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Towards a post-secular political order?

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The 'return of religion' as a social phenomenon has aroused at least three different debates, with the first being the 'clash of civilizations', the second criticizing 'modernity', and the third focusing on the public/private distinction. This article uses Habermas' idea of a post-secular society as a prism through which we examine the return of religion and impact on secularization. In doing so, we attempt to understand the new role of religion as a challenger of the liberal projects following the decline of communism. Against this background, section four focuses on Habermas's central arguments in his proposal for a post-secular society. We claim that the *problematique* in Habermas's analysis must be placed within the wider framework of an emerging global public sphere. In this context we examine the problem of religion's place in political process and the two readings of Habermas as suggested by Simone Chambers.

Keywords: international relations; globalization; religion; Jürgen Habermas; secularism; post-secular society

Introduction

The 'return of religion' as a social phenomenon has aroused at least three different debates, with the first being the 'clash of civilizations', the second criticizing 'modernity', and the third focusing on the public/private distinction. The first debate was sparked by Huntington's thesis (Huntington *et al.*, 1996; Huntington, 1997) where civilizations are founded on different religious creeds, and which also focused on 'asymmetric conflict' and on terrorists who can no longer be deterred. By prioritizing religious differences as the primary reasons for future wars, Huntington questioned the Westphalian myth claiming that conflicts result from the territorial organization of politics. It seems that at least the events of 9/11 support some of his arguments.

The second debate criticizes representations of modernity as a unidirectional 'development' of society as well as the secularization thesis. Here, multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 1987; Eisenstadt, 2002) have been examined with the help of comparative politics, sociology (*vide* Peter Berger's criticism in Berger

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(1999)), and history. Moreover, the secularization thesis is confronted with disconfirming evidence such as the emergence of 'fundamentalism' in 'modern' and in many allegedly 'pre-modern' societies. In addition, since most of the globe seems not to have followed the secularization path, suggests that the European model is more the exception than the rule. Besides, the secularization 'theory' is even unable to account for the observable differences in American and European social developments (Lehmann, 2004). Thus, the resurgence of evangelical movements in the United States was paralleled by a revolt against secular international elites in many parts of the world (Marty and Appleby, 1995; Almond *et al*., 2003). Yet, these revolts were not spearheaded by the 'masses', *á la* Hardt and Negri (2000), but by counter-elites and 'converted' adherents of secularism, all of whom had been exposed to Western ideas and practices (Kepel, 1995; Juergensmeyer, 2008).

These developments challenge notions of a secular domestic politics and of a secular world based on contract and custom in a system of states, which has developed since the Westphalian settlement. According to this foundational myth, religion mattered – if at all – only domestically, and even then it increasingly mattered only within the 'private' realm. Challenges to this separation have been conducive to conflict, as suggested by Norris and Inglehart (2004), whose modified thesis of secularization connects to this extent with Huntington's predictions. For them, decisive breaks in the tectonics of world politics are marked by a faultline where a diminishing part of the secular and rich segment of the world is facing an increasing number of non-secular poor. The insecurities of life, which formerly led to demands for religion, supposedly can be taken care of by an increase in wealth. This model employs the same logic as the old theories of stages of growth or of 'development', where the 'sense of cash', *á la* Lerner (1958), trumps other concerns, although the prospects for the world as a whole are less than rosy.

Given the background of these two debates, the third attains its importance with its discussion in political theory focusing on the changing configuration of the public sphere and the public/private distinction. This debate supplements the discussion in international relations (IR), which addressed the disappearance (or rather the re-drawing) of territorial boundaries that traditionally marked the internal/external (global) distinction. Over the years, and to name only a few of the prominent voices, thinkers such as Connolly, Taylor, and as of late Habermas, have contributed to the first set of problems in this debate (Connolly, 1999; Taylor, 1999, 2007; Habermas, 2003, 2006; Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006). These earlier contributions focused largely on the possibilities of political projects in which religious elements were part of a vibrant public sphere, without establishing orthodoxies of superior insight or revelation. The latest speculations by Taylor and Habermas point to the more general problem arising from the emergence of a global public sphere. Although one has to be cautious in drawing parallels to the emergence of the 'public sphere' during the 18th century, which

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Habermas (1989) has examined, few would deny that there is a global discourse emerging that deals with new issues of governance and the possibilities for democracy in a post-national era (Held, 1995); not to mention the discourses on global public goods ranging from environmental issues to the global knowledge commons.[1] To that extent, these debates have an impact on visions and projects of the global public order. But, when related to the problem of secularism, this means that regardless of one's preference, secular cosmopolitans seem to be the minority, and they will have to deal with people who have embraced neither secularism nor a world public order based entirely and exclusively on Western notions.

Although neither Habermas nor Taylor have developed these themes further, it is imperative to rethink the problem of a secular state and of an international order based on the Western liberal project for at least two reasons. First, the ongoing debate in IR focusing on terrorism and asymmetric conflict is decidedly too narrow to understand the ongoing change. Understanding the current situation requires coming to terms with both the end of communism and its secular utopia, *and* with the challenges to the liberal project itself that result from the forces of globalization. Second, the forces of globalization inevitably transcend the traditional boundaries of the state and the fundamental distinction between the public and the private sphere, both of which have been constitutive of our understandings of (inter)national politics until now. Therefore, raising questions concerning *why* and *how* the 'return of religion' challenges traditional notions about the international system, the state, and society, are far-reaching questions concerning the revolutionary potential of religion not only in IR but also for the constitution of our societies.

The significance of Habermas's work becomes evident when attempting to utilize the semantic potential of religion for politics in the global sphere against the vacuum created by the collapse of the traditional political utopias. He wants to counteract the destructive tendencies of fundamentalism – and the visceral reactions it engenders – and at the same time to provide a counterweight to those developments that are likely to degenerate into an economistic dystopia of unfettered accumulation and its social pathologies (Habermas, 2003; Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006).

Such a re-conceptualization has encountered both skepticism and careful optimism as exemplified by the different positions taken by John Gray and Pope Benedict (Pope Benedict, 2007; Gray, 2008). Beyond these initial assessments, however, it is required to formulate a political project which transcends the 'logic of the market' if one wants to do justice to this *problematique*. Simultaneously, this new project must be attentive to the 'deep pluralism' (Connolly, 1999:

[1] See, for example, Inge Kaul *et al.* (eds) (2003), *Providing Global Public Goods*, New York: Oxford University Press.

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184–187) of the various political and religious traditions that are being brought into ever-increasing contact by the forces of globalization.

The difficulty of formulating such a project is obvious. Consider, for example, the role of civil society; on the one hand it is seen as an important ingredient in a vibrant political system in which religion, among other things, is supposed flourish, while, on the other hand, the public space, within which binding decisions are made, is supposed to be antiseptically 'religion-free'. Such a distinction is hardly convincing, as pointed out by Cooke (2007). But, it is also clear that religious beliefs, if they are admitted into the public realm, cannot insist on their superior status as 'ultimate truths'. Rather, they must subject themselves to discursive deliberation in which validity claims are exchanged and tested. Naturally, this first of all rules out the 'capture' of the state by religion (or rather by a group of the clergy) and second, it counteracts the view that the 'ultimate' goal of politics is that 'truth' must subdue 'power', and that the theory of the 'two swords' can be reduced without further ado to that of the infallible 'holy sword'. Third, it also makes inadmissible far-reaching claims to ultimate authority in the social sphere in the name of (religious) traditions, which frequently turn out not to be religion-based at all.

This article probes deeper into the problems outlined above. Without claiming to provide a comprehensive assessment of the various debates, we use Habermas as a prism through which we examine the just mentioned issues. In order to do this, the next section picks up on the secularization thesis and its various criticisms, and provides a point of departure. In the third section, we compare the utopian aim of Habermas's project of a post-secular society with Connolly's politics of becoming (Connolly, 1999: 51–53; 57–62). In doing so, we attempt to understand the new role of religion as a challenger of the liberal projects following the decline of communism. Against this background, section four focuses on Habermas's central arguments in his proposal for a post-secular society. We claim that the *problematique* in Habermas's analysis must be placed within the wider framework of an emerging global public sphere. Before concluding remarks, the last two sections examine consequently the problem of religion's place in political process and the two readings of Habermas as suggested by Simone Chambers (2007).

The secularization debate

In the post-Second World War era, the central role of religion in sociology, as exemplified in the works of Durkheim (1994) and Weber (1993), seems to have been displaced by a fascination with social *systems*. Thus, a functional perspective became prevalent instead of locating ideas and interests of actors in the structures of meaning, in which religion held the pride of place. Questions of modernization, political development, and rational action reigned supreme rather than questions concerning the role of world religions or their civilizations and teachings, which

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had given rise to particular historical forms of sociality.[2] To some extent, these developments were the logical outcome of Weber's thesis on the disenchantment of modernity, where rational modes of action and organization were transforming all spheres of social life. Instead of comprehensive meaning structures, formal procedures and maximizing criteria, such as Lerner's 'sense of cash' characterizing modernity and political development, provided the background for interpretation and for 'predicting' future developments. In a way, this completed the secularization move that had appeared first in the construction of a 'world history' by the Enlightenment. After all, Enlightenment had transformed the old theological conception of 'history' as an eschatological narrative of salvation into an immanent *telos* of progress.

Given this legacy, it became questionable whether the indubitable decline of organized religion – evident in both the shrinking sector of practicing believers and in the loss of monopoly over the interpretation of existential questions which all denominations faced – could be pressed into the secularization/modernization scheme. Admittedly, the conception of a holy cosmos might have disappeared, and religious practice showed increasingly individualistic tendencies emphasizing personal beliefs and syncretistic elements rather than common rites or dogmatic exegesis. Yet, as Stark and Bainbridge (1985) suggest, the empirical record was far from corroborating the secularization argument. Instead, they argued persuasively that when religion declines, cults appear. The emergence of esoteric circles and movements, and the renewed interest in the occult and in 'foreign' religions showed that the focus on officially constituted churches had misled traditional sociology of religion. Thus, there was a need to develop a conceptual apparatus, free from traditional European manifestations and their conceptual baggage. Moreover, the divergence of secularizations in Western societies questioned the heuristic appropriateness of the modernization/secularization scheme, never mind the difficulties in applying this scheme to other regions.

The first question of a non-church-based research program in the sociology of religion was elaborated famously by Luckmann's (1967) *Invisible Religion*. Two decades later, Bourdieu's (1987) plea for a '*sociologie de la croyance*', instead of one focusing on churches, repeated this central demand.

The second question on the secularization/modernization scheme was addressed by Peter Berger (1969) in his *Rumour of Angels*, where he suggests important modifications to the secularization theory and points to the exceptional status of Europe in this regard. More recently, he has argued that far from representing a universal phenomenon, secularization shows specific stratification patterns that are highly relevant, at least for the future of international politics:

> My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions […], is as furiously religious as it ever was […] (Berger, 1999: 2).

[2] See, for example, Troeltsch's monumental work on the social teachings of the Christian churches: Ernst Troeltsch (1960), *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, New York: Harper.

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> There exists an international subculture composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, that is indeed secularized. This subculture is the principal 'carrier' of progressive, enlightened beliefs and values. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the 'official' definition of reality, notably the educational system, the media of mass communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system. They are remarkably similar all over the world today [...]. I cannot speculate here as to why people with this type of education should be so prone to secularization. I can only point out that what we have here is a globalized *elite* culture. In country after country, then, religious upsurges have a strongly populist character. Over and beyond the purely religious motives, these are movements of protest and resistance *against* secular elite (Berger, 1999: 10–11).

Importantly, not only has the traditional focus on Western societies skewed our perception of the pervasiveness and universality of secularization, but the global *optique* also provides us with the best indication of how the secularist project is being challenged, and how there is a need to rethink the relationship between religion and politics. After all, some religious movements have become global phenomena, and revolts against secular elites are not simply populist demands for redistribution – even if calls for justice are seldom missing – but deliberate attempts to delegitimize the existing order.

This challenge touches, therefore, on the very foundational myths underlying the Westphalian state system. Supposedly, a secular order was established whereby states increasingly defined their role as 'neutral' and viewed themselves as secular guarantors of political order. The *res publica Christiana* of old became the 'international system', managed through the pursuit of interests and the balance of power.

Clearly, both tenets of the Westphalian mythology need significant correction. The religious settlement, which was based on a modified version of the Peace of Augsburg – *cuius region, eius religio* – provided for the official recognition of a plurality of creeds. Yet, the 'neutral' liberal state did *not* emerge from Westphalia. Instead, and as is evident still today, nearly everywhere with the significant exception being the Low Countries, state churches and religious institutions were the rule in both catholic and protestant countries. These church organizations were charged with important administrative and social tasks. In some cities, domestic peace was predicated on some form of 'corporate' arrangement that guaranteed Catholics and Protestants parity in decision-making. Indeed, the notion of a *beatitudo civilis* as an 'end' of the state trumping tall other ends takes well into the 18th century to emerge. This notion coincided with the decline of the representative institutions of the old estate system. Historians have pointed out not only the crucial role played by religion in the emergence of the state, for even such figures of Enlightenment as Rousseau stressed the importance of a 'civil religion' for political order, but also that such 'modern' leaders as Napoleon

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wanted the benefits of the aura of the sacred, for example when he was crowned Emperor by the pope (even though he took the crown out of the pope's hand to place it on his head).

Similarly, the merely 'contractual' notion of international politics is the result of a positivist reconstruction of the development of international law in the late 19th century rather than a historical reality. The actors of the *res publica Christiana* knew quite well that outsiders, such as the Ottomans, mattered politically, but that membership in the European club was predicated on the recognition of the status of a player and his acceptance of certain conventions. Occasionally, there were also some larger common political undertakings of the European sovereigns, which often had significant religious overtones, as for example in the fight against the Ottomans. But the fact that it took until the Peace of Paris in 1856 to accept the Sublime Porte into that club – while all of Latin America had been admitted in the aftermath of their independence – suggests that considerably more was required for the reproduction of 'international politics' than the mere interaction among different 'units'.

Finally, in our time, we have witnessed the return of religion not only through fundamentalist warriors and terrorist networks but also through the forces of globalization. All three have undermined the historical compromises between the internal and the external, and between the public and the private domains, and they have reopened many of the problems that seemed to have been solved or that traditionally had not made the international agenda. To that extent, a simple return to Westphalia seems hardly possible. In addition, issues of global justice, human rights, and responsibility for nature and 'God's creation' are further proofs that the set of political problems on the global agenda has fundamentally changed. Finally, as shown by the collapse of the Soviet empire, in which both fundamentalist mujaheddin in Afghanistan and a Polish pope played a crucial part, the interaction between religion and politics has always played a much more vital role than the imagery of hermetically separate spheres suggests.

These brief historical reflections serve as important correctives for the conventional secularization thesis. Undoubtedly, they are at odds with the dominant understandings informing contemporary discourse. For example, a glance at the works of Huntington, and Norris and Inglehart make apparent the disconnection between actual practice and our conceptual maps. For Huntington (1997: 185, 238–245), future conflicts develop along the fault lines of religion, whereby both the traditional statist picture of international politics and its secular manifestation are abandoned only to re-enter the picture when he warns the West of a potential Confucian–Islamic connection. Similarly disturbing is Norris and Inglehart's (2004: 215–241) treatment of the consequences for Western secular societies that live in abundance while they face an increasing segment of poor and religious people around the world. Here, the problem between the numerous poor and the childless rich – a traditional opposition as the use of the term 'proletariat' from Rome to Marx attests – lacks even the faintest allusion to problems of distributive

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

It is easy to fathom that neither proposal holds any promise for a solution. Given these problems, the secularization thesis, both in its original and modified form, fails to come to terms with the existing practices and to grasp the legitimization deficit which appears when one tries to base future actions on old recipes. The old strategies may have worked in the past but the preconditions for their success have been altered in the meantime. The issue is not only that actual problems have overtaken the 'maps', which were supposed to provide orientation, but also that the old representations do not possess the conceptual resources for developing alternatives to the present impasses. For example, the anaemic character of possessive individualism animating the liberal project has become a liability, as critics as diverse as Connolly (1999) and Taylor (1989) have pointed out. It is exactly here where Habermas's argument for a post-secular political order can contribute to a broadening of the horizon within which new opportunities can then be identified.

The politics of becoming after the fall of communism

It has hopefully become clear from the previous section that the 'return of religion' to politics in general and to international politics in particular cannot be reduced to the repercussions of 9/11, even though that event had a decisive impact. In this section, we compare this specific militant and violent 'return of religion' with the eschatological-utopian potential of communism, in order to explain the origins of Habermas's interest in religious semantics. Finally, we argue that, structurally speaking, Islamism has inherited the role of a principal challenger to the West, as Barber has already argued in responding to Fukuyama.[3] Philpott (2002) provides a fitting shorthand in this respect:

> The ultimate goal of radical revivalists is the Islamization of this order, replacing secular order with divine order, the nation state with an Islamic system, democracy with an Islamic notion of consultation, positive law and human legislation with *sharia* and government of the people and by the people with God's rule (Philpott, 2002: 89).

This principled opposition is not founded on territorially based block-confrontations resonant of the Cold War, rather it derives from a discursive gambit which anchors social order in religion. The West faces no longer a communist, atheistic challenge, which militarily dominated a significant part of the globe and

[3] 'The days of Islam's cultural conquests, it would seem, are over.' (Fukuyama, 1992: 42; Barber, 1995). For a discussion see Smith (2002: 174–176).

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whose influence and activities went well beyond the Elbe, but an opponent whose 'fifth columns' and networks have penetrated its very societies. Today, Muslims everywhere distance themselves from the militant versions of Islam, much like socialists and communists had to do with regard to Stalinism. Justifiably or not, they are under suspicion that Islam – like communism – is likely to result in a politics of violence. Of course, behind this suspicion lies the general mistrust towards all religions based on claims of ultimate truth. Assmann (1997, 2007) identifies this attitude as a particular problem of monotheistic religions, be that as it may.

In any case, it seems that while communism was formerly the dominant mode of criticism, religion has now become the principal discourse for airing grievances and for demanding change. This was already apparent during the Iranian revolution, when the opposition to the regime and to the West was made in terms of a theological vocabulary that was used by people, who at first blush appeared often thoroughly 'Western'. Similarly today, the secular and political discourse of pan-Arabism, which was the original conduit for opposing the West, has been replaced by a more fundamentalist 'Muslim' criticism of Western society and culture. Obviously, the collapse of the Soviet empire has also affected the persuasiveness of the secular narrative of progress. Communist ideology offered an alternative vision of political order, which opposed the liberal West, and which justified the role of the secular socialist movement within world politics.

With this changing of the guards from communism to Islam as the main antagonist, the West – or at least Europe – encounters a historically familiar adversary. In contrast to communism, Islam does not represent a foreign and hermetically sealed culture. It has with the West many roots in antiquity and in the subsequent Judeo-Christian traditions. Both the West and Islam have not only a history of conflict but also of a great give and take, even though these exchanges were hardly ever evenly balanced. After all, Islamic culture bloomed long before the rise of the West; one should remember el Andaluz and the transmission of the ancient classics via Arabic scholars to the West! Western influence, on the other hand, became most noticeable during later periods coinciding with colonialism i.e. a period in which the original political and cultural leadership had been lost. These 'facts' gain significance especially when the decline is interpreted in religious terms, in other words, as punishment for abandoning strict Islam. In this interpretation, 'secularization' has emasculated Islam's power and made the community of believers an object of European power politics.

Despite the allure of such an 'explanatory' narrative of the fall from hegemony, it conveniently overlooks the fact that the end of Arab predominance was *not* brought about by the 'West' but by internal dissent, the Mongol onslaught, and the subsequent consolidation of Osmani power. To the extent to which a historical dialogue is secularist – supposedly 'objective' and based on historical 'facts' – it is, as any 'history', rife with recollections that bring serious impediments and liabilities to a fruitful discourse. Thus, quite contrary to the belief that a secular narrative must be a 'neutral ground', which is uniquely predestined to serve as a

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basis of communication across all fault-lines, we should understand that history is always a production of memory and not a collection of brute facts. After all, remembering actions and events always proceeds from a present *problematique*, which in turn assigns importance and meaning to the things remembered and to our projects in the future.

In short, far from providing an Archimedean point of view due to its 'facticity', history is always implicated in the very political struggles of the day. Equally, it is no accident that the process of 'recovering' one's history is usually the first step towards emancipation among individuals and groups. In this sense, one might overestimate the potential of historical dialogue and forgo the opportunities that arise out of a direct confrontation of the problems of order. Although different political designs may clash, at least here exponents could meet at the same level and without some of the historical baggage. A case in point seems to be the 'fruitful' dialogue between Islam and the scholastics. There the different voices resulted neither in a cacophony of recrimination nor in simple idiosyncratic affirmations or claims of possessing 'the truth', despite the participants bringing their own interpretations of the classical Platonic or Aristotelian texts to the dialogue.

Precisely here, Habermas's attempt to examine the semantic potential of religion should be located. After the fall of communism, Habermas has searched for a counter-paradigm and new opportunities to counteract the claims of unfettered capitalism, which has become part of 'globalization'. For him, the contemporary situation is characterized by the fact that

> normative consciousness is not only threatened from without by the reactionary desire for a fundamentalist counter-modernity, but it is also threatened internally by the derailing modernization itself. The division of labour between the integrative mechanisms of the market, the bureaucracy and social solidarity is no longer in equilibrium but has been altered in favour of economic imperatives, which rewards the type of interactions which are governed by the self interest of respective actors. The introduction of new technologies which reach deeply into the until now considered 'natural' elements of the person reinforce a naturalistic understanding of the subjects and their actions (Habermas, 2005: 247–248).[4]

Habermas (2006a: 43) surmises that within religious communities something might still exist 'that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by the professional knowledge of experts alone'. He believes that he can refer to 'adequately differentiated possibilities of expression and to sensitivities with regard to lives that have gone astray, with regard to societal pathologies, with regard to the failure of individuals' plans for their lives, and with regard to the deformation and disfigurement of the lives that people share with one another' (2006a: 42–43). Therefore, Habermas's interest in the moral sense of religious communities is

[4] Own translation.

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derived from his recognition of the poverty of the secular discourse, which in its neo-liberal and naturalistic form has engendered the diagnosed pathologies but provides insufficient resources for counteracting its derailments. Although Habermas does not reveal all of his cards, he obviously wants to recover the potential a 'relevant utopia' could have for social and political life, as, for example, Simone Chambers confirms:

> There is an utopian core to religious eschatology that can be harnessed for or allied with this-worldly causes such as global justice … […] … Habermas recognizes the normative potential of religion as a counterweight to instrumentalization (Chambers, 2007: 215).

In this reading of Habermas, Chambers follows Wolin (2005), according to whom Habermas recognizes that religion

> prevents the denizens of the modern secular society from being overwhelmed by the all-encompassing demand of vocational life and worldly success. It offers a much-needed dimension of otherness: The religious values of love, community, and godliness help to offset the global dominance of competitiveness, acquisitiveness, and manipulation that predominate in the vocational sphere (Wolin, 2005: 16–17).

It is one thing to use religion as a provider of new impulses for conventional arguments but quite another to come to terms with its transformative potential. In other words, if religious discourses have the persuasiveness that is necessary to strengthen their potential for criticism, they are bound to develop their own dynamics. In this sense, Connolly's approach to a 'politics of becoming' and his advocacy of 'deep pluralism' go beyond what Habermas has in mind when he, like Connolly, criticizes Rawls (Connolly, 1999: 22–23; Habermas, 2006b: 10). On the other hand, Connolly takes issue with the Habermas of a few years ago, not only because the exclusion of religion-based arguments in the public sphere contradicts pluralism but also because laicism introduces a particular kind of sterility into the public realm, which Connolly dubs 'pure politics'. Against this sterile notion, he advocates a politics of becoming.

Unlike the usual attempts to cement political stability by a basic consensus,[5] the politics of becoming is supposed to create an opening for change, particularly in those situations in which one party profits from stability while others suffer from it (Connolly, 1999: 19–71, 163–187). As he points out:

> The most complex ethical issues arise in those contexts where suffering is intense and its visitation upon some is bound up with securing the self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence, or cultural merits of others. That is, the most intense, intractable cases of suffering are political in character. They often revolve around what I call the politics of becoming (Connolly, 1999: 51).

[5] Here Connolly refers to Nietzsche's term 'Winterphilosophie'.

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As Connolly explains:

> By *the politics of becoming* I mean the paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries. The politics of becoming emerges out of the energies, suffering, and lines of flight available to culturally defined differences in a particular institutional constellation. To the extent it succeeds in placing a new identity on the cultural field, the politics of becoming changes the shape and contour of already entrenched identities as well (Connolly, 1999: 57).

Although Connolly might not relate the above observation to the global conflict between the dominant secular thinking and the counter-discourses challenging its hegemony, he nevertheless describes rather fittingly what is happening in the global sphere after the 'return of religion'. His objection to pure politics and his advocacy of deep pluralism are aimed at creating more inclusive consensus through the politics of becoming. He does so, however, with the full awareness that not all can be included, even though an increasing number can participate in political contestation.

The politics of becoming faces a considerable challenge by the secular West in the global public sphere, as it appears that the West could defend its position quite well with a form of Nietzschean '*Winterphilosophie*' represented by secularism. The central idea of the philosophy of becoming is, however, that only openness to change makes it possible to have an *argumentative* rather than a *conflictual* transformation. In short, the crucial point for a global politics of becoming is the recognition of others on equal terms. In this context, Connolly follows Deleuze by mentioning the case of religious and secular interlocutors, who both experience a critical distance between the articulations of their positions and the proper meaning of their positions, which opens the space for dialogue and change (Connolly, 1999: 43–46).

Moreover, some other authors such as Bagge Laustesen and Ole Wæver go even further by distinguishing between religion and ideology and by admitting that concrete creeds might sometimes be closer to the latter. For them, ideology attempts to 'legitimize a given polity and policy by the use of a quasi-religious semantics' (Laustesen and Wæver, 2000: 726). The distinguishing characteristic of religion is its openness that militates against all attempts to reduce it to an instrument of policy or legitimization: 'Religion constitutes being […] ideology constitutes identity. […] Ideologies create an illusion of a fullness of being, while religion stress(es) that there is always a higher being barring the subject' (2000: 728).

If we were to reintroduce the line of thinking above into the debate of Rawls and Habermas/Connolly, we could say that a narrow secularism fits the template of an ideological comprehensive doctrine far better than the notion of an open religion. Furthermore, the notion of a global politics of becoming enables us to fathom the critical and utopian potential of religious discourse as a means of meeting a host of challenges that have arisen with the demise of communism and

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with the advent of globalization. Certainly such a commitment to the politics of becoming is risky, but it would seem to provide the point of departure for a politics that moves beyond the ossified stability, which Nietzsche once rightly criticized as '*Winterphilosophie*'.

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

Habermas's thinking with regard to the contemporary post-communist and post-nationalist era was outlined in the previous sections. In this part, we engage with some of his more specific arguments and examine their applicability to contemporary 'global' politics. One difficulty is that, in the past years, Habermas has changed his views considerably with regard to the place and role of religion. While in 1999, Habermas was still Connolly's main 'secular' sparring partner, Connolly hinted around that time at the possibility of a change that would bring the Habermasian project within the penumbra of Connolly's post-secular politics of becoming – a point that seems to have materialized:

> Now a new Habermas could say: It is impossible to participate in discourse without projecting the counterfactual possibility of consensus; but, hey, since each attempt to interpret the actual import of that counterfactuality in any concrete setting is also problematical and contestable, this stricture does not rule out in advance religious or non-theistic metaphysical perspectives that exceed the terms of the postmetaphysical alternative my younger self endorsed as necessary. […]
>
> In an age of globalization and the accentuation of speed in so many domains of life, a cultural pluralism appropriate to the times is unlikely to be housed in an austere postmetaphysical partisanship that purports to place itself above the fray. The need today, rather, is to rewrite secularism to pursue an ethos of engagement in public life among a plurality of controversial *metaphysical* perspectives, including, for starters, Christian and other monotheistic perspectives, secular thought, and asecular, nontheistic perspectives. A new modus vivendi is needed to replace the Kantian achievement in which a few fundamental differences *within Christianity* were relegated to the private realm in the name of a generic rational religion or a generic reason. Here pluralism would not be grounded in one austere moral source adopted by everyone (say a universal conception of rational religion, or discourse, or persons, or justice). It would be grounded in an ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies honouring a variety of moral sources and metaphysical orientations. Such an ethos *between* interdependent partisans provides an existential basis for democratic politics if and when partisans affirm without deep resentment the contestable character of the fundamental faith they honor most (Connolly, 1999: 38–39).

Evidently, although Habermas has not left Kant behind, he has realized many of Connolly's proposals within the parameters of his project. This is particularly

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visible if one considers Habermas's works preceding his *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992), which was Connolly's focus.

Habermas formulates the linguistic transformation of the sacred, based on his discussion on the sociology of religion, in the second part of *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987: 43–111). With this thesis he means

> the transfer of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization from sacred foundations over to linguistic communication and action oriented to mutual understanding. To the extent that communicative action takes on central societal functions, the medium of language gets burdened with tasks of producing substantial consensus. In other words, language no longer serves merely to *transmit* and actualize prelinguistically guaranteed agreements, but more and more to *bring about* rationally motivated agreements as well; it does so in moral–practical and in expressive domains of experience no less than in the specifically cognitive domain of dealing with an objectivated reality (Habermas, 1987: 107).

Here, it is unnecessary to decide to what extent these arguments, which push the world religions nearer to the rationalistic language of the Enlightenment whereby the sacred is reduced to the mythical, are still tenable. This attempt, for example to locate Christian faith in-between linguistic rationality and pre-linguistic mysticism, could be compatible with a religious perspective, as it borders some of Ratzinger's arguments (Ratzinger, 2004). Yet, since the inducing of a rationally motivated consensus seems a rather heroic assumption by now, Habermas argues that the new focus on language can provide the required task of transmission and actualization. According to him, the left-Hegelian project of the 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*) of religion in thought and of the bringing about of the heavenly kingdom on earth – whereby theological concepts must fit a needle's eye of critical reason in order to be viable in a profane environment – has been a failure. Hence, he notices a general turn towards some forms of messianic hope ranging from Adorno to Derrida. Moreover, Habermas (2003: 111–113) seems to share this hope.

Yet, Habermas (2006a: 41) wants to avoid becoming 'easy prey for theology', despite his insight regarding the limitations of his philosophy and its fragile position within 'modernity'. Thus, he insists on the 'generic distinction (which is not at all meant in a pejorative sense) between the secular […] discourse that claims to be accessible to all men and the religious discourse that is dependent upon the truth of revelation' (2003: 109). Rather, he suggests that '[d]eterming these disputed boundaries should therefore be seen as a cooperative task which requires *both* sides to take on the perspective of the other one' (2003: 109). By focusing on boundary drawing, he avoids the implicit Kantian and Hegelian evaluation of religion by the standards of philosophy (2006a: 42–47). Indeed, Habermas supplements the respect for successful life projects with a readiness to learn. He finds such repositories of meaning in religious communities:

> Those moral feelings which only religious language has as yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging

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> formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed. The mode for nondestructive secularization is translation (Habermas, 2003: 114).

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

Habermas proposes the concept of a post-secular society for the project of preserving the semantic potential of religion through a procedure of translation; it has three identifiable dimensions: one moral, one political, and one philosophical. Within the moral dimension, the world religions serve (in their reflexive understanding) as the bastions for preserving moral feelings, articulations, arguments, and motivations. Such questions as whether, in the long run, moral argumentation can function without religion is elegantly side-stepped by Habermas. He suggests that this is an empirical question, and that as far as he is concerned he intends to hold his position of what is potentially a 'purely' secular morality (Habermas, 2006a: 38).

In the political dimension, on the other hand, Habermas pleads for a new openness *vis-à-vis* religiously informed objections, as together with the moral dimension they might provide important resources for escaping from the pathologies and derailments of footloose modernization. However, he draws a line between the public domain and the state, which religious arguments cannot negotiate (Habermas, 2006b).

Finally, the philosophical dimension provides, via its translation capability, the accessibility of the religious messages to those who use only the common public language (Habermas, 2005: 216–257).

Within these three dimensions, one finds various connections. Above all, the link between the political and the moral dimensions, as well as the consequences of any dependency of political arguing on pre-political religious arguments, is important for the realm of international politics. Moreover, there is another connection between the philosophical and the political dimensions begging the question how 'deep' the postulated pluralism has to be in order to include all relevant forces of a politics of becoming on the global level. The following section discusses these two connections.

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

In order to understand better the benefit of using Habermas's work on post-secular society, it is useful to consider a particular contribution he made in a debate with Ratzinger (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006). Habermas used as his foil the Böckenförde theorem (Böckenförde, 1967: 112; Habermas, 2006a: 21), which indicates that the secularized state is based on presuppositions which the

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state alone cannot guarantee. In counteracting any cooptation attempts, Habermas insisted that only weak substantive assumptions derived from the normative content of socio-cultural lifeworlds are necessary for creating a social bond. Further, it is important for him that the citizens *constitute* the power of the state rather than simply tame it via discoursive gambits. Consequently, there remains no pre-constitutional power in need of a pre-political partner or opposition. In other words, if one sees democratic procedures as 'a method whereby legitimacy is generated by legality, there is no "deficit of validity" that would need to be filled by the ethical dimension' (Habermas, 2006a: 28). Inspired by Kant, the proceduralist understanding of the constitutional state insists (against the Hegelian view of law) that the basic principles of the constitution have an autonomous justification and that all citizens can rationally accept the claim this justification makes. The 'uniting bond', missed by Böckenförde, need not be supplied by some pre-political institution, rather it consists in the 'democratic process itself' (Habermas, 2006a: 32).

In Habermas's contributions, much like in Rawls, there is a noticeable tendency to accord increasing importance to the concrete 'life-world', although he continues to put his trust in reason and in democratic procedures. Although political virtues play a subordinate role for him, he nevertheless recognizes the importance of the embeddedness of state in a civil society 'that is nourished by springs that well forth spontaneously – springs that one may term "pre-political"' (Habermas, 2006a: 30–31). In his vision, the consciousness of a post-secular society will respect all sources that sustain the normative consensus and solidarity among the citizens. That applies to religious communities as well, that have integrated universal principles of justice in their orthodox teachings. Ideally, however, the democratic dynamics should be sufficient to sustain the costly motivations of accepting obligations *vis-à-vis* other citizens who remain anonymous. Yet for Habermas, Böckenförde's fears of a disintegrating citizenry insisting on its subjective rights are plausible, because the increasing autonomy and dominance of social subsystems, such as the economy and the withdrawal from the political into the private life, are part of a derailing modernization. The social bond might break (Habermas, 2006a: 35–37).

In this multifaceted discussion, Habermas makes an audacious move. As hinted at earlier, he claims that the question whether communicative reason is sufficient to stabilize the modernization process can be treated 'undramatically' as an 'open, empirical question' (Habermas, 2006a: 38). Here Habermas errs, because the very treatment of this issue as an empirically open question is anything but non-dramatic! If it turned out that a secular moral could function only under ideal circumstances and not under 'normal' conditions, the project of a secular or agnostic Enlightenment would have to be considered a failure. Irrespective of one's general position, there seems to be a consensus reaching from Böckenförde to Habermas, that religiously based arguments and attitudes make valuable contributions to the public order and its discourses. Of course, this does not mean that religious persons are *eo ipso* also moral persons; such a

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self-serving move must be opposed particularly by those who take their religion seriously.

To explain better, the contribution of the believing part of the public to the political discourse is independent of the substantive claims or the personal integrity and seriousness with which the beliefs inform an individual's life. It simply means addressing alternative goals rather than being stuck and reducing public life to supporting rational maximization of what is unreflectively considered individual satisfaction – after all, *de gustibus non est disputandum* – or even more narrowly, to capital accumulation in a footloose economy. Thus, different from the strange recollections of many adherents of the Enlightenment, the tropes of religious argumentation do not simply preserve the *status quo*, since the coalition between the throne and the altar has long disappeared, but they provide now an important alternative vision to the dominant 'liberal' or neoliberal utopia. In the sense of the politics of becoming, the task is the introduction of some dissonant voices to the secular choir rather than stabilizing the existing narrow discourse.

Given the desire for plurality, the question remains as to how much room one should accord to dissonant voices. With this question, a weak point in Habermas's argumentation becomes obvious, as has been noted by both supporters and opponents of a larger role of religious semantics. As mentioned earlier, Habermas separates the realm of public opinion, in which religious argumentation is desirable, from the sphere of the state and its institutions, which ought to remain free from religious tinges. Religious arguments are to contribute to moral arguments but not to take over. In this, Habermas follows Nicholas Wolterstorff who attacked the Rawlsian position on this subject. Yet, Habermas accepts only Wolterstorff's first point, and he rejects the opinion that religious arguments should have a role in the institutional sphere (Habermas, 2006b: 11–12). This separation, however, is untenable as pointed out by Paolo Flores d'Arcais:

> Habermas claims that there are two separate worlds of communication in which mutually incompatible rules prevail. According to this proposal the official Hillary Clinton is enjoined from mentioning God when she is campaigning while her husband Bill can do this in public when he is campaigning for her. The 'pragmatic solution' by which Habermas tries to escape from his contradictions is not a practicable one. After all, it is simply a fact that in the public spheres all (or at least a good and increasing number) are invoking God (Flores d'Arcais, 2007: 57).[6]

It is small wonder that secular citizens are concerned, because a strict separation between a public and an institutional argumentation cannot be maintained, as suggested by Casanova (1994). The reason parallels Habermas's basic assumptions that nowadays the pre-political sphere of public opinion is no longer facing an

[6] Own translation.

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absolutist state, and that constitutional principles and public policy both emerge from the process of public deliberations. To that extent, dividing the public into two spheres simply cannot function.

The fear remains, however, that by giving up this separation we arrive at an authoritarian state, which would insist on a common '*confessio*' much like the post-Westphalian developments in early modernity.[7] Yet, this fear can be alleviated, as Meave Cooke suggests. In accordance with Connolly's arguments for a deep pluralism, Cooke argues that the public sphere's task cannot be to simply 'translate' religious arguments so that they can become part of a secular policy. Rather, the task is to find better arguments that can be buttressed by both religious and secular reasons. Consequently, a post-secular state can result from a post-secular society (Cooke, 2007: 227–230, 232–234). With Connolly, religious arguments are not fixed and beyond deliberation as intimated by Habermas (2006: 12), but they are subject to criticism. After all, religious arguments are different from d'Arcais's caricature, and they are not limited to tropes like 'it's God's will' (Flores d'Arcais, 2007: 57),[8] even if secular citizens share a justified fear of God being invoked as an authority. Here, the crucial distinction seems to be between *authoritarian* and *non-authoritarian* forms of argumentation rather than between religious and secular arguments. As Cooke observes:

> There is no conflict in principle between non-authoritarian reasoning and an orientation towards some 'otherworldly', transcendent source of validity (for example God, or the good) […]. In short, non-authoritarian citizenship is independent of postmetaphysical or metaphysical thinking, and of religious belief […]. My contestation is that there are good reasons for excluding decision-making processes, but there are no good reasons, at least in the present context, for excluding contributions *solely* on the grounds that they are formulated in religious terms. […] Indeed, it may help citizens with religious worldviews who hold authoritarian views of truth and knowledge to see that religious faith is not necessarily dependent on such views, encouraging the kind of non-authoritarian approach, not just to knowledge but also to ethics and politics, that I see as a cornerstone of liberal democracy (Cooke, 2007: 235).

As correct as Cooke might be, religious arguments in the public sphere – ranging from domestic American fundamentalism to its Islamic versions in the international arena – go frequently together with authoritarian forms of argumentation. Here one has to decide: either one considers, like Connolly and Deleuze, that religious citizens are capable of critical argumentation, or one has to deny them this ability *a priori*. In the latter case, however, the reason for exclusion becomes obfuscated, because it is a flaw of the argumentative style rather than of the arguments themselves that would justify the exclusion.

[7] For example, Flores d'Arcais objections articulate well this fear.
[8] Own translation.

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This crucial point has been addressed by Pope Benedict in his controversial lecture at Regensburg (Schall and Pope Benedict, 2007) the return of religion to the political stage can occur and be acceptable to secular citizens only if it is accompanied by an absolute commitment to non-violence. In this, the pope agrees with the protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who identified the renunciation of force as the precondition for participation in political discourses to which all – hence also religious citizens – must subscribe (Ricoeur, 1992: 120). Only thus can religion contribute to public discourse in a post-secular society and to harnessing its semantic potential.

With the above clarification in mind, we can now address Cooke's last point, which has also been scrutinized by J.H.H. Weiler. Contrary to the European experience, global modernization is taking place in disjunction with 'secularization'. For this reason, the project of the democratic constitutional state will have a chance only if it is freed from its connotations of a-religiosity or of active hostility towards religion. In his plea for a Christian contribution to the European Union, Weiler (2003)[9] argues that one of the great obstacles to spreading democracy is the frequently alleged conflict between democracy and religion, and the acceptance of the belief that the introduction of democracy must go hand in hand with banning God and religion from the public sphere. This is particularly true of the French *laicite* model and also of some trends in American constitutional thinking. Yet, as Weiler (2004) suggests, this does not have to be Europe's message. If Europe exemplified openness to religious voices, it might foster democracy, worldwide, better than a rigorous secular example (2004: 64–65). This is also the message conveyed by the notion of a post-secular state as introduced by Cooke. After all, the situation 'on the ground' is less hopeless than what academic discourses portray. For example, and as shown by several opinion polls, the vast majority of Muslims rejects violence, accepts human rights (including the equality of sexes), and admires Western achievements, although not necessarily without some criticism of its social forms (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007). Without this being conclusive proof, it would be fatal if the practical working out of our differences were impeded by some philosophical argument with a largely ideological character.

Two possible readings of Habermas

'[I]s the postsecular condition just a detour on the road to philosophy's eventual success in bringing all-important moral institutions under the roof of profane reason? Or is the postsecular condition the manifestation (to some extent) of something more permanent?' (Chambers, 2007: 221). By asking these questions,

[9] Here quoted after the Joseph H.H. Weiler (2004), *Ein christliches Europa*, Salzburg: Pustet. For an abridged English version, see Joseph H.H. Weiler (2007), 'A Christian Europe? Europe and Christianity: rules of commitment', *European View* **6**.

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Simone Chambers addresses the crucial and ambivalent point in Habermas's proposed post-secular society.

As Chambers aptly remarks, there are two possible readings of Habermas. On the one hand, Habermas considers translation to be the central task of a post-secular society. Habermas uses such formulations as 'for the time being' or 'as yet' which seem to indicate that this task will be finished at some point. For Chambers, this is a *Platonic* interpretation, because it assumes that religion represents only a secondary means of communicating truth, which in turn is independent of religion and which can be grasped only by a few sages.

On the other hand, Chambers notices Habermas's tendency to accept that

> religious images speak to us in ways analogous to aesthetic images. While the content of these images might change over time, our essential openness to them does not. Thus, the power of religious language is not due to our level of historical/cultural development, but rather to something about the way we experience the world. On this reading, religion (or something like it) will always have the power to communicate truth (Chambers, 2007: 219–220).

Chambers calls this the Aristotelian interpretation of Habermas, because for Aristotle 'rhetoric' is not simply the outside wrapping of the actual arguments but it belongs intrinsically to political argumentation and its *practical* truth-claims.

The two readings of Habermas – one Platonic, the other Aristotelian – is well understood by Chambers. She uses them as a 'heuristic device in order to structure the problem in a certain way' (2007: 221). In this section, however, when referring to the different interpretations, we use the terms 'weak' instead of Platonic and 'strong' instead of Aristotelian.

The strong interpretation of Habermas accepts religion as a comprehensive and permanent partner in dialogue, while the weak interpretation assumes a conversation that is limited both in terms of topics and time. Moreover, the strong interpretation implies a stronger acceptance of religion, which in the international context appears more salient. Via the issue of 'translation', however, we are able to understand how a strong interpretation can also become acceptable to a secular public.

As mentioned previously, Habermas, the social theorist, tries to tackle the task of investigating and translating the semantic potential of religious language for public discourses. In this context the demarcation criterion of revelation is crucial. Even if there were a change in the self-conception of moving from secular to a post-secular society, pluralist societies could hardly be said to have the desire of becoming societies of believers. Thus, when Habermas discusses Kantian notions of God and immortality – topics which he explicitly rejects (Habermas, 2005: 216–257) – his boundary drawing seems to undermine the cooperative venture between secular and religious argumentation. One might ask whether such topics have to be taboo in principle, but since Habermas has discussed this problem explicitly with Ratzinger, thereby no longer observing the taboo, it might be useful

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to refer quickly to the latter's conception of reason. For Ratzinger, reason does not 'overcome' faith but is compatible with it. In this sense, and as Ratzinger (2004) argues, Christianity can be thought of as the fulfillment of the Enlightenment. Naturally, this claim can be applied to all 'reflexive' religions.

It is not necessary to decide here whether to accept Ratzinger's or Habermas's particular conception of reason. Such a question must be treated as an open question in a global post-secular society, if the cooperative dimension is to be preserved. Instead, the implications of the differing interpretations mentioned by Chambers merit our attention.

In the case of Habermas, the two different interpretations of his thesis can be best illustrated with his own examples. For instance, he uses the notions of creation and of man as an image of God in his criticism of genetic engineering and the concomitant manipulation of human freedom (Habermas, 2003: 114–115). In the space of two pages, he manages to provide much food for thought. Moreover, Habermas is quite successful in using the religious semantics of creation to buttress his claims of the dangers to freedom of a being that has been peer-produced rather than given life by a creator. Significantly, he does not provide a 'translation' into a secular language of such religious terms as 'creation' or 'image of God'. This would have been the task, which he explicitly mentions when he demands that new concepts able to provide new perspective can be derived from the available religious material. In this context, he also uses 'alienation' as an example and derives it from the conception of 'sin' (2005: 250). All of the above, of course, seems to point to a strong reading of Habermas.

Unsurprisingly, Habermas resorts to the controversial concept of sin when he criticizes social pathologies. Yet, he also addresses a deeper problem, namely the problem of a 'new beginning' and of 'freedom' contained in the semantic potential of 'sin':

> When sin was converted to culpability, and the breaking of divine commands to an offense against human laws, something was lost. The wish for forgiveness is still bound up with the unsentimental wish to undo the harm inflicted on others [...]. In moments like these, the unbelieving sons and daughters of modernity seem to believe that they owe more to one another, and need more for themselves, than what is accessible to them, in translation, of religious tradition – as if the semantic potential of the latter was still not exhausted (Habermas, 2003: 110–111).

With this admission, Habermas exceeds the limits of secular understanding and thus also the weak interpretation. The radical 'potential' for a 'new beginning' points to a reality that transcends the notion of death and sin, and for which religious communities have used the cipher of 'God'.

It should be obvious from these brief remarks that the two interpretations of Habermas are indeed distinctive. The weak interpretation forgoes all the semantic potential of concepts that explicitly imply another 'reality' and limits itself to less

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controversial topics. In contrast, the strong interpretation accepts dialogue with religious communities without *ex ante* restrictions so that even questions of the existence of God can become part of a 'reasonable' and shared consensus. Irrespective of which concrete religious concepts serve as a basis for the politics of becoming, it seems that only the strong version of Habermas is rich enough to realize the aspiration towards the deep pluralism which is characteristic of the global public sphere. Perhaps, this potential is then important enough to be taken seriously by even the secular citizens of the West and the international elites.

Conclusion

From a Western perspective, the presence of religion in IR seems like a 'return' to pre-Westphalian order, which has the odium of a revisionist project, particularly if the disappearance of religion and secularization is interpreted as indicating 'progress'. But as the three debates in different fields have shown, 'history' does not seem to follow the prescribed course. Furthermore, if one takes Berger's comments seriously, Europe and the international secular elites are in a more precarious position than the triumphalism of progress suggests. The masses of the global village are resisting and taking up arms against the secular establishment. While the actions are inarticulate, their seriousness has to be acknowledged, which in turn makes it necessary to come to terms, conceptually, with these challenges. To that extent, to reduce the problem to one of elites vs. masses is missing the point and it forgoes the opportunities that could result from rethinking the entire *problematique*.

Contrary to most IR experts, who still hope to round up the wagons and fight the passing raids of the challengers opposing their designs for running the world, Habermas understands that it makes little sense to push religion into the camp of fundamentalism. Instead, he recognizes religion's potential for change and for a relevant utopia, and he tries to harness this potential in the interest of a global reform. Yet, what in the domestic public appears as a revolutionary step for Habermas, namely admitting religion into public discourse, is a rather obvious presupposition for world politics. Moreover, the burden of proof whether a secular or a religious form of argumentation represents the 'normal' form of communication does not seem to be a foregone conclusion.

Habermas's proposal to accept religious semantics seems, therefore, promising. This is especially true if the global village constitutes itself in these discourses as a world society, and if this society is not based on the unbridgeable cleavages, *á la* Norris and Inglehart. Religious semantics transcending the limits of bounded communities represent a promising strategy for establishing a global public discourse and for tackling the pathologies of globalization and modernity.

Precisely because the global world is also a world of our making, the question whether a dialogue or a clash shall prevail hinges on the readiness to encounter some, at first strange and often even provocative, arguments. Only thus is it

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feasible to engage in a discussion which is not a mere appendix to the projections of military strength – whose limits have become, of late, increasingly obvious – or of one-sided insistence on the Western way of life as the panacea for all ills.

The price for this adjustment is openness and critical attitude towards one's own preferences and beliefs in the sense of a deep pluralism. Habermas's post-secular society and its requirements, when applied to the global public sphere, could be a promising step in this direction. In the case of the global village, it might be appropriate to apply the old adage of Henry IV in relation to building a viable French community: 'Paris is worth a mass'.

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