairness leads him to justify the state intervention to make sure individuals would have equal opportunities, even if that implies a restriction of the freedom of other individuals. In Rawls' case, value equality becomes more primary than other values in the classical liberal tradition, e.g., freedom and property. Rawls even defends state intervention to balance the original positions between different economic classes.

[308] See Bernstein, Richard J. "The Constellation of Hermeneutics, Critical Theory, and Deconstruction" in Dostal, Robert J., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
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the search for emancipation. Viewed from Habermas' Marxist agenda, Gadamer's approach to

language dismisses the fact that "language is also a medium of domination and social power,"[309]

Habermas perceives Gadamer's understanding of language as a pure system of exchange, and for that

reason, oblivious to the role ideology plays in language itself. Habermas' Marxist agenda wants to

create room for a critical dimension in hermeneutics that would allow one to distance himself or

herself from language, thereby creating possibilities for rejecting what has been handed down--

tradition.[310] Habermas is aware that creating distance from tradition is a complex task. Yet he

believes that the critique of ideology has a pre-linguistic nature, and thus Gadamer's claim of

hermeneutic universality is not sound.[311]

In response, Gadamer argues that Habermas misunderstands the conditions of reflection.

Authority, Gadamer explains, does not necessarily imply coerced obedience. Rather, tradition has to

do with "dogmatic recognition"—that is, "superiority in knowledge and insight to the authority," a

belief that authority is right.[312] In other words, nobody can find an independent ground to criticize

authority. This is too obvious for Habermas to dismiss. Habermas' democratic revolution is

necessarily related to the idea of world citizenship that claims pluralism is not only a given condition

but also a value to be pursued. His challenge to monolithic societies automatically ascribes authority

to pluralism as a vision of the 'good society.' The endemic contradiction in Habermas' theory is to

affirm that a neutral space implies that "anyone or no-one belongs there."[313] That is to say, according

to Habermas' own standards, his normative theory regarding the procedures of public debate should

be seen as "just another voice" in a pluralistic society. Of course, when it comes to the procedures of

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[309] Habermas in Holub op. Cit., 67.
[310] Holub, op. Cit., 66.
[311] Feaser, op. Cit., 367.
[312] Gadamer in: Warnke, Georgia. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987)
[313] Adams, op. Cit. 245.

argumentation, Habermas is rather "dogmatic." From Gadamer's point of view, this is absolutely normal, and this is why Habermas should retreat from envisioning neutrality as an "answer" to plurality. Habermas, like everyone, experiences being within tradition, and he is not able to theorise without ascribing superiority to knowledge or insight to a certain authority.

Habermas' fear of authority becomes clearer when it comes to the legitimacy of state coercion. His proceduralist approach still affirms that legitimacy occurs when individuals subscribe to the laws they approve.[314] Habermas sees the role of public argumentation as crucial for resolving such an equation, since laws are the result of rational debate. State coercion is guided by the law, which is "the medium through which communicative power is translated into administrative power."[315] One might wonder how that works within deliberative democracy, since the power of the "publics," i.e. the informal public sphere, are seen as having more input in the democratic process. In this context, one must take into consideration the minorities (such as minorities that choose the path of the ethical life as their identity) who are not willing to conform to such democratic deliberative process. It is difficult to imagine that such groups would agree with every coercion imposed upon them—abortion or gay marriage, to name a few. In Habermas' terms, such groups are fundamentalist because they do not see their voice as one amongst others, and therefore are not prepared for rational debate. Yet, in the eyes of these groups, Habermas may well be the fundamentalist one; for he is imposing a particular life form upon all citizens—that is, an imposition of the political-ethical distinction.[316] I will get back to this element in the next chapter. For now, I want to highlight that, in practical ways, Habermas should be seen as authoritative when it comes to his own theory.

Gadamer's notion of tradition reveals that there is indeed authority ascribed to particular traditions in every state decision. Contrary to the liberal mantra of neutrality, the system itself would

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[314] Habermas, "Religion in the Public…" op. cit. p. 5
[315] Habermas in Fraser, op. Cit., 377.
[316] Thomassen, op. Cit., 75.

not do without favouring certain ways of life. This is what keeps the values that guide one's society

in check.[317] Such closeness with the narrative that informs the language of rights is necessary to

maintain the intelligibility and the boundaries of "rights."[318] It is true that Gadamer's ontological

hermeneutics faces some difficulties,[319] but when it comes to the idea of possible public dialogue, I

think it substantially compels the parties engaged in conversations to be aware of the narratives that

illuminate each voices. Religion, as Habermas is certainly aware of, is at the core of these traditions.

I shall now explore the deficiencies of Habermas' understanding of religion.

iii - Habermas And Religion

Habermas' awareness of "post-secular" reality, as well as his attempt to make more room for

religion in his idea of public sphere, follows a recent movement within contemporary philosophy that

many have called the return to religion.[320] This return points to the exhaustion of secular rationality in

the West. [321] As Habermas himself has realized, the complete exclusion of religion could "dry up" the

sources of motivation for society.[322] He sees the "blinkered Enlightenment" that refuses to recognize

any rational content to religion as a dangerous situation for society as a whole.[323] This is because he

is aware that religion furnishes society with the semantic meanings that the secular enterprise is not

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[317] see Benedict. Op. Cit.

[318] Williams, Rowan "Beyond Liberalism," *Political Theology* 3.1 (2001), 64-73.

[319] For instance, some may argue Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics leads to an ontological conservatism. (see Warnke, op. cit, 137) Some have also said Gadamer does not provide enough room for metaphysical inquiry. (See Zimmernann, Jens. *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World*. IVP Academic, 2012. p. 162)

[320] Interestingly enough, the young Habermas, who embraced the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, would certainly hesitate to affirm the importance of religion for the formation of social ethics. Ironically, the crisis caused by the limitations of modern positivism – one of the main targets of the violent critique of Frankfurt School against modern rationalism – forced Habermas to revisit the meta-legal sources of the constitutional state, which includes religion.

[321] See Zimmermann, *Incarnational Humanism*, op. cit. p. 43.

[322] Habermas, Op. Cit., 102.

[323] Habermas., "a Awareness...," op. cit., 18.

able to produce on its own. In this context, Habermas' "institutional proviso" is ultimately an attempt to make room for religious citizens in the life of the society. It reflects his sensitivity to the reality that a vast, secularized world religion is here to stay.[324] However, it could be said that Habermas' attempt to move towards the "post-secular" has been blocked by the limitations of his own understanding of religion.

New Paradigm, Old Tools

While welcoming Habermas' return to religion, Michele Dillon has argued that the German philosopher's move towards the "post-secular" displays a rather modern understanding of religion.[325] Dillon contests Habermas' treatment of religion as a "monolithic" phenomenon.[326] Accordingly, Habermas tends to strongly associate religion with "emotion and tradition," as well as presuming that religious discourse escapes the scope of rational validation.[327] Overall, Dillon explains that Habermas' idea of the "post-secular" is caused by and requires "a change of conscience of the relevance of religion."[328] Yet Habermas' idea of the "post-secular" is confusing, at times, especially because he has not been arguing for new ways to understand religion. From this perspective, one should be suspicious of Habermas "institutional proviso." Habermas has not elaborated enough on how the freedom to speak religiously in the public sphere would be translated into meaningful interactions between religious and non-religious citizens. To be sure, beyond requiring non-religious citizen to engage with religious ideas, Habermas has not significantly challenged the "communicative competence" of the secular citizen.[329] In other words, while Habermas wants to welcome religion, he does not challenge the modern paradigm according to which rationality is seen as something

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[324] See Habermas, "Notes on post-Secular Society," op. Cit., 28.
[325] Michele Dillon, "Jürgen Habermas and the Post-Secular Appropriation of Religion: A Sociological Critique," *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2012), 249-79.
[326] Ibid., 252.
[327] Ibid., 251.
[328] Ibid., 258.
[329] Ibid., 259.

separated from religion. Overall, the realm of critical thinking is still perceived as the secular--non-religious.

Dillon's concern echoes a broader problem that has united different philosophical traditions against the precariousness of the modern definition of religion.[330] For many, Habermas' understanding of religion follows this precarious modern categorization of religion. Surely, as noted above, Habermas' understanding of the relationship between reason and faith has not drastically changed. Habermas insists that faith is outside of the realm of rationality, and he still generally thinks of religion as a separate pool over against the secular.[331] Habermas' idea of post-metaphysical philosophy tends to place religion outside of the realm of rationality, and it exemplifies his tendency to compartmentalize religion.[332] He holds a strong belief that "under the conditions of post-metaphysical thinking, whoever puts forth a truth claim today must nevertheless translate experiences that have their home in religious discourse into the language of scientific expert culture – and from this language translate them back into praxis."[333] Overall, Habermas advocates the utility of religion, but beyond doubt he has not completely abandoned the idea that what is good in religion is essentially philosophical. He "defends" a Hegelian view that major "world religions belong to the history of reason itself."[334] This suggests that what is rationally plausible in religion will integrate the sacred realm of rational thought, because philosophy is the guardian of reason.

Moreover, Habermas follows the modern tendency to focus on the cognitivist aspect of religion, i.e. its ideas and ethical knowledge, and how they differ from the secular mindset.[335] This

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[330] Radical Orthodoxy, Communitarianism, Narrative ethics and neo-Calvinism are a few of the philosophical traditions that have engaged in refuting the modern idea of religion.

[331] See this discussion in Chapter 2.

[332] Reader, Op. Cit., p. 41.

[333] Zimmermann, Op. Cit., 43.

[334] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* op. Cit.,

[335] Dillon, op. cit., 260.

reflects a rather "disembodied" understanding of religion,[336] which does not do justice to the material

forms that religion takes, e.g. political, sociological, psychological, etc.[337] This cognitive criterion

also seems to dictate Habermas' categorization of "religious citizens" and "secular citizens." Such

categories reflect a polarized take on religion that has very little to do with the way religions exist in

the world. When it comes to the practical life of individuals, it becomes rather difficult to know what

these categories even mean for citizens do not necessarily think of themselves in these terms.[338]

Arguably, believing and not believing are not better understood as competing positions in cognitive

terms, but different ways to *be* in the world.[339] In addition, such categories also seem to ignore long

traditions of religious thinking, whereas Habermas insists on speaking of them in terms of "religious

communities" in a rather separatist fashion.[340] It continues to foster individuals who engage

politically and intellectually in civil society.[341] Finally, Habermas' understanding of "religion" is not

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[336] Smith explains that modernity tends to project over religion its obsession with mind and souls. For that reason modernity thinks of religion in terms of beliefs and values and tends to disregard the embodiment religions take in practical life. James K.A. Smith, ed. "Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for "Post-secular" Sociology of Religion," *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2012), 160.

[337] I believe it is not necessarily a problem to propose a definition of religion in cognitive terms. In fact, many from the epistemological tradition would argue there are enough elements to challenge the modern understanding of religion even in the cognitive sense. The problem seems to be the cognitive reductionism of such analysis; for one cannot ignore how intertwined all aspects of life are to religion. For that reason, other analyses are just as possible, e.g. anthropological, sociological, psychological, etc. Yet, as Eliade has contended against the modern reductionist approach, trying "to grasp the essence of [religious] phenomena by means of physiology, sociology, economics, linguistic, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it—the element of the sacred." That is to say, understanding what is perceived as sacred and then analysing how the idea of sacred plays in relation to every aspect of life is the valid methodological path to understand each religion. As Eliade explains, "there is no pure religious phenomenon." (Eliade, Mircea . *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (U of Nebraska Press, 1996), xvii.

[338] Another example that renders the categories "religious citizens" and "secular citizens" fictitious is the most recent manifestation of religious experience in the West, according to which individuals expressively reject the role of religion while embracing a vague concept of spirituality, i.e. the "not religious but spiritual" citizens." See Dillon, op. cit., 267.

[339]Ferrara observes that such a possibility derives from Taylor's third meaning of the "secular" as a world in which believing has been tested from within. See Ferrara, op. cit., 77-91.

[340] Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society" op. cit., 18.

[341] This is an element observed in the very fabric of Christian faith, since it was engaging with other worldviews, as well as heretical teaching from which the church fathers refined Christian theology. For a explanation of the role of heresy and polemics in patristic theological development, see Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. 2nd edition (New York:

able to properly qualify different religious groups and the degrees to which their "fundamentalism"

affects or threatens liberal systems in the West.[342] To be sure, Habermas has categorized as

"fundamentalists" both radical Muslims and Pentecostals, without articulating further differentiation

between the two groups. This downplays in a rather unrealistic fashion the violence radical Muslims

are capable of producing.[343]

In sum, it is fair to say that Habermas' return to religion represent recognition on behalf of the

secular perspective regarding the limitations of secularism. Yet Habermas does not provide enough

material to read him as demanding a substantial integration of religious discourse in the realm of

rational public debate, nor calling for a more nuanced definition of religion. Even though he is aware

of the shortcomings of secularism and more knowledgeable of the relevance of religion in

contemporary society, Habermas' idea of religion is a stumbling block to a consistent conception of

"post-secular" reality. Overall, the notion of "post-secular" society requires a "post-secular" notion

of religion.[344]

HarperOne, 2010). The same has happened across centuries, and it is still a reality with regards to many new questions that the church has to face (abortion, same sex marriage, assisted suicide, etc.).

[342] Habermas writes, "Pentecostal and the Radical Muslims, can be most readily described as 'fundamentalists.' They either combat the modern world or withdraw from it in isolation" (Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society" op. cit., 18.

[343] It is rather questionable to group Pentecostals and radical Muslims under the same lable "fundamentalists." There is enough evidence within the Christian theological tradition to regard seven-day creationists—to name one among many Christian fundamentalist claims—problematic. Overall, seven-day creationism is an odd scientific reading of Scriptures caused by a modern understanding of inerrancy. Strangely enough, many fundamentalists read Scripture with the tools of modernity as a way of countering modern scientism. Yet seven-day creationist fundamentalists are willing to do nothing violent beyond declaring heretical those who do not follow their beliefs. This is not comparable to what radical Muslims, as recent experience displays, are willing to do with those they consider heretical. Of course a philosopher of the caliber of Habermas is able to make such a distinction. For that reason, Habermas' categorization is better understood in light of the secular agenda, i.e. diminishing the status of religions that do not conform to the "secular" as a whole. Accordingly, to say radical Muslims and Pentecostals are equally "fundamentalist" is a logical fallacy to attribute religion as a phenomenon of the same nature of the radical Muslim.

[344] Smith, op. cit., 161.

What is so Modern about Religion?

I have argued that Habermas' idea of the "post-secular" defaults to the endemic limitation of the modern understanding of "religion." Recent historical analysis of the term "religion" has led some to conclude that there is something unique to the way modernity defines "religion." Accordingly, one could say "religion" as category refers to a modern creation. Brent Nongbri has argued that the modern notion of religion—something "isolated" from politics, economics and science—is far from being a "universal feature" in human history.[345] He explains that "religion" as modernity defined it was conveniently paired with the modern invention of the secular.[346] While the modern idea of the "secular" refers to the realm of what is not religious, the pre-modern mind did not think of "religion" as a separate realm since the worship of God used to relate to every single aspect of life. Of course, Nongbri is not denying the obvious reality that the phenomenon of religion was present in the pre-modern world.[347] Yet he explains that "religion" as a marginalized pool of private faith and belief cut off from politics and other spheres of life was in itself a modern political act to support the liberal order.[348] This suggests that the modern idea of "religion" brings in itself a political agenda of restricting faith to private realm of life as a way to foster the primacy of the citizens' allegiance to the State.[349] The liberal fingerprints on the origins of a-political "religion" have

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[345] Nongbri, Brent. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2.

[346] Nongbri does not claim innovation with his research, as he even points to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* as a landmark in the field. The contribution of his work is the compilation of vast research on the topic in one volume. Ibid., 3.

[347] Nongbri presents a problem concerning ancient terms that tend to be identified as "religion" in modern translations. He contends that there is a modern anachronistic imposition of the term "religion" in the translation of ancient texts. See Nongbri, "Lost In Translation" in: Ibid., p. 26-46.

[348] Ibid., 102.

[349] This is very much related to "religious wars" and the liberal solution of privatized faith to unite civil society around a pacifying political goal. Hauerwas comments that the Liberal agenda of privatizing the faith "to get individuals, who are necessarily in conflict with one another, to enter into a cooperative arrangement for their mutual self-interest." Hauerwas, Op. cit., 78.

arguably influenced the post-reformation groups to reinterpret pre-modern theologies with the anachronistic idea that God is not interested in the political realm.[350]

John Milbank, one of the leading voices of Radical Orthodoxy, seems to agree with Nonbgri's thesis in a different way. Milbank argues that since theology pervaded every single aspect of the pre-modern mind, the very idea of the secular was created to accommodate 'the political' apart from theology.[351] Milbank is also pointing that once in human experience there was no "religion"; for religion was everywhere.[352] Yet Milbank challenges more specifically the idea of the "secular" as a realm of human experience sealed off against religion. Milbank also targets modern social theories, which he contends, "are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise"[353] To question the "secular" as the realm hermetically sealed from religion and theology is to question the very definition of religion.

Identifying religion as modernity does it did not exist in the pre-modern world should not lead one to a nostalgic return to the pre-modern philosophical paradise, nor to a radical discard of the category all together.[354] Giving up the category "religion" would not do justice to the trajectory of the term within Western thought. Yet understanding that the human religious experience surpasses the modern categorization of the phenomenon should motivate one to ask different questions from the

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[350] For an interesting explanation of a liberal interpretation of New Testament that produces a "gospel according to Locke," see Lugo, Luis E. "Caesar's Coin and the Politics of the Kingdom: A Pluralist Perspective" by in: Michael Cromartie, *Caesar's Coin Revisited: Christians and the Limits of Government.* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 2.

[351] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

[352] The fact the modern notion of religion collapses with the pre-modern way of understanding religion can be observed in Gibbon's approach to Roman persecution of Christians in the first centuries. Gibbon sees persecution as merely political because his modern lenses cannot conceive politics and religion so intertwined as it was for the Greek Roman World. See Leithart, Peter J. *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (IVP Academic, 2010), 25. The great merit of Leithart's critique is that it clarifies that the post-Enlightenment approach tends to overlook the fact that the Romans "did not conceive of an irreligious politics or a apolitical religion." (Ibid)

[353] Milbank, op. Cit., 3.

[354] Habermas has a point when he observes that a deep questioning of the tradition can become part of such the tradition itself.

ones modernity has been asking regarding the role of "religion" in society.[355] In other words, what

one has to do is not simply reject the "secular," but engage with the term in ways that will lead to a

transformation of the way the "secular" becomes aware of its religiosity.[356] It is necessary to

challenge the concept of religion through new lenses that will enable one to sense religion where the

modern tools tend to dismiss it.[357]

James K. A. Smith, for instance, has proposed a liturgical definition of the term according to

which "religion" refers to the way individuals and communities engage in the act of *worship*.[358]

Smith's anthropological proposition of the term challenges the modern definition of religion, even if

one wants to believe secularization has been experienced in its fullness. This is because, as he argues,

the secular world does not do without liturgies. In this sense, one can talk of secular liturgies and

therefore secular *religion*.[359] Smith's liturgical definition of religion focuses on the pre-cognitivist

development of faith—the practices that could eventually be translated into doctrine or not—and the

embodiment of concepts perceived in the ways of life.[360] By taking the "hermeneutical-turn"

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[355] Nonbgri asks, "Can we see anything new and interesting about phenomenon X by considering it, for the purpose of study, as religion?" Ibid., 155.

[356] Adams paraphrases Karl Marx's famous challenge to the philosopher when making a similar point. He says, "The Theologians have only refuted the secular, in various ways: the point is to change it" I read him as someone referring to the tendency of theologians who see a modern understanding of the secular as precarious, yet displaying very little effort to engage with a better definition of the term secular. Adams, op. cit., 251.

[357] Smith, op. Cit., 161.

[358] I believe such definition is particularly relevant for countering sociological surveys regarding religious demographics and behaviour that take into consideration a cognitivist definition of "religion." Accordingly, sociological surveys regarding the divorce rate that define Christians as those who express a nominal association with beliefs and doctrine but are very secularized in their *liturgies* would present a rather different result from the surveys that define Christians as those who practice Christian liturgies in their way of life. (I am thankful to my friend Joshua Lee Harris—Doctorate candidate at Institute for Christian Studies--for helping me to understand the implications of such anthropological definition of religion)

[359] Ibid., 162.

[360] I read the French historian Mircea Eliade as corroborating Smith's anthropological definition of religion as fundamentally liturgical. Eliade argues that although the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world are not formulated through theoretical language, it is possible to observe a defined body of metaphysical assertions present in ancient social life. He writes, "the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them, a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that can be regarded as constituting metaphysics" Accordingly, although the technical terminology of metaphysics is not present in the lives of the ancients, their everyday practices indicate the existence of a "metaphysical position," or theories of being that aim to explain why is there something rather

seriously, Smith attempts to show that distinguishing the "religious" from the "secular" by means of recognizing doctrines concerning gods or transcendence is a mistake.[361]

Nongbri, Milbank and Smith, are few among many who help to signal that a rethinking of the concept of "religion" is essential for a fruitful transition to the "post-secular." Following different theoretical paths, they are stretching the term "religion" beyond the modern cognitivist model and its agenda of unbiased neutrality. Ironically, "religion" as a term that refers to the a-political realm is in itself a strategic, political concept. I am in agreement with these voices that conceiving a "post-secular" or "post-liberal" definition of religion will fruitfully illuminate a variety of fields, particularly philosophy of religion and political philosophy, giving these fields semantic potential to make sense of the way religious practices are intertwined with every aspect of life. Political philosophers should closely track such a semantic stretching of the term "religion."

The impossibility of Religious Neutrality

So far in my critique of Habermas' understanding of religion I have presented a problematization of the modern definition of "religion" as the private sphere of faith over against the idea of "secular" as the a-religious space. However, from Habermas' perspective, one could argue that abandoning a cognitivist approach to "religion" would be a shortcut to raising the rational status of religious discourse by avoiding the test of "reflexivity."[362] As noted above, Habermas has a polarized view of religion over against philosophical discourse because he believes religion relies on a type of discourse that is "protected" against rational scrutiny.[363] If one objects that Habermas' current openness to the presence of religion in the public sphere suggests he has raised religion's

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than nothing. Eliade, Mircea *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959), 3. I believe Eliade's lesson can be applied by analogy to what Smith is aiming to do with his concept of religion, namely, using the liturgical practices—symbols, myth and rites—as a way to track down the presence of religion.

[361] Smith, op. Cit., 176.

[362] See chapter 2 above.

[363] Habermas, in: Mendieta, op. Cit., 10.

status concerning its rationality,[364] one must keep in mind that Habermas' willingness to make use of religion symbols is simply concerned with their semantic utility in motivating social goals—not with the intrinsic rationality nor the uniqueness of those symbols. Overall, suspending any judgment regarding the truth claim of religious believers is still an essential part of his idea of "methodological atheism." Habermas insists that, from a cognitivist point of view, *"religion"* is beyond rational scrutiny. Yet, it has been argued that even from a cognitivist point of view the idea of religious neutrality is nothing but a myth. [365]

In *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on The Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories,* Roy A. Clouser has taken up the task of challenging the understanding of theorization as the realm of religious neutrality. His main thesis is that explaining and understanding the world is determined by religious commitments, and for that reason theoretical thinking cannot be perceived as the realm of religious neutrality. Clouser defines "religious" as the beliefs that present an ultimate picture of reality, i.e. as ontologically fundamental.[366]

Clouser acknowledges his debt to Herman Dooyeweerd, a leading voice in the Amsterdam movement of neo-Calvinism. In a way, Clouser's work is advancing the non-conformism to the secular criteria of knowledge proposed by Dooyeweerd.[367] I read Clouser's theory as going a similar route as the "hermeneutical-turn" as advanced by the Amsterdam neo-Calvinist tradition.[368] Yet he is

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[364] For an argument from the perspective that the current rational status Habermas has given to religion is satisfactory, see Mendieta, Eduardo."Spiritual Politics and Post-Secular Authenticity: Foucault and Habermas on Post-Metaphysical Religion." *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2012), 307-35.

[365] It is not my purpose to shift the scope of the present work to an epistemological inquiry. However, a short consideration of such epistemological critique of the myth of religious neutrality helps one to see that even in his own comfort zone—the cognitivist definition of religion—Habermas faces substantial problems.

[366] Clouser, Roy A. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1991), 24.

[367] Dooyeweerd's proposition advocates an "inner reformation of the sciences." Thus he is seen as having anticipated the "post-secular," as Smith clarifies. See James K.A. Smith and John Milbank, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 31-42.

[368] As Straus clarifies, "in his own peculiar way Dooyeweerd also participated in the 'linguistic

developing the ontological aspect of tradition, as well as religion in the process of human understanding in the cognitive realm of theorization. Ascribing to religion a connotation of privacy and non-political activity has pervaded Habermas' understanding of religion and blocked his ability to develop a more robust notion of the post-secular. By contrast, Clouser's work indicates that, even if one wants to insist on a cognitivist definition of religion, one has to be aware that it does not necessarily lead to a conflict between reason and religion.

Without shifting the focus of my critique to epistemological grounds, I believe Clouser's work impacts the present debate because it renders as inconsistent Habermas' understanding of reason and faith—the first the realm of critical thinking and "reflexitivity" and the second the realm of "metaphorical" language.[369] Habermas' very notion of "reflexivity" becomes very fragile in light of Clouser's work. Accordingly, what Habermas sees as the philosophical task—raising critical questions about concepts—must also rely upon certain *religious* presuppositions. As Clouser contends, the act of the justified hypothesis takes something as justification, which in turn relies upon a set of core beliefs that are presumed as justified. To be sure, without such *religious* presuppositions, the very critical questioning of religious symbols that Habermas requires as constitutive of public reasoning lose its intelligibility. From Clouser's perspective, the consequence of the complete denial of such ontological structure of knowledge leads to the reckless post-modern relativism that Habermas himself so eagerly wants to avoid. Ironically, Clouser's work reminds Habermas that recognizing a non-contingent, self-existent belief—essentially beyond "reflexitivity"—is the only way to intelligibly theorize. That is to say, affirming truth in a *secular* fashion is rather problematic.

Turn' and the 'quest for meaning." Strauss, Danie. "Understanding the Linguistic Turn and the Quest for Meaning: Historical Perspectives and Systematic Considerations," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 32.1 (2013), 91-108. In this way, I extend this qualification to Clouser's work.

[369] Habermas, " Transcendence..." in Mendieta, op. Cit., 307-9.

In addition, Clouser's analysis of theorization demands one to revisit what Habermas calls "post-metaphysical" thinking, according to which philosophy should have precedence over theology. Clouser echoes on epistemological grounds what other thinkers have already observed in different fields of philosophy: namely, that even philosophy cannot do without theological and metaphysical presuppositions.

Identity-split and the Post-Secular

I have argued that Habermas' 'institutional proviso' showcases the shortcomings of his understanding of neutrality and religion. Some aspects of his methodology still operate under a rather modern understanding of neutrality and religion. I believe that such notions are incompatible with Habermas' attempt to move towards the "post-secular." Despite his awareness of the hermeneutic turn, when it comes to his "ideal speech situation" Habermas is not willing to give up a neutral vantage point beyond the traditions that are involved in the public sphere. It bothers him to think that his own vantage point is inside a tradition.[370] His understanding of religion also defaults to a polarized understanding of the secular (over against religion). Finally, Habermas' perspective could still dismiss the challenge that "hermeneutic-turn" imposes on his understanding of religion, i.e. as an arbitrary escape from "reflexivity." Yet Clouser's work suggests that even from a more cognitivist definition of religion, one could criticize Habermas' dichotomized understanding of religion and reason. However, one must question how a "post-secular" notion of neutrality and religion informs a solution for the identity split-problem.

The identity-split is not to be understood as a conflict of "religious citizens" against "non-religious citizens" rather a conflict of religions differently favoured by the liberal system. For that matter, the categories of "religious citizens" and "non-religious citizens" should be abandoned for the

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[370] In the next chapter, I will attempt to show how his idea of "solidarity" is hardly intelligible apart from Christianity. This is why he has to make room for the utility of religion while denying any inquiries regarding its truth claims.

sake of understanding what is at stake. The shift to the "post-secular" demands not only a realization that the secularist approach is just another worldview—Habermas rightly affirms this—but also that giving up the idea of neutral vantage point from which one attempts to judge the very conditions for public dialogue. Habermas is right to suppose that the identity-split is a cognitive problem. Yet he misses the point— conveniently so as I shall argue in my final chapter—that it is a *political* problem that generates the cognitive problem. It is the imposition of a particular worldview that determines an *a priori* refutation of religions that do not submit to the ethical-political compartmentalization of discourses under the guise of neutrality. As I have argued, the religious experience is at odds with the liberal worldview that presupposes that the political and the rational are something cut off from the realm of religion. In such conditions, one could never be faithful to his or her Christian faith while participating in the liberal public debate or within the boundaries of *formal* public sphere as defined by Habermas' "institutional proviso."

Finally, the identity-split as understood by Habermas is a strong indication of the inability of his theory to account for the relationship between faith and knowledge. The hope for understanding the problem remains in the possibility of embracing a "post-secular" notion of religion. Such understanding aims to foster a more harmonic relationship between reason and faith. If everyone evolved in the debate operates inevitably on *religious* presuppositions, then a "post-secular" understanding of rational debate should start by questioning the competency of those Habermas calls "non-religious." If establishing a normative notion of public debate is to be a possibility, it necessarily begins by ascribing the authority of knowledge and insight to some tradition. History has shown that the values that have captured the imaginations of those who envision "solidarity" come from a very specific tradition. There are reasons to believe affirming such traditions are essential for

sustaining the kinds of values Habermas wants to affirm. I will explore this point in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HABERMAS' RELIGION AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION IN A POST-METAPHYSICAL WORLD

In the previous chapter I argued in favour of a "post-secular" definition of religion that would be able to take the religious features of the secular mindset into consideration. The task of analysing Habermas' philosophy with respect to *religion* demands alternative ways to account for the hidden religious aspects. Writing In 1950s, the German philosopher Eric Voegelin proposed an insightful analysis of political modernity in light of his notion of *political religion.*[371] Voegelin's analysis has set the stage for fruitful study of the various radical political movements of modernity—Nazism, Fascism, Marxism--in light of their appropriation of Gnostic mythological features in terms of "immanentization".[372] Gottfried has explored such an approach in order to frame neo-Marxism[373] in

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[371] Although Voegelin does not directly coin the term "political religion", the substance of the notion is widely attributed to him. See Gentile, Emilio, *Le religioni della politica, fra democrazie e totalitarismi* (Roma, Laterza, 2001). Voegelin himself avoided the term because of its ambivalence, as he explains in his autobiographical reflections. He writes, *"*I would no longer use the term 'religions' because it is too vague and already deforms the real problem of experiences by mixing them with the further problem of dogma or doctrine." Voegelin, Eric *Autobiographical Reflections*, *CW* 34, 78.

[372] Relating my argument to the last chapter, I take Voegelin's approach as anticipating the "post-secular" insofar as it enables one to see religious ideas in realms that the secular has classified as essentially non-religious. Many have read Voegelin's idea of "political religion" as detrimental to "religion" in the sense that his critique implies an irrationality on the part of some political movements. Contrary to this reading, one has to remember that the main point Voegelin makes with the idea of political religion is that the Gnostic movements are before anything else a result of a distortion in the human soul. For such a misunderstanding with regards to the term "religion" later on, Voegelin avoids the term "political religion."

[373] Gottfried uses the term "post-Marxist left." Although I am in general agreement with Gottfried's analysis, I prefer to avoid this term. Gottfried is right in pointing out that new left does not articulate their political language in terms of dialectical materialism or "economic structuring of bourgeois society." He is also right to observe that the new left lost interest in economic planning. See Gottfried, op. cit. p. 125. Yet, echoing Lind's critique of Gottfried's analysis, I also understand the new left remains Marxist to some extent. (See Lind, William S. "Dead But Not Gone." *The American Conservative*. N.p., 10 Oct. 2005). Moreover, I believe this shift of the new left (cultural Marxism) is a logical consequence of the dialectical movement of the concept orthodox-Marxism in the first place. Voegelin, for example, has observed Marx's historical materialism as a concept "does not exist," due to its internal contradictions and closeness to the metaphysical reality. Voegelin, Eric. *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 1982), 263. Moreover, the economical critique of Marxism from Austrian school scholars suffice to show that as an economical picture of reality, Marxism is simply impossible. See, for instance, Böhm-Bawerk, Eugen. "The Theory of Value and Surplus

terms of a political religion. Accordingly, the philosophical project of cultural Marxists like Habermas could be understood as "parasitic on Judeo-Christian symbols," while simultaneously articulating their own mythology and eschatology.[374] Even though Habermas sees himself as a thinker whose rationality operates outside of the scope of religion, Voegelin's analysis of "Gnostic dream" helps one to see Habermas' political project as a religious one. Insofar as Habermas advocates a particular appropriation of the Judeo-Christian theological heritage, his political project can also be framed in terms of political theology. In this chapter I shall analyse the religious features of Habermas' project. I argue he is willing to use Christianity as long as it advances his idea of liberal democracy while not considering the shortcoming of his idea of "saving" translation and of his goal of post-metaphysical thinking. Overall, Habermas wants Christianity on his own terms while he is not willing to pay the metaphysical costs to have it. He wants a particular type of state but he is not willing to foster the conditions that will maintain such a political system.

In order to accomplish the purpose of this chapter, I will first explore Voegelin's notion of political religion in order to give context for Habermas' use of Christianity and his democratic revolution. Insofar as Habermas' project is framed as a Christian heresy—i.e., Gnosticism—it will be helpful to see in what sense Habermas relies on Christianity. To be sure, Habermas is willing to salvage Christianity while dismissing the inquiry regarding the truth-validity of Christian faith. Given that Habermas desperately needs Christian concepts to advance his project, Habermas must

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Value" in Hilferding, Rudolf, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, and Paul M. Sweezy. *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*. (ed.) Paul M. Sweezy (Institute, 2011), 9-19; and Ludwig von Mises' analysis of *socialist calculation*. See Mises, Von, "The Making of Moder Civilization: Saving, Investiment , and Economic Calculation" in Mises, Ludwig von, Bettina Bien Greaves, and Richard M. Ebeling. *Marxism Unmasked: From Delusion to Destruction*. 1st edition. (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 2006). These ideas within Marx that fail to stand as *concepts* have to be excluded from the actual concept of Marxism in terms of conceptual possibility. That is to say, in a way the new left develops Marxism as a possible concept. The new left is as Marxist as Marx was in the sense that they cling to everything in Marx that can stand the dialectical movement of the concept *Marxism*. For this very reason, the new left has dropped the ideas that are not conceivable or impossible to be embodied. Hence, I believe Gottfried dismisses that from the perspective of the dialectical concept, "Marxism," (especially after 1989) the new left is as Marxist as it possibly can be.

[374] Gottfried, *Strange Death*, op. cit., 119-141.

show the effectiveness of his notion of "saving translation" embodied in his "institutional

translation proviso." If such translation is not possible, Habermas' project fails. For this reason, I

will analyse Habermas' idea of translation. I argue that such translation is not possible since, by

definition, there is an epistemological gap between a metaphysical (religious) and post-

metaphysical thinking (secular citizen). I end the chapter by presenting some problems for

Habermas post-metaphysical thinking, suggesting that Habermas is not willing to pay the

metaphysical costs for advancing his own project.

i)   Habermas' Religion

The notion that the Marxist movement relies upon religious discourse, mimicking the Judeo-

Christian meta-narrative, has been widely documented. Even a Marxist like Habermas is aware that

the very idea of progress that shapes the political goals of both right and left in the West would be

rather impossible apart from the uniqueness of Judeo-Christian heritage.[375] Voegelin was a key

figure in clarifying the connections between Marxism and Christianity. He located the origins of

Marxism and its revolutionary forms in the Christian heresy of Gnosticism. Expanding Voegelin's

analysis, Gottfried suggests that Habermas' project is one amongst others, which are operating

within this sort of political religion.[376] Analysing Habermas' project through the lenses of political

religion is illustrative of the type of relationship that the German philosopher has with Christianity.

Before exploring in what sense Habermas' project is dependent upon the semantics of Christianity,

It is worthwhile to elaborate upon Voegelin's analysis of the "Gnostic Dream" and the reasons

Gottfried includes Habermas' project as one shaped by such a dream.

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[375] Voegelin, op. cit., 118.
[376] Gottfried, op. cit.

Habermas and the "Gnostic Dream"

Voegelin's analysis of the revolutionary drive of political modernity locates the roots of such movements within political modernity in the heretical use they make of Judeo-Christian eschatology.[377] The "gnostic dream" consists in the human attempt to realize the Judeo-Christian eschatological vision of the "new heavens and new earth" within the limits of history. This is what Voegelin calls the complete "immanentization" of the Christian symbol.[378] Voegelin explains that this is a rebellion against the very structure of being, and a refusal to accept the human place in the structure of existence.[379] In Voegelin's analysis, to affirm that such movements are religious has less to do with explaining them by their religious dogmas and doctrines—they certainly have them and use it in their propaganda—than the presence a serious spiritual disorder.[380] The Marxist paradigm of the "end of history" as the "state of perfection" is a classic example of this process of "immanentization." [381] This firm grip that the Gnostic myth creates in its modern version in regards to the "end of history" raises its partakers to the level of "light-bearers" or "cleansed ones," giving them legitimacy to force their understanding of "truth" upon the "reprobate"[382]—i.e., the bourgeoisie, in the case of the Marxist version of the myth. How does Voegelin's theory serve to illuminate Habermas' project?

In the first chapter of this essay I explored Habermas' commitment to Marxism. I argued that even though Habermas has abandoned the scientism of historical materialism as well as the

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[377] Accordingly, without the Judeo-Christian eschatological drive the revolutionary mindset of late modernity is not even conceivable. Judeo-Christian eschatology points to a perfection—new Canaan or paradise—that can only be actualized beyond the limits of historical experience. See Voegelin, op. cit., 107-10. It also relates to the tensions between Christian apocalyptical narrative and its idea of Parousia. See "Gnosticism-The Nature of Modernity" in: Ibid.

[378] Voegelin, op. cit., 124 As he observes elsewhere, "[G]nostic man must carry on the work of salvation himself." Voegelin. *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Lanham MD: Gateway Editions, 1997), 8.

[379] Voegelin, op. cit., 166-8.

[380] Ibid. p. 178. As Michael Franz argues, the Gnostic disorder refers to "a radical dissatisfaction with the human condition and an intense longing for enhanced certainty and power." Franz, Michael "The Concept of Gnosticism and the Analysis of Spiritual Disorder." *First Principles* (Jan. 2008).

[381] Voegelin, op. cit., 121.

[382] Gottfried, op. cit., 132.

economical accents of orthodox-Marxism, Habermas' notion of "radical democracy" of world citizenship is strongly connected to neo-Marxism agenda. For what is still on dispute, Habermas remains a Marxist and expressly associating himself with Marxist goal of emancipation.[383] In this way Habermas' attempt to advance modernity can be explained by the "gnostic dream." It could be said that, though he remains a figure of the left, Habermas is on the "right" relative to Marx. Yet, while he proposes a revolution that is evidently more patient then the one proposed by orthodox-Marxism, Habermas' project shares with orthodox Marxism a similar mechanism with respect to its meta-narrative of redemption. In Habermas' case, however, the "end of history" does not refer to communism, but a globalist democracy that eventually overcomes exclusivist cultural frontiers.[384] Habermas' "Gnostic dream" is one that legitimizes a revolution that takes place within a managerial engagement towards a world democracy.[385]

Voegelin observes that the Gnostic myth tends to recognize a kind of individual who, though not a militant, can still be persuaded. Gottfried clarifies that these are the in-between types—neither the "reprobate" nor the "light-bearer." In the case of Habermas, what he calls the "democratic deficit" refers to this "in-between" type. As Gottfried explains, "defective democrats cannot really engage in conversation with those who think differently; they need conversation-masters to set up the rules for their verbal exchange."[386] Ironically, Habermas' idea of democracy, as well as his

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[383] See chapter one above. Also see Lind, William S. "Dead But Not Gone." *The American Conservative.* n.p. (10 Oct. 2005).

[384] As Fraser clarifies, "Habermas is a citizen of the world; he favours a cosmopolitan democracy constructed in accordance with a theory of universal human rights. That global democracy does not yet exist; it is still in the process of development." Fraser, op. cit., 370.

[385] Andrew Fraser has analysed the connections between the slower pace of Habermas' democratic revolution—relative to Marx's revolution—and the role of the managerial class. As he clarifies, Habermas' "vision of 'radical democracy' can be realized only if those who manage the corporate welfare state recognize and institutionalize within civil society the communicative freedoms essential to the legitimation of administrative and corporate power. Those managerial, professional, and intellectual elites are now the vanguard of the revolution. Habermas has become the Marx of the managerial class." Fraser, op. cit., 365.

[386] Gottfried, op. cit, 132.

advocacy of the emancipation of the citizen, relies on a strong ideological tutelage by those whom Gottfried refers to as "conversation-masters." [387]

Gottfried's effort to demonstrate how Voegelin's theory is still valid to neo-Marxists helps one to approach Habermas in terms of political religion. Gottfried applies Voegelin's notion of "second reality" to neo-Marxists. This "second reality" refers to a self-enclosed condition towards the perception of reality that generates a simplistic moral dualism that gets in the way of serious philosophical commitment to understand political reality.[388] The anti-Nazi engagement and a loose affirmation of the socialist narrative of "good versus evil" is too obvious to be dismissed in Habermas. Indeed, Habermas tends to marginalize conservatives ideas under the label of "antidemocratic" as a way to silence their voice in the mainstream debate.[389] The current use of the label "fundamentalist" in Habermas' vocabulary, as presented in the last chapter above, can be seen as having this silencing effect in groups Habermas is not willing to accept. The same could be observed in Habermas' engagement with the *revision*.[390] As Gottfried clarifies, revisionism has less to do with revisiting the dismissed reality of resistance to the Nazi-regime then with exposing Soviet atrocities to deconstruct "the case for uniquely evil Nazism."[391] Habermas' engagement disregards his own standards of solidarity and mutual learning in the name of a "democratic" re-education of Germany in regards to its totalitarian past. At the end, Habermas seems to be against the very possibility of bringing forth a discussion regarding revisionism. Habermas and the new left have transformed the term "revisionism" into a derogatory title without making distinctions between different types of revisionists.

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[387] These features have led Fraser to expose Habermas' mentorship of the managerial class. Here one could say the actual engagement of Habermas in academia can be seen as representative of the tutelage Gottfried talks about. See Fraser, op. cit., 381.

[388] See Jamieson, T. John. "Eric Voegelin Institute." *The Eric Voegelin Institute.* Eric Voegelin Society Meeting 2009, 2004.

[389] Gottfried, op. cit., 127.

[390] Ibid,102-4l

[391] Ibid, 103.

Gottfried's application of Voegelin's analysis helps one to categorize Habermas' project as a type of Christian heresy. Habermas' project not only relies on Judeo-Christian eschatology but also appropriates key tenets from Judeo-Christian ethics. Yet Habermas' appropriation of Christian values is selective, as every heretical appropriation tends to be. To be sure, in many cases Habermas' usage of Christianity has very little to do with orthodox Christianity's understanding of these values. Habermas shapes the Judeo-Christian theological heritage into a political project of his own liking.

Habermas' Christianity

Habermas advocates an appropriation of Christianity, or at least the Christian scriptures, as long as they advance liberal democracy.[392] In this sense, he is aware of the uniqueness of Christian tradition in providing the semantic content of liberal democracy. In a telling interview with Mendieta, Habermas goes as far as stating the following:

> For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. 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.[393]

Habermas believes Christianity paved the way for liberal democracy. He understands that values such as "universalistic egalitarianism," "freedom," "solidarity" and "emancipation"—values that he so eagerly advocates—all have their genesis in the Judeo-Christian ideas of "justice" and "love." To be sure, it has been observed that Habermas' idea of public debate requires from the parties within the communicative community a sort of "benevolence" that can only be found within

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[392] Havers, op. cit., 161.

[393] Habermas, Jürgen "A Conversation About God and the World" in *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God and Modernity*. 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 149.

the limits of Christian ethics.[394] Habermas even praises the "polycentric church" as an enactment of

pluralism that has an internal role in its ecclesiology, but also serves as motivation for the world.[395]

Yet, reading out of context, such quote can misrepresent Habermas' understanding of the

relationship between Christianity and democracy. There is an aspect of the Christian tradition that

Habermas believes to be necessary to reject, i.e. metaphysical thinking. He aims at "saving"

Christianity from the pre-modern blend with Athens. He believes Greek metaphysics deprived

Christianity from accomplishing its potential.[396] While willing to appropriate this version of

Christianity within the limits of liberal democracy, Habermas fears validating orthodox Christianity.

Overall, he is not ready to put up with the metaphysical aspect of the Christian tradition. In this

regard, he believes modern philosophy is akin to the separation of Christian semantics from this

metaphysical impulse.[397]

The illusion that Habermas' words cited above would represent his shift in ascribing an

intrinsic value to the truth of Christianity vanishes when one reads them in light of a greater picture

of Habermas' own project. The German philosopher remains faithful to his early observation that

"without *appropriating* the substance of Judeo-Christian understanding of history in terms of

'salvation' Western individuals would not be able to even understand the concept of "morality and

ethical life."[398] It is true that Habermas' development of the "post-secular" has caused him to grow

in sympathy to religion as a necessary source for secular motivation. Here, however, while one

could highlight the fact that Habermas stresses the Western debt to the Judeo-Christian tradition,

one must observe his emphasis on the term "appropriation." As I pointed out before, this emphasis

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[394] Lee, op. cit., 40.
[395] Habermas, "On the Relation between…" op. cit., 299-300.
[396] Ibid., 294-7.
[397] Habermas, "Transcendence From... "op. cit., 311.
[398] Habermas, Jürgen and Hohengarten, William Mark. *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays.* MIT Press, 1994, 15.

suggests that philosophy has the last word regarding translation. To be sure, he believes "without

the transmission through socialization and transformation through the philosophy of any one of the

great world religions, this semantic potential could one day become inaccessible."[399] Habermas'

perspective implies two distinct aspects. First, it opens up the possibility of preserving morality

within the Christian tradition apart from the philosophical conditions that gave birth to it—i.e.,

metaphysical inquiry and, more importantly, the practice of faith. That is to say, "Christian faith is

no longer essential for believing in Christian morality."[400] Secondly, Habermas' usage of

Christianity relies in the understanding that philosophy has the ability to make religious symbols

relevant to a secularized society. Habermas' approach indicates that the philosophical ability to

translate religious symbols is what "savage" religious semantics are in the first place. What is at the

heart of Habermas' affirmation is that religion demands the work of philosophical translation to

affect political debate in a post-metaphysical world. Yet, is this translation possible?

ii) The Problem of Translation

In my critique of Habermas' "institutional proviso" presented last chapter, I focused on the

limitations of his notion of neutrality and religion. I avoided questions concerning the very

possibility of faithful translation of religious concepts into a language accessible to all. However,

when analysing Habermas' use of Christianity, the question proves to be unavoidable. To be sure,

Habermas' "institutional proviso" is designed to work as a filter that allows for religious language

in the informal public sphere. It also aims at creating the conditions for the translation of religious

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[399] Jürgen Habermas, quoted in Miguel Vatter, "Habermas between Athens and Jerusalem: Public Reason
and Atheistic Theology," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 28.3 (2011), 243-61.
[400] Havers, op. cit., 163 .

concepts into secular ones as a requirement for entering the formal public sphere.[401] The problem

remains in the fact Habermas must show that such translation is possible. Accordingly, he must

demonstrate that the religious concepts that undergo such translation can remain intact. In other

words, Habermas' "institutional proviso" is viable if and only if religious concepts are not lost in

this process of translation.[402]

Habermas is aware of this problem. Yet he is rather optimistic regarding the possibility of

such translation. First of all, as stressed repeatedly in this essay, he believes that cooperative work

between religious and non-religious citizens can be fruitful for the task of translation.[403] Here,

Habermas' idea of solidarity is crucial. In the context of deliberative democracy, he argues that

citizens must be mutually committed to principles such as respect and reciprocity regarding each

other's autonomy as well as valuing the co-authorship of the law.[404] In this scenario, he believes

each citizen is able to understand that they should provide good reasons for their fellow citizens.

The bottom line is that religious and non-religious citizen must take each other seriously in a mutual

learning process.[405]

In addition, Habermas is confident that philosophy has been successful in its role as translator.

In such a process, he explains, "religious contents are saved in terms of philosophic concepts."[406]

Habermas' optimism relies ultimately in philosophy's ability to translate religious concept into

secular language. Habermas' confidence generally remains the same since his first articulation of

"methodological atheism." He has been consistently pointing out what he perceives to be successful

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[401] Habermas, "Religion in the Public" op. cit.

[402] In more concrete terms, if a religious reason against abortion, for example, enters the institutional debate in a secularized manner, it has to be still recognizable *as the same reason* that originated in its religious form. The secular version of a religious concept must maintain the same relevance and force of the original religious rationality.

[403] Habermas, "The Political" op. cit.

[404] Habermas, "Religion in the Public" op. cit.

[405] Ibid.

[406] Habermas, quoted from Mendieta, op. cit., 334.

examples of religious concepts that undergo translation to secular language while maintaining their argumentative power. Marx's idea of the emancipated society, Habermas argues, is an example of a successful translation of the Christian notion of the Kingdom of God.[407] The "translation of human likeness to God into the equal dignity of all humans" is another example of the effectiveness of "saving translation."[408] In this context, Habermas even mentions liberation theology as capable of performing such a translation.[409] There are, however, reasons to counter Habermas' optimism. I shall present few objections to Habermas' idea of translation.

No way out

Before criticizing Habermas' notion of "saving translation" *per se,* it is worthwhile to highlight what Miguel Vatter has pointed out regarding the implications of the very notion of such "saving translation" with respect to religion. Accordingly, if Habermas' idea of translation were successful, then religious institutions would eventually become obsolete. This is because when every single concept within religion is translated, the semantic content of religion would be exhausted and there would be no more need to affirm the role of religion. Given that since the mid-1990s Habermas has recognized that religion should no longer be perceived as obsolete, the success of "saving translation" contradicts Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in society.[410] If, on the other hand, translations were not successful, then religious institutions would get lost anyway "given the prevalence of other translations of moral and political concepts."[411] Vatter is referring to the development of a morality that is derived from evolutionary biology. He observes that Habermas' theory does not provide tools which make it possible to decide between Christian and

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[407] Habermas, "The Boundary Between Faith and Knowledge" in: *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Polity, 2008), 231.

[408] Habermas, "On the Relation between…"op. cit., 346.

[409] Here, "God" is translated as "the freedom of the lowliest in the spiritual communication." Ibid.

[410] See chapter two of this study.

[411] Vatter, op. cit., 244.

evolutionary ethics, for example. I will return to this point later. In any case, Vatter's critique is compelling because even before discussing the possibility of Habermas' idea of "saving translations," there is a case to be made in which religion turns out to be useless in practical terms within Habermas project—even if Habermas wants religion to be present or relevant. One could counter that Habermas has been sensitive to such problem insofar as his "institutional translation proviso" is designed to solve the problem that Vatter refers to—in practical terms, religion is still obsolete within Habermas' system. Vatter's critique highlights the fact Habermas still needs to articulate more clearly why religion is relevant when his own idea of "saving translation" leads to an opposite direction.

Turning to the problem of translation *per se,* there are reasons to challenge Habermas' optimism. Mavae Cooke, for instance, has observed that Habermas' optimism regarding translation overlooks the complexity involved in semantically transporting content embedded in a religious narrative to a post-metaphysical way of thinking. She has looked into what Habermas calls "saving translation" as a way to account for what is necessary at stake in order to deem translation successful. Accordingly, to be successful, a translation must "retain the power of the original to inspire though and action insofar as they succeed in making truth appear anew."[412] Cooke explains that translation implies two necessary functions. First, it enables "critical engagement with truth content." Second, it motivates society by "inspiring…collective action."[413] She analyses a few figures and symbols, concluding that even if the first function of translation could be accomplished, there is enough evidence to affirm that the second function—the motivational aspect—is not easily accomplished.

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[412] Cooke, Mavae ."Translating Truth." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37.4 (2011), 479-91.
[413] Ibid., 482.

Cooke's use of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy serves to suggest that the motivational aspect of translation is hardly maintained when a particular concept is shifted from the context that gave meaning to it. She stresses two aspects from Ricoeur's theory with regards to meaning. First, it is impossible to understand "figurative types and acts" isolated from the stories from which they emerge. It is in the interplay between symbols and context that meaning is attained. Thus, religious concepts have a "global shape." Second, truth is always mediated. As she clarifies, Ricoeur helps one to see that even "mediated truth is articulated truth."[414]

While Cooke highlight Habermas' dismissal of the complexities regarding translation, she agrees with the German philosopher that such translation is "possible and necessary."[415] I believe Cooke's conclusion does not follow from her own critique of Habermas' idea of translation. If Cooke has proven anything, it is the difficulty in making it possible that a translation of religious concepts to a post-metaphysical political reality would be able to carry the inspirational power. Through the lenses of Habermas' political theology—i.e. his usage of Christianity—Cooke's analysis illuminates how in fact Habermas' project of translation *transforms* Christian symbols. As I explored in the last chapter, the so-called secular might not be as "accessible to all" as one might want it to be. The "secular" still operates in terms of a particular religious vision.

Vatter's critique of Habermas' translation is more fundamental. Vatter observes that in some cases the translation can be so perfectly atheistic that the essence of religious elements is simply lost. The translation of moral and political terms to evolutionary biology might provide a terminological overlap with Christianity.[416] For instance, love can be perfectly described within an evolutionary framework, yet, rather than bringing biology and theology together such translation can easily perpetuate language gaps. Both biology and theology might refer to the same term;

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[414] Ibid., 484.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Vatter, op. cit.

however they do not speak about the same essence. Vatter's observation resonates with Cooke's usage of Ricoeur's theory, according to which these symbols are necessarily interconnected with a variety of other symbols for their very existence. Apart from those symbols, religious concepts can easily lose their essence.

It is clear now that Habermas' relationship to Christianity is ambivalent. While Habermas builds his project upon some distinctive elements in Christian ethics—values that historically were only known to the Judeo-Christian tradition—he dismisses the importance of discussing the truth value of Christianity, as well as the metaphysical thinking that comes in the name of a pluralistic idea of democracy. While Habermas peruses a post-metaphysical thinking, one might question if his only project can do without absolutes.

iii) **The Metaphysics of "Post-Metaphysical" Thinking**

Another important aspect of Habermas' use of Christianity is his ambivalent attitude toward metaphysics. While Habermas wants to affirm the utility of religious semantics by translation, he proposes a post-metaphysical philosophizing that is, by definition, closed to the question regarding the truth-value of religion. That is to say, he closes off the realm from which the semantics he wants to affirm originated. Cooke has observed that one of the greatest problems in Habermas' idea of translation relates to the terms in which non-believers meet religious claims within the framework of post-metaphysical rationality.[417] One has to keep in mind that the encounter between religious and non-religious citizens is not an intercultural one—an encounter in which both cultural parties learned mutually from each other. In practical terms, Habermas' vision of an encounter between a non-believer and a believer is one in which the learning process goes in only one direction, i.e.

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[417] Cooke, "Translating Truth." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37.4 (2011), 479-91.

religious citizens are expected to accommodate modernity—"modernization of religion."[418] This entails two correlative aspects. First, Habermas' understanding of the interaction between religious and secular citizen is less a Gadamerian fusion of horizons than a one-sided process of learning—religious citizens are expected to accommodate modernity and recognize pluralism, and secular citizens are only to recognize that religion had a genetic role in motivating civilization.[419] Second, in such encounters, an epistemological precondition for dialogue is missing. Accordingly, there are no "culture-transcending ideas of truth and moral rightness that make possible a rational consensus with regard to their validity" between the two parties.[420] As Cooke argues, such an epistemological condition is not met when post-metaphysical thinking analyzes religious claims. By definition, a post-metaphysical rationality must remain agnostic regarding the truth-value of religious claims.[421] Due to the fact that Habermas is more interested in the inspirational power of religious belief and not in the truth-value of religious content, he does not have much to say about the problem of truth here. As already indicated repeatedly above, Habermas is interested in the utility of religion for political purposes.

The first aspect only indicates that solidarity between groups with conflicting worldviews is problematic.[422] Each party learns in its own isolated sphere. I want to focus on the second aspect. I believe that Cooke's observation regarding the epistemological grounds in the encounter between religious and secular citizens regarding truth is indicative of what is going on in Habermas idea of translation. I shall analyse it now.

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[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Habermas, "Religion in The Public..."op. cit., 17.
[422] Solidarity presupposes working towards a common objective. Yet the objectives and the motivations are essentially different within conflicting worldviews—i.e. Christian citizens and secular citizens. As Williams has rightly observed, the process of law-making in current societies is more a civil recognition of these differences and openly speaking of the unavoidable conflict then a wide open venture of cooperation. Williams, op. cit.

Cooke's observation that post-metaphysical thinking by nature suspends the idea of truth as defined by metaphysical thinking does not imply that post-metaphysical thinking can escape the scope of "truth." Indirectly, Cooke touches on this point, since she observes the very fact that Habermas speaks of "mutual learning"[423]—i.e. between religious and non-religious citizens—must imply that truth is at stake.[424] To be sure, one is only motivated by something one regards as truth, regardless of the fact that particular truths might be defined in an immanent or in a transcendent sense. Yet, the inescapability of truth reaches an even deeper element in the present discussion: It is impossible to escape an idea of truth even if this truth refers to the affirmation that one cannot know transcendent truth—i.e. in the case of post-metaphysical thinking. In other words, the conflict between religious and post-metaphysical thinking still operates within two different concepts of truth. Generally speaking, metaphysical thinking would argue in favour of a transcendent truth (Absolute), while post-metaphysical thinking would argue in favour of an immanent truth.[425]

As mentioned before, Habermas accepts the Christian legacy insofar as it fosters his own agenda. However, he is not willing to pay the metaphysical cost that Christianity requires. He welcomes Christian secularized language as long as it provides the material to structure public debate, but at the same time he wants agnosticism through "institutional proviso" to set the boundaries of formal public debate.[426] Habermas' confidence that the intersubjective approach is

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[423] There is an important distinction between the way Habermas in which speaks—"mutual learning"—and the actual way his thought makes room for such mutual learning experience. As I just pointed out above, even though Habermas speaks about "mutual experience" the practical ways his philosophy understands the interactions between religion and non-religious citizens is very much framed in a one-sided fashion. My point here is that Habermas' terminological attempt to speak about mutual experience presupposes that truth is at steak.

[424] Cooke, op. cit.

[425] At least as Habermas envisions it. In speaking of post-metaphysical thinking here, I am not referring to the relativist version of it. It is clear that thought Habermas is against metaphysical thinking he still attempt to articulate an idea of truth in terms of consent. It is an immanent idea of truth that tried to avoid the radical relativism of some post-modern thinkers.

[426] As Habermas writes, "post-metaphysical thought is prepared to learn from religion, but remains agnostic in the process." Habermas, "Religion in the Public" op. cit., 17.

appropriate for a post-metaphysical reality enables him to affirm that his philosophy "can do without the concept of an absolute"; therefore, he can "dispense with this legacy of Hellenized Christianity."[427] With this attitude, he is committed to welcome Christian values while avoiding absolutes and metaphysical inquiry in favour of a pluralistic society and a non-dogmatic public debate. Here one might point out the fact that just because Habermas avoids such elements does not prevent him from inevitably carrying them on within his own philosophy. Dieter Henrich, an important voice within German idealism, has pointed out Habermas' naiveté in thinking that his own project can do without "figures of thought" that have traditionally been named metaphysical.[428]

Henrich denounces Habermas' prejudice against metaphysics as "hypertrophy"[429] and disrespect towards the principle of fallibility.[430] Such prejudice leads Habermas to dismiss the necessity of the type of questions that entail every single philosophical inquiry. To be sure, historically, metaphysics has evolved exactly from this type of investigation, which "has remained without a proper title." Moreover, Henrich observes that, despite the fact that Habermas applies terms in his own philosophy with a high metaphysical expense such as "semantic…meaning … objective [and] reference," he uses them "as if they were entirely unproblematic and self-explanatory."[431] Henrich's critique is relevant here because it shows that Habermas builds up from

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[427] As a representative of a more orthodox reading of Kant, Henrich's critique of Habermas could be dismissed as foundationalist. Philosophers that subscribe to a more classical understanding of metaphysics could criticize Henrich's view on metaphysics. This is not relevant here since I want to suggest that they would agree that Habermas carries metaphysical concepts in his own philosophy. Dieter, Henrich, from Peter Dews, *Habermas: A Critical Reader* (Wiley, 1999), 323.

[428] Ibid., 293.

[429] Ibid., 295.

[430] Ibid., 306.

[431] To illustrate this fact, Henrich points out Habermas' intellectual debt to Austin's theory of speech acts, observing that Austin's theory was developed in a "conservative millennium." That is to say, Austin did not have to provide explanations for things that the community of his own time was willing to accept as true. Habermas borrows from this tradition without any further attempt of clarification or justification." Ibid., 303. Habermas depends on traditions that developed in a particular way due to metaphysical assumptions. Ibid., 302.

those metaphysical assumptions without acknowledging to what degree his own philosophy needs

metaphysics to be meaningful in the first place.

Henrich highlights the fact that no theory can survive without metaphysics and absolutes. To

be sure, while not acknowledging it, Habermas establishes some absolutes within his own

philosophy. The very fact that he sees consensus within a communicative community as the

measure for truth already points to certain elements he is not willing to negotiate. Adams has

observed that Habermas locates absolutes in communication/language when he defines it as "the

possibility in principle of passing from one language to another." Habermas understands that

communication is "procedurally" guaranteed by the encounter of individuals within a public debate.

Along these lines, Henrich has also observed that, according to Habermas' understanding of

communicative community, it is "permissible to speak of an 'absolute' as long as one also makes

hostile remarks about the subject and about the term 'metaphysics.'"[432] I believe Henrich's

observation points to the fact that Habermas cannot put up with some absolutes articulated within a

particular tradition. In fact, Habermas is not necessarily against universalism. As a philosopher who

claims to advance the Enlightenment project, he still wants to find universals as long as they are

universals beyond the exclusivist boundaries of orthodox Christianity.[433] This is why Habermas'

preoccupation with showing that constitutional democracy is independent of Christianity is so

crucial to his philosophy.

Post-metaphysical thinking and the crisis of meaning and motivation

As highlighted above, Habermas' idea of dialogue is loaded with the distinctive semantic

content of Christian ethics. His very definition of progress as "lessening, abolishing, or preventing

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[432] Ibid., 311.

[433] Adams observes Habermas' universalist ethics as "continuation and transformation of religious
worldviews."

the suffering of vulnerable creatures" already displays a close relationship with Christianity.[434]

Habermas is aware that a post-metaphysical philosophy cannot provide this set of values, nor answer questions such as "why be moral at all?" Yet he believes that post-metaphysical philosophy shows that questions of such nature "do not rise meaningfully for communicatively socialized individuals."[435] Habermas is satisfied with the post-metaphysical answer, according to which we learn morality at home and therefore no "self-surpassing of morality is necessary."[436] He benefits from the fact that he has a Western cultural background at his own disposal; however, he is not interested in developing the means through which this legacy could be maintained, especially if it involves compromising his project of democracy as "world citizenship." In other words, his political theory relies on elements that have been developed partly by a significant influence of Christian tradition, yet he is not willing to admit this *co-dependency* due to his "post-metaphysical" belief that no particular tradition should be privileged over others in a pluralistic society.

Habermas is not able to provide justifications based on his own project. If post-metaphysical and post religious society cannot provide an answer to the question "why to be moral,"[437] it might be the case that it cannot provide a justification for a rational choice between the type of ethics that will support a communicative community and the type that will not support it. Habermas would counter, affirming that those reasons are there to be found, since "moral insights tell us that we do not have any good reasons for behaving otherwise."[438] Note that Habermas' vagueness denotes a rather naïve hope for a universal rationality. He seems to dismiss the fact that such affirmation might not mean the same thing when situated in a culture in foreign to Christianity. To be sure, different societies could affirm that "moral insights tell us that we do not have any good reasons for

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[434] Habermas, "Transcendence From Within..." op. cit., 316.
[435] Habermas, quoted from Mendieta, op. cit., 314.
[436] Ibid., 315.
[437] Ibid., 314.
[438] Ibid., 315.

behaving otherwise" without compromising practices that collide directly with Habermas'

understanding of *reasonable* morality. Worth mentioning here is the *neo*conservative engagement

with democratization in the Middle East as an example of the problems that can arise from the hope

that a universal affirmation such as "humanity longs for democracy" would mean the same thing

everywhere in the globe. On the contrary, the folly of the American mission to spread democracy

across the globe has provided considerable evidence that it was not by chance that liberal society

arose only in the West. That is to say, one cannot impose the liberal state upon a community that

does not have what Voegelin has called the "existential conditions" for democracy.[439] In other

words, democracy depends on cultural elements—theological and philosophical—for its survival.

Yet, for Habermas, the very existence of the constitutional democratic state seems to represent

the ultimate example of the philosophical power of "saving translation."[440] Habermas' account of

constitutional democratic states, in which solidarity satisfies the conditions for generating legitimate

coercion in pluralistic scenarios becomes rather fragile. The rise of pluralism wrought an increasing

lack of the possibility to agree around a substantial meaning of the "good life" within Western

societies. This has significantly affected its political life. To be sure, in face of the fact of pluralism

and the attempt to be equally welcoming of conflicting worldviews, constitutional democracies

have experienced increasing tensions around the issue of rights. This has to do with the imposition

of the pluralistic agenda that demands a disconnect between what Jacques Maritain called the

"democratic philosophy and state of mind" from the "energy of the Gospels." Maritain was

referring to the fact democracies were only experienced as a historical manifestation of values and

ideas inspired by Christianity. Yet, differently than Habermas and like Voegelin, Maritain was also

aware that there is an ongoing dependency between democratic philosophy and the state of mind of

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[439] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics, op. cit., 55*
[440] See Habermas "On The relationship between the Secular"op. Cit, 339-48

"Christianity as a leaven in the social and political life of nations and as a bearer of the temporal hope of mankind."[441]

Giving support to Maritain's understanding of the connection between Christianity and democracy are the anomalies of unthinkable notions of "right" that currently are justified under the value of "human dignity."[442] The language of human rights apart from the "energy of the Gospels" becomes in danger of being reduced to a consumerist relationship between state and individual, guided by what Augustine called *libido dominandi*.[443] When the notion of humanity is no longer informed by a particular teleology or purpose, the idea of human dignity becomes a matter of individual manufacturing. In this scenario, rights are understood as "intrinsic endowments."[444] To be sure, pluralism—the notion that individuals should not suffer restrains for having different worldviews--itself loses its intelligibility apart from a meta-narrative that gives context to it. Again the very notion of hospitality to the foreigner as known in the West finds its roots in the Old Testament divine commandment. Moreover, recognizing the "other" presupposes a familiarity with a cultural "us."[445] Habermas' idea of pluralism necessarily destroys the conditions to even make pluralism intelligible. In such scenario the more pluralist one society becomes the more the idea of human dignity distant itself from its original meaning—as informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition. If Habermas' idea of pluralism is right then the very definition of human dignity

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[441] Maritain, Jacques. *Christianity and Democracy, the Rights of Man and Natural Law* (Ignatius Press, 2012), 23.

[442] The most extreme example I could list is the right to have a cell phone. See Hurst, Lynda "All Compassionate Governments Should Provide the Following to Their People:" *The Toronto Star* 10 Jan. 2009.

[443] City of God 2:21. Also See Cavanaugh, Willian T.'s account of the Libido dominandi effect in economics (*Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008. Print.

[444] Williams, Rowan "Beyond Liberalism," *Political Theology* 3.1 (2001), 64-73.

[445] Such analysis shows that Habermas' notion of pluralism, by definition does not equally welcomes all ideas and worldviews. At its best pluralism defined in Habermas' post-metaphysical fashion suffers a problem of lacking the elements to make pluralism intelligible. That is to say, Habermas attempt to step outside of every existing worldview force him to give up his own world-view. Where is he located as a observer to recognize the "other"? He is not able to account a solution for that.

necessarily becomes manufactured. That is because in such scenario human dignity undergoes the

notion of pluralism as well—humanity defined according to the plurality of groups or individuals.

I am far from presenting a classic liberal state as the faithful political representation of

Christianity. Also, my critique of Habermas' understanding of universal reason does not attempt to

make Habermas sound like a neoconservative; for he is certainly not one. My point is simply that

one must recognize the historical fact that there is no liberal state apart from a society that shares a

Christian background.[446] If Habermas has done well in recognizing that what he wants to defend as

a political system came into to being in virtue of a great influence of Judeo-Christian background,

he must find ways to affirm this particular way of life. That is the cost of maintaining the regime he

wants to advance. I find Peter Berger's words very helpful here. He writes, "Any sociologist will

agree that religion, true or not, is useful for the solidarity and moral consensus of society. The

problem is that this utility depends on at least some people actually believing that there is the

supernatural reality that religion affirms. The utility ceases when nobody believes this anymore."[447]

Gnosticism and Habermas' Fear of Metaphysics

I now return to Voegelin's analysis of the Gnostic dream in order to stress his observation that

Gnostic projects such Habermas' are mainly characterized by a radical closure to metaphysical

inquiry. This is because "immanentization" is the process in which "God is drawn into the

existence of man." In its more radical form, "immanentization" is the "activist redemption of man

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[446] Adams points out a difficulty that emerges from Habermas' theory related to this fact. He observes that the "public sphere" is a problem insofar as "it refers to an arena that is Christian through and through." Adams, op. cit., 6. Adams' observation helps one to see that Habermas refers to public debate as a general term; he dismisses the reality that the liberal state is not general insofar as it refers to an European and Christian phenomenon. Hence the very possibility of conceiving the idea of pluralistic society is necessarily attached to a development within Christian tradition. Habermas insists upon resolving the multicultural society as the possibility of dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian in a neutral public sphere, for example. However, it seems that the real problem is how even to conceive of a neutral dialogue in Habermas' terms when the public sphere historically signifies the dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian within a Christian public sphere. In other words, the invitation to a foreign religion to participate in the public life is a Christian development in itself.

[447] Berger, Peter. "What Happens When a Leftist Philosopher Discovers God?" *The American Interest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 June 2015.

in society," that Marxism refers to.[448] In this scenario, man becomes "conscious that he himself is

God." Transcendence and metaphysical thinking is not only unintelligible but also forbidden by

definition.[449] Voegelin effectively encapsulates these elements by pointing out that "the death of the

spirit is the price of progress."[450] Voegelin was aware that dogmatically avoiding metaphysical

inquiry would not destroy the world but "increase the disorder in society."[451] I take the increasing

tension within the language of rights to be indicative of this observation. Without the deep

recognition that every society represents a transcendent reality that offers a particular goal of the

"good life," the conversation about freedom and democracy becomes a toll for tyranny.[452] To

conclude with Voegelin, "when democrats rave about freedom and equality and forget that

government requires spiritual training and intellectual discipline," one "can warn them that they are

on the way to tyranny."[453]

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[448] Ibid., 124.
[449] Ibid., 125.
[450] Ibid.,131.
[451] Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism.* op. cit., 9.
[452] See Voegelin, *The New Science*, op. cit., 55.
[453] Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, op. cit., 13.

CONCLUSION

There is much to be celebrated in Habermas' return to religion. He has been a leading voice in calling secular scholars to pay attention to the crucial role religion plays in society. His attempt to articulate a theory that embraces the "post-secular" is also an attempt to abandon the secularist prejudice against religion. Yet there are many incompatibilities between his effort to make room for religion and the philosophical presuppositions of his own thought. The main task of this research was to explore the internal problems of Habermas' project as they relate to his attempt to make room for religion within his understanding of public sphere. My critique of Habermas' ideas on religion aimed at overcoming a reductionist approach by taking seriously other aspects of his philosophy in order to elucidate his notion of religion in the public sphere.

In chapter one I presented Habermas' philosophy as one struggling to harmonize a very radical critique of Western rationality—the one he inherited from his Frankfurt School mentors—with the goal of advancing the Enlightenment. The result of this synthesis led Habermas to overcome the radical critique of rationality, on one hand, and motivated his vision of the Enlightenment with a Marxist notion of emancipation, on the other. While Habermas abandons the economic determinism of Marxism, he continued to hold onto Marx's therapeutic challenge of "transforming the world." He also inherited from the Frankfurt School an anti-bourgeois attitude—against the bourgeois' culture, religion and institutions. Such an attitude still informs Habermas' vision of global democracy, especially insofar as it is beyond a nationalist mentality. As far as Habermas' Enlightenment project goes, his attempt to rationally ground public communication brought him back to the Kantian idea of public reason. He still sees a great potential within the Enlightenment, and for that reason he does not want to radically reject it, as Horkheimer and Adorno did. Regarding modernity as an unfinished project,

Habermas undertakes the task of advancing it. In sum, Habermas brought optimism to the Frankfurt School's "Critical Theory" while portraying the Enlightenment in terms of a democratic revolution of world citizenship.

Envisioning public rationality, Habermas developed his own notion of the public sphere. It is a two-track structure that works through a collaborative relationship between the informal realm characterized by its freedom and it innovative potential, and the formal realm characterized by rigorous debate and deliberative capacity. Habermas' idea of the public sphere is highly influenced by his early notion of the "ideal speech situation." Even though Habermas abandons the term to avoid being dismissed as an idealist, Habermas' notion of public sphere is still informed by such standard. This explains Habermas' constant struggle to refine his theory, since he does so with the vision of an ideal speech situation. The constant shifts regarding his understanding of the role of religion are best understood in light of his pursuit for actualizing the ideal speech situation.

In chapter two, I explored the trajectory of Habermas' understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere. Early on his career, Habermas was a subscriber to the secularization theory. He believed religion would progressively be overcome as society acquires more education and knowledge. For this very reason, he concluded that religion was perceived as an obsolete aspect of life. Modern thinking, he thought, already absorbed what was valid in religion. In the mid-1980s, Habermas began to revise his earlier views, affirming that they were in fact too harsh. This abandonment of the secularization theory culminated in the 1990s, when he finally admitted that religion has indeed an ongoing role in society which philosophy cannot replace. Still, religion was given no place in the public sphere. It was in this period that he developed his understanding of "methodological atheism." Accordingly, in order to enter the realm of public sphere, a religious concept had to be translated into a secular language accessible to all. Philosophy, therefore, was to have the role of providing avenues for

such a translation. It was to have primacy over religion, and it also enabled religion to be preserved in this process of translation.

After September 11th, Habermas began to dedicate more thought to the issue of religion. He began to advocate for a "post-secular" notion of society. In such a society, religion is "here to stay." It has much more opportunity to influence the deliberative process than in the secularist mentality he had adopted earlier. Attempting to make more room for religion, Habermas began to recognize that his original notion of "methodological atheism" was more costly to religious citizens compared to secular citizens. In this scenario, Habermas tried to distant himself from Rawls' 'proviso' by welcoming religious citizens to speak freely in the informal public sphere while still observing an "institutional translation proviso"—i.e. submitting religious concepts to translation only when they enter the *formal* public sphere. In this context, Habermas also urged the secular citizens to be open to taking religion serious as well as engaging in a mutual learning process with religious citizens. While Habermas' continues to look for religion as a source of semantic content for political discourse, his commitment to the project of deliberative democracy still leads him to associate reason with post-metaphysical thinking. In this scenario, faith is still perceived as something outside of reason.

In chapter three, I explored the conflict within Habermas' attempt to move towards the "post-secular" through his idea of "institutional Translation proviso" and his understanding of neutrality and religion. Initially, I examined Habermas' "institutional proviso" in light of his own standards. It became clear that even though an "institutional proviso" does welcome citizens to speak freely about their religious motives in the informal public sphere, it still repeats the same problems of Rawls' 'proviso' at an institutional level. Habermas is not able to articulate why religious citizens should be able to bring their religious beliefs to the informal public sphere while being prevented from doing so in the informal public sphere. My assessment of his "institutional proviso" showed that, because

Habermas is driven by a modern idea of neutrality and religion, he dismisses what is really at stake in the identity-split problem. For Habermas, the issue arises because, as his "ideal speech situation" makes clear, the public sphere should be constituted by an environment of rigorous equality between parties. Using Hauerwas' critique of liberalism, I demonstrated that the issue with the identity-split is not equality *per se*, but the prejudice within the secularist mindset against religious language. In such an environment, "religious" arguments are excluded *a priori* from the conversation. In practical terms, Habermas' notion of public sphere differs from Rawls' regarding how far religion can go. Yet Habermas does not propose a serious challenge to Rawls' notion of public reason. Habermas' understanding of the relationship of religion and rationality is much closer to Rawls than he wants to admit.

Even though Habermas wants to shift to the post-secular, it is clear that his philosophy still functions within a modern understanding of religion and neutrality. A post-secular notion demands a post-secular understanding of neutrality and religion. Habermas' notion of state neutrality and the obsession to find a vantage point of "common rationality" as a way to overcome the problems of pluralism, however, dismisses the ontological presence of tradition. Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics serves to demonstrate that Habermas' struggle to implement the "linguistic-turn" in a more effective way when it comes to his idea of public sphere. Habermas' fear of tradition leads him to dismiss Gadamer's lesson that philosophy cannot do without ascribing authority to some knowledge or insight.

While Habermas wants to acknowledge the unique contributions of religion in the public sphere his definition of religion is very much to confine it to a modern categorization of the term. Habermas still holds an understanding of religion that is less rational then philosophy by definition. Yet a "post-secular" understanding of religion has to be the one that liberate the term from the

dichotomized definition of religion "over against the secular." To be sure, contrary to the modern notion, religion as a separate pool from other aspects of human life happens to be a rather new concept. Nongbri's linguistic/historical analysis of the modern notion of "religion" combined with Smith's attempt to frame religion in terms of *liturgies* offers one an awareness of the agendas behind the modern notion of the secular. In addition, it suggests that moving towards the "post-secular" demands a growing awareness that even the *secular* has its own religious features.

One could contest that, from Habermas' perspective, this "post-secular" stretch within the notion of religion could be a shortcut for raising the rational status of religion by avoiding the test of reflexivity. Yet Clouser's analysis of the structure of theorization suggests that, on a cognitivist level, one cannot theorize without presupposing a truth of religious nature. Clouser's work helps one to see that Habermas' understanding of faith—the realm of metaphorical language—and reason as the realm of reflexivity is rather problematic. To be sure, from Claouser's perspective, reflexivity itself presupposes a non-contingent, self-existent belief to even exist. By advancing this "post-secular" task of understanding religion, one can see that because even the *secular* has its religious features, Habermas' categories of "religious" and "secular" citizens becomes unhelpful. In light of this new paradigm, the identity-split problem is not to be seen as a conflict between religious and non-religious citizens, but rather a conflict of religions differently favoured by the liberal state.

In the final chapter, I explored some religious features of Habermas' philosophy. Having explored the notion that even the secular cannot do without religious aspects in chapter three, I proposed an analysis of Habermas' philosophy that would allow one to see his project as having "theo-political" implications. I used Voegelin's notion of political religion as well as his analysis of political modernity in light of the Gnostic mythology as indicative of Habermas' religious features. In light of Voegelin's analysis, Habermas' project can be understood as operating under the Gnostic dream of

"immanentization." Accordingly, Habermas' philosophy aims at the realization of the Judeo-Christian vision of "new havens and new earth" within history in terms of a global liberal democracy. As Gottfried helps to clarify, the Gnostic dream triggers a philosophical attitude in Habermas' philosophy which places himself as a light-bearer of the project of redemption in terms of "good vs evil." It can be observed in Habermas' attitude towards the "fundamentalist" as well as in his tendency to ostracize — together with other cultural Marxists—conservative voices.

In light of Voegelin's political analysis, Habermas' philosophy operates from a Gnostic misuse of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Habermas' use of Christianity is a selective one. He is willing to welcome Christian ideas as long as they advance his own notion of liberal democracy. While Habermas has correctly recognized the uniqueness of Judeo-Christian heritage in the development of liberal democracy, he wrongly sees philosophy as responsible for making such ideas relevant in a post-metaphysical era. In this context, the analysis of Habermas' understanding of "saving translation" became unavoidable. This is because if Habermas does not show that such translation is possible, not only does his notion of "institutional translation proviso" become impossible, but also his whole use of Judeo-Christian ethics of justice and love becomes problematic. Habermas maintain his optimism in the project of translation. He believes that "solidarity" between believing and non-believing citizens is what enables such translation. He presents many examples within history of successful translation as a demonstrative that it has worked and will continue to work.

Habermas' notion of "saving translation" does not take seriously the complexities involved in the process of translation. As Cooke helps us to see, in order to be successful a translation must maintain the original power of an argument. Habermas seems to dismiss the problems with keeping the motivational aspect within his idea of translation, because religious concepts strongly depend on the stories from which they arise. Vatter's critique of Habermas' notion of translation makes it clear that,

in some cases, the translation is so atheistic that the very meaning is lost. In this context, one could say that, unless the Christian story is affirmed, the value one *wants* to affirm loses it meaning entirely. In many cases, this can be observed in Habermas' own use of Christian values. His understanding of these values is so incompatible with Christianity that it turns out to be a whole different concept.

Finally, the problem of translation has to consider the fundamentally different perspectives represented by different parties. On one side, religious individuals generally associate a metaphysical understanding of truth as absolute; yet, on the other side, the non-religious side generally associated with the post-metaphysical thinking understands "truth" as immanent, at best. This is another issue Habermas seems to dismiss. Habermas' fear of metaphysics is another indication of the Gnostic features of his project. While Habermas avoids metaphysical philosophising or discussion regarding truth, he does rely upon metaphysical presuppositions that structure his project. Habermas' post-metaphysical thinking prevents him from justifying the type of regime he wants to advocate. While he relies on public rationality to articulate his idea of public sphere, he dismisses the fact that such rationality is not as global as he wants it to be.

I have shown in this essay that Habermas is not taking seriously enough the full extent of the "post-secular." The discovery of the post-secular reality demands a tremendous effort also to envision a post-secular methodology to account properly for religion. It demands from the post-secular not that religion is here to stay, but that the very definition of religion has been shaped by a methodological bias. Acknowledging that such biases are unavoidable—contrary to what the modern framework does—is the first step towards thinking of religion as not something over against the secular and detrimental to knowledge. Habermas' return of religion is not sufficient yet to make the type of room for religion he wanted to make. There remains a lot to be clarified by Habermas regarding his "institutional translation proviso." First, he has to acknowledge that his articulation does not yet

overcome the objections he holds against to Rawls' own 'proviso.' Second, he must show that "saving translation" is possible in light of the latest criticism he has received. In the case that such translation is possible, he still has to articulate a way to make religion relevant. Overall, if Habermas' use of religion follows, he has to demonstrate why religion is still relevant. In practical terms, regardless of the fact Habermas wants to make room for religion, his methodological tools are designed to exclude religion from the realm of rationality and social relevance.

Habermas has not yet fully realized the costs that come with "using" Judeo-Christian ethics. His calling for the "post-secular" demands that his own philosophy grow in awareness of the type of regime he wants to affirm. This requires a commitment in affirming a particular way of life. His desire to use the Judeo-Christian ethics of justice and love will always depend on the faithfulness of those who practice religion. There are still many things Habermas must clarify regarding his attempt to make room for religion as well as his use of Christianity. While his readers wait patiently for further clarifications regarding the ' institutional proviso', it seems clear by now that Habermas relies much more upon the truth-validity of Christianity than he is willing to admit.

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