

Freedom in the 1990s

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Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century there was a renaissance of liberalism and a new interest in freedom in modern Western industrialised nations. Theologians responded to the intellectual discourse in various ways while treating the concept of freedom in theology. Here three different engagements with the understanding of freedom and liberalism at the end of the century are introduced. The first is a critique of liberalism and rejection of modern accounts of freedom as autonomy. This account draws upon historical and theological resources in the presentation of modern liberalism as a negative development in theology and in understandings of society. In the article here, this first approach is presented in the context of its social and political orientation and contemporary context in the later twentieth century. While some of the contours of this first approach are viewed critically, one aspect of its intentions is praised. The second example is an adoption of the discourse of modern liberalism and a justification of it with an account of the Reformation as its progenitor. This account draws upon a narrative of progressive liberation in modern human history. The second approach is addressed here in its particular context after the Second World War and in the specific cultural and theological framework of the latter part of the twentieth century. While the revival of modern liberal theology in the latter part of the twentieth century is presented here as a necessary development in the wake of radical early twentieth century anti-liberalism, some of the sweeping claims of this approach are viewed critically. Finally, a third mediatory approach is presented. This general group sought to advance a form of the liberal theological tradition while also theologically challenging Enlightenment conceptions of autonomy. Three brief examples are drawn upon to illustrate this approach. One is concerned with providing orientation for the basic doctrinal question of human freedom and sin. The second example deals with the systematic theological specification of human freedom in the postmodern context and its relation to an understanding of divine freedom. The third example deals with the ethical implications of a theologically grounded understanding of freedom.

Keywords: autonomy, freedom, liberalism, modern theology, twentieth century.

Freedom and the Late Twentieth-Century Renaissance of Liberalism

Quid est libertas? (What is freedom?), Cicero asked, and answered by claiming that it is the *potestas vivendi, ut velis*, the ability to live as you like (*Paradoxa Stoicorum*, 34). That simple adage of Stoic wisdom may have been enough to please some, but for a Swabian intellect, it was not. In Georg W. F. Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*) the self-elected Prussian pleaded for an understanding of world history as the advancement of the self-realisation of freedom: 'Die Weltgeschichte ist der Fortschritt im Bewußtsein der Freiheit' (The history of the world is the advance in the consciousness of freedom); he could thus declare that 'Die Weltgeschichte geht von Osten nach Westen' (World history goes from east to west).¹ The description of Western self-understanding and identity in terms of freedom was accelerated in recent history during the Cold War and the polarities of the 'free-West' for freedom against the 'bound-East' for peace. As Anselm Doering-Manteuffel has written: 'Der Kampf für die "Freiheit" im Westen und für den "Frieden" im Osten sollte in Politik und Gesellschaft hüben und drüben identitätsstiftend wirken' (The struggle for 'freedom' in the West and for 'peace' in the East worked to establish identity in politics and society on both sides).² Freedom's high place in Western self-identity, as reflected in Hegel's philosophy, is also attested to in Heinrich August Winkler's work; the prominent German historian's recent *Geschichte des Westens* (*History of the West*) charts the birth and development of this characteristic, among others, especially the division of power, in Western culture. These ideals constitute the central aspects of what Winkler calls the 'normatives Projekt' (normative project) of the West.³ Although the first volume of his history of the West was published in 2009, many of his earlier publications have a similar viewpoint. Jürgen Habermas' political philosophy, as exemplified in his speech 'Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt' ('Modernity – an uncompleted project') from 1980, was clearly an important milestone for the development of the discourse of the 'Projekt der Moderne' in terms of

¹ *Werkausgabe*, vol. 12 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 134.

² Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, 'Im Kampf um Frieden und Freiheit. Über den Zusammenhang von Ideologie und Sozialkultur im Ost-West-Konflikt', in Hans Günter Hockerts (ed.), *Koordinaten deutscher Geschichte in der Epoche des Ost-West-Konflikts* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003), p. 36.

³ Heinrich August Winkler, *Geschichte des Westens: Von den Anfängen in der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 2009). See his other important works: *Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (1993); *Streitfragen der deutschen Geschichte* (1997); *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, vol. 1, *Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik* (2000); vol. 2, *Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung 1933–1990* (2000).

the expansion of freedom and liberalism for the 1980s and 1990s.⁴ John Rawls was also very influential in attempting to reconcile Enlightenment concepts of freedom, contractual theory, equality and the modern society in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971). This text became an important resource for the renaissance of liberalism in the second half of the twentieth century.⁵ Although the mood of the later 1980s and 1990s was clearly different from that of the *fin de siècle* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the birth of classical modernity, there was an intellectual zeitgeist at the end of the twentieth century which was equally inescapable. In the late twentieth century there was a lively discourse on liberalism and freedom among political theorists, historians, theologians and philosophers in the context of a changing political landscape, the rise of the European Union and the global distribution of Western values. In the wake of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, the end of António Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, and Francisco Franco's in Spain in 1975, many south American, central American, African and Asian countries transformed from military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes to democratic governments in the 1970s and 1980s; this reached a point of emotive symbolism in the collapse of the 'anti-fascist protection wall' in 1989, and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and reunification of Germany in the years that followed. By the late 1980s and through the 1990s the intellectual forum in many industrialised nations had been saturated with talk of freedom. This emphasis on freedom in the late twentieth century accompanied not only political and ethical frameworks, philosophical concepts of the person and theological schools which support them, but also many counter-narratives, and not a few from the realms of communitarianism in the assault on the modern autonomous self or the self-oriented materialistic society, or the 'buffered self' (Charles Taylor).⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), which is similar to his popular *After Virtue* (1981), is particularly insightful,

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt' (1980), in idem, *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt: Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze 1977–1990* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1990). He developed his communicative theory for the modern world in the early 1980s, cf. idem, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981–2).

⁵ See also his *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁶ His earlier publication on the self is: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989); there he discusses the rise of the 'disengaged subject', 'new sense of freedom', 'self-possession', 'self-objectification', 'dominance of reason', 'disengagement', 'self-making', the 'punctual self', etc; the term 'buffered self' is developed in his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

not for its rejection of Hegel but for the constructive offer of an alternative. While he makes no claims about the history of the world, a universal claim about the human-self is asserted: the virtues of acknowledged dependence point to an area where 'men need to become more like women'.⁷ In fact, MacIntyre has taken it upon himself to correct a lack in the entire history of Western moral philosophy: 'From Plato to Moore and since there are usually, with some rare exceptions, only passing references to human vulnerability and affliction and to the connections between them and our dependence on others.'⁸ It is this dependence which MacIntyre creatively explores; he is not simply analysing the reality of it, but the consequences of it, for it is a means to virtuous human flourishing, in an Aristotelian ethical framework. He asks: 'what difference to moral philosophy would it make, if we were to treat the facts of vulnerability and affliction and the related facts of dependence as central to the human condition?'⁹ The strong, perhaps masculine account of freedom in Hegel has met, in MacIntyre, a feminine dependence on a greater self-awareness, not a *Bewußtsein der Freiheit* (consciousness of freedom), but one of interrelationship and the *conditio humana*.

Some of the counter-proposals, and not only MacIntyre's, responded to a relatively simplified discourse on freedom in the late twentieth century which has roots in humanism and the early Enlightenment. They sometimes sought to establish a more radical break with the Western tradition leading to the Enlightenment, and were thus driven back into the late Middle Ages. Although the object of criticism was a perceived over-emphasis on Enlightenment individualism and autonomy, which has primary roots in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political and social philosophy, this was projected back onto the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Nominalists were viewed as responsible for setting the stage for the modern autonomous individual. While the broad meaning of freedom was reduced to the limited sense of autonomy, the critique of modern autonomy, *pars pro toto*, became a critique of freedom itself.

An Anglo-American Antithesis

MacIntyre was not alone in responding to simplified moral accounts of autonomy in the 1980s and 1990s. One response to the modern individual is also found in a group which would later be named Radical Orthodoxy. Many individuals in this group have taken up the topic of the modern concept of freedom in a relatively critical and sometimes reductionist manner. Stanley

⁷ *Dependent Rational Animals* (London: Duckworth, 1999), p. 164. See also his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁸ *Dependent Rational Animals*, pp. 1–2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Hauerwas (who called modern democracy, freedom, justice and human rights bad ideas in the 1990s) may be seen on the edges of this group; he has also contributed to Radical Orthodoxy publications recently and has proved to be influential for some of the thinkers.¹⁰ When it comes to addressing freedom philosophically and theologically in the new school, the late medieval *via moderna* is a critical turning point. The deterioration of the Thomistic ideal, the development of the late scholastic theories of knowledge and predication, and the separation of philosophy from theology with Duns Scotus (c.1270–1308) and William of Ockham (c.1285–1347) are thus made the genetic root of the modernist error.¹¹ The Reformation is presented as the immediate progenitor of a new *religio moderna*, a religion of the will. John Milbank writes of this in an exemplary fashion in his *Theology and Social Theory*, originally published in 1990: ‘late-medieval nominalism, the protestant reformation and seventeenth-century Augustinianism, . . . completely privatized, spiritualized and transcendentalized the sacred, and concurrently reimagined nature, human action and society as a sphere of autonomous, sheerly formal power’.¹² An ‘incipient liberalism’ is also read back into Augustine’s opponents: ‘The Roman commonwealth . . . is actually

¹⁰ Cf., Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991); idem, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); idem, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989).

¹¹ Ockham is well known for his Spartan logical dictum: *Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate* (‘plurality is not to be posited without necessity’), which mirrors his rejection of the simple harmonisation of revelation and Aristotelian philosophy (sc. Aquinas). Scotus before him also contributed to the division of theology and philosophy. He also turned more definitively to the centrality of the will in his doctrine of God. While both Aquinas and Scotus denied the Augustinian account of the necessity of divine illumination for the comprehension of natural truth, Scotus’ account of the principle of individuation begins with the unique instance (*haecceitas*, ‘thisness’), whereas Aquinas’ begins with the shared *materia*.

¹² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), p. 9. Richard H. Roberts writes: ‘In effect, the whole of Dr Milbank’s argument is a prioristic and consists in the construction of an extended theological circle in which all the justificatory (rather than exploratory) procedures in the four treatises have in effect pre-determined outcomes. In such a constructed context, the reductive construal of sociology as a scientific discipline exclusively in terms of the metanarrative of secular reason is a misleading distortion.’ (Richard H. Roberts, ‘Transcendental Sociology? A Critique of John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993), p. 533.). He continues: ‘*Theology and Social Theory* expresses a set of doctrines that should be resisted by both theologians and sociologists, not least because it misconstrues and distorts their respective disciplinary remits.’ (Ibid., p. 534.)

condemned by Augustine for its individualism, and for not really fulfilling the goals of antique politics. . . . Augustine recognizes an individualizing degeneration in Rome's more recent history, and condemns the "incipient liberalism" . . .¹³ Milbank seems to suggest that Christianity's battle against liberalism is much older than the nineteenth century. He writes further of the modern condition in 'post-humanism' in which 'freedom is only a reality as arbitrary power' or 'the promotion of the strongest': 'In civil society this is manifest as the growing postmodern dominance of the market system . . . recent capitalism . . . a war that is constant and invisible, all against all, and all against created nature'.¹⁴ The corrupt 'secular culture of modernity' shows itself in 'the private will respecting the freedom of others'.¹⁵ Part of the difficulty of his argument is the proposal of apparent conceptual necessities of unfolding ideological determinism from the late Middle Ages to the modern period. This is compounded by his readings of intellectual figures, sometimes from long past centuries, with too little concern for their actual historical locations. It is also made problematic in his promotion of the French Integralists as the hopes for metaphysics, anti-capitalist socialism and a more assertive Christianity.¹⁶ Although the editors of *Radical Orthodoxy* (1999) do not hesitate to declare a Cambridge pedigree,

¹³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 504, his emphasis.

¹⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (1993), p. 314.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁶ 'It should, in fact, be peculiarly the responsibility of Christian socialists at present, to demonstrate how socialism is grounded in Christianity' . . . 'the French, not the Rahnerian version of integralism, provides the basis for a true political theology'. *Theology and Social Theory* (1993), p. 208. Milbank praises Henri de Lubac's social Catholicism (cf. *ibid.*, p. 226). For Lubac's contribution to Vichy France, cf. John Hellman, *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France: Uriage, 1940–1945* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1993), pp. 51–2. Hellman writes: 'In his lecture on "A Christian Explanation for Our Times", Father de Lubac criticizes contemporary myths, calling, in his conclusion, for the development of a truly "Catholic" spirit after centuries of individualistic and rationalistic deviation – the "human revolution". De Lubac described the "Catholic renaissance" that was an element in "the present work of reconstruction" and, citing Beuve-Méry's *Esprit* article "Révolutions nationales, révolutions humaines", de Lubac articulated his "dream" of "a generation of young Frenchmen who would take Christianity seriously". Like his friend Father Teilhard, Father de Lubac also envisaged the Second World War, in a larger context, as marking the passage of the modern man from an epoch of bourgeois individualism to one of personalist community.' (*Ibid.*, p. 51; cf. *Esprit*, 98 (March 1941), pp. 281–4. His Uriage lecture 'L'explication chrétienne de notre temps' was reprinted as *Vocation de la France* (Le Puy: Mappus, 1941). See also Hellman, 'Die katholische nationale Revolution in Frankreich 1922–1944', in Lucia Scherzberg (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung im französischen Katholizismus und deutschen Protestantismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008),

the group is more American than is usually acknowledged. Hauerwas was not the only figure providing anti-modernist direction to the new school. An American Jesuit, and graduate of Gonzaga, Santa Clara and Chicago, provided a narrative of modernity in the 1980s which is central to the programme.¹⁷ Michael J. Buckley claims in *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987) that the subjection of theology to philosophy is the causal explanation for the rise of atheism.¹⁸ Radical Orthodoxy wants to reverse this, as is indicated in

pp. 78–101; idem, *The Communitarian Third Way: Alexandre Marc's Ordre Nouveau, 1930–2000* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.) Milbank also draws upon Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65) in his critique of Marx and exposition of French socialism (cf. *Theology and Social Theory* (1993), pp. 188–203). This figure was important for French fascists. In reference to the revolutionary group, the Proudhonian circle, that later dissolved into Charles Maurras' fascist Integralism, Zeev Sternhell asks: 'Why was this group named after Proudhon?' He goes on: 'Proudhon, of course, owed his privileged place in *L'Action française* to what the Maurrassians saw as his antirepublicanism, his anti-Semitism, his loathing of Rousseau, his disdain for the French Revolution, democracy, and parliamentarians, and his championship of the nation, the family, tradition, and the monarchy.' Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1996), pp. 56–7. He continues: 'The Sorelians and Maurrassians shared this intellectual revolt against the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution' (ibid, p. 57). Hellman writes: 'Father de Lubac liked to point out that while his hero Proudhon was a fierce anti-clerical and critic of the Church he had also been a traditionalist on questions of sexual morality and an admirer of certain "virile" Christian virtues. Lubac also found much that was positive in the thinking of Nietzsche and, to a certain extent, of Marx as well'. Hellman, *Knight-Monks*, p. 299.

¹⁷ Cf. Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); see also, idem, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998). The programmatic publication appeared in 1999: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999). The editors name the following individuals as influential: Donald Mackinnon, Rowan Williams, Nicholas Lash, David Ford, Janet Soskice, Tim Jenkins, Lewis Ayres, Stanley Hauerwas, David Burrell, Michael Buckley, Walter Ong and Gillian Rose. Besides the editors, some of the other individuals who have contributed, in one way or another, are Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, John Betz, Daniel M. Bell, Phillip Blond, David Burrell, William T. Cavanaugh, Conor Cunningham, William Desmond, Peter M. Chandler, Louis Dupré, Michael Hanby, David B. Hart, Laurence P. Hemming, D. Stephen Long, Gerard Loughlin, John Montag, David Moss, Simon Oliver, Tracey Rowland, Steven Shakespeare and James K. A. Smith. The views of these individuals are of course widely divergent.

¹⁸ See the critical review of the book in 1989: James E. Force, 'The Origins of Modern Atheism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), pp. 153–62. He writes of 'Buckley's polemical bias' (p. 155): 'The fact that Buckley ignores such seminal figures as Spinoza, Hobbes, and the English Deists, all of whom play an important role in the modern

Milbank's essay from 1995: 'Only theology overcomes metaphysics'.¹⁹ The metaphysical anti-liberalism, anti-modernism and anti-capitalism at work in Milbank's turn to the Middle Ages at the height of the post-Second World War renaissance of liberalism has pre-formations in the first intellectual rejection of the French Revolution in the nineteenth century. Some of the critique was also re-established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century French (and German) anti-Enlightenment intellectual movements.²⁰ In the 1920s

movement of Biblical criticism, betrays a narrowly epistemological focus which may indeed have something to do with the partial background of modern atheism but which, when presented as the whole story, gives a misleading representation of what is going on in the emergence of modern atheism. When he ignores these early modern Biblical critics, Buckley ignores a strain within modern thought which is instrumental to the origins of modern atheism.' (Ibid., p. 154.) He continues: 'Buckley's account underplays the direct influence of the historical tradition of Biblical criticism' (ibid., p. 161). He cites David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (London: Croom Helm, 1988): 'There was, particularly in the Restoration period, an explosion of atheism, largely confined to the upper classes and based primarily on the thought of Hobbes. This upper-class Hobbesian atheism was not published or publicly avowed in any straightforward manner; hence it is difficult to identify. But it existed, and the failure to recognise it must distort any intellectual history of the seventeenth century in Britain.' (Berman, *History of Atheism*, p. 48; cited in Force, 'Origins of Modern Atheism', p. 155.) Force continues: 'Buckley ignores the sort of society in which his writers are writing, the conventional forms of literary discourse they choose, their social class and political allegiance, and most significantly, the nature of the religious controversies in which they are engaged. Buckley's central methodological point of departure is the logical autonomy of his chosen texts. Buckley exhibits the logical linkage in his list of six typical figures whose overly rational, non-theological apologetics pave the way for the full blown atheism of Diderot and Holbach. He tailors his narrative to illustrate "the inward conceptual necessity of unfolding determinations and necessity"'. (Force, 'Origins of Modern Atheism', p. 157; Force cites Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, p. 340.) Buckley also ignores the socio-political and cultural backgrounds to the rise of atheism. The new biblical studies, which were central to the secular project, emerged in a context in which the role of the official religion was losing ground in society (cf. Force, 'Origins of Modern Atheism', p. 158).

¹⁹ *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995), pp. 325–43.

²⁰ As David Curtis argues, the overarching metanarrative which located the problems of the early twentieth century in a larger decline and fall story from the Middle Ages had become *lieu commun* among Catholic intellectuals in the 1930s in France; cf. 'True and False Modernity: Catholicism and Communist Marxism in 1930s France', in Kay Chadwick (ed.), *Catholicism, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 73–96; see also Nicholas Atkin, 'Ralliés and résistants: Catholics in Vichy France, 1940–44', *ibid.*, pp. 97–118. The same can be said of many German Catholic intellectuals from the early twentieth century; cf. Claus Arnold, "'Gegenintellektuelle" und kirchlicher Antimodernismus vor 1914', in Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (ed.), *Intellektuellen-Götter: Das religiöse Laboratorium der klassischen*

and 1930s and early 1940s the programme was convincing in part because liberalism was being turned back on many fronts in Europe.²¹ In terms of the more immediate context, in the Anglo-American background of the 1980s there was a lively anti-Thatcherism and anti-Reaganism which seems to be reflected in the intense critique found in the early 1990s publication.²² While politicians and cultural analysts in the 1980s and 1990s were proclaiming that freedom was spreading to the world, some sought to offer a counter-narrative of the positively perceived spread of modern Western values and economics. Milbank's discourse on freedom is deeply entwined with this cultural critique. His work from the 1990s is an example of the radical rejection of the late twentieth-century cultural renaissance of liberalism. In the service of this programme, he tells a decline and fall story about the last six centuries to de-legitimise modern accounts of freedom and liberalism. Freedom, usually understood reductively as autonomy, is negated in the communitarian (or Integralist, or Personalist) framework. Not everything, however, from the Radical Orthodoxy group is so radical; it has done modern

Moderne (München: Oldenbourg, 2009), pp. 21–38; Irmgard Böhm, 'Modernismus und Antimodernismus', in Emerich Coreth et al. (eds), *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Graz: Styria, 1988); Ulrich Bröckling, *Katholische Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik: Zeitkritik und Gesellschaftstheorie bei Walter Dirks, Romano Guardini, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Michel und Heinrich Mertens* (Munich: Fink, 1993).

²¹ From 1922 to March 1933, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Turkey, Albania, Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Yugoslavia, Romania, Germany and Austria transformed into new authoritarian governments.

²² Ivan T. Berend writes: 'In the changing international environment, what happened was the replacement of East–West rivalry by a rising global rivalry: a creeping Atlantic rivalry among postwar allies, dramatic Asian–Western competition, and a rising Islamic–Western conflict, which gradually became manifest during the decades after the end of the Cold War. These new economic-political trends strongly influenced politics and developed a new European self-confidence in the closing decades of the twentieth century. European–American relations became more equal, but were also characterized by more conflicts. Anti-Americanism also gained ground.' (*Europe since 1980* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 61.) 'One may also speak about ideological anti-Americanism, or the rejection of the absolute supremacy of the neo-liberal, market fundamentalist, and neo-conservative ideologies that became dominant during the 1980s under Reagan.' (*Ibid.*, p. 62.) See also, Lester D. Friedman (ed.), *Fires were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006); as he remarks in the preface to the 1st edn (1993) about Thatcher era cinematography: 'Many of these films directly attacked the Thatcher government, seeing her free-market philosophy as a callous disregard for everyone but the entrepreneurial buccaneers who plunder the economy'. (*Ibid.*, p. xiv.) See also: Richard J. Golsan, 'France: From Anti-Americanism and Americanization to the "American Enemy"' in Alexander Stephan (ed.), *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 44–68.

theology a great service in, among other things, promoting the sometimes overlooked Neoplatonic tradition of Christian thought.

A New Liberal German Synthesis

The theological and philosophical approach to freedom was also treated extensively in German Protestant theology at the end of the twentieth century. With Reinhart Koselleck, for example, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf points back to a tradition in Christian theology which was established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: ‘The close link between Protestantism, individual freedom, independent thinking and moral virtue determined the intense Protestantism discourse in the so-called “saddle period” (Reinhart Koselleck), the decades between 1770–1830, down to the hard fundamental political disputes over the legitimacy of the French Revolution.’²³ These are Graf’s remarks from 2006 but accounts of freedom and Protestantism in close alliance can also be found in his work from the 1980s and 1990s. Elsewhere Graf makes his own plea for something like a Protestant project as well, one which revolves around the discourse of freedom, the individual and autonomy. Ulrich Barth, to name another important figure in the tradition of Falk Wagner, finds the trajectory earlier, with the late medieval Augustinian monk turned reformer, in Martin Luther’s ninety-five *Ablaßthesen* (1517). Although Luther negated Erasmus’ autonomous freedom with all his theological resources, Barth finds, as he explains in a publication originally from 1998, the ‘Geburt religiöser Autonomie’ (birth of religious autonomy) here.²⁴ The theses offer a ‘Kompendium der Sozialkritik, Moralkritik, Religionskritik, Ideologiekritik und Institutionenkritik’ (Compendium of social critique, moral critique, critique of religion, critique of ideology and critique of institutions).²⁵

²³ ‘Die enge Verknüpfung von Protestantismus, individueller Freiheit, Selbstdenken und sittlicher Tugend bestimmt die intensiven Protestantismuskurse in der sogenannten “Sattelzeit” (Reinhart Koselleck), den Jahrzehnten zwischen 1770–1830, bis in die harten fundamentalpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um die Legitimität der Französischen Revolution hinein.’ *Der Protestantismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 2006), p. 15. Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf and Klaus Tanner, ‘Einleitung – Protestantische Freiheit’, in idem (eds), *Protestantische Identität heute* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl.-Haus Mohn, 1992), pp. 13–24; Graf, ‘Ist bürgerlich-protestantische Freiheit ökumenisch verallgemeinerbar? Zum Streit um das protestantische Verständnis von Freiheit’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 89 (1992), pp. 121–38.

²⁴ Ulrich Barth, *Aufgeklärter Protestantismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 53, 94. Cf., idem, ‘Die Geburt religiöser Autonomie. Luthers Ablaßthesen von 1517’, in Arnulf von Scheliha and Markus Schröder (eds), *Das protestantische Prinzip: Historische und systematische Studien zum Protestantismusbegriff* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1998), pp. 3–37.

²⁵ Barth, *Aufgeklärter Protestantismus*, p. 94.

In Luther's theses he sees the methodological and the material sense of 'Aufgeklärten Protestantismus' (Enlightened Protestantism).²⁶ Although most, including Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), as Barth also points out, see the development of this phenomenon much later, in the Enlightenment, Barth wants to locate its roots at the beginning of Protestantism itself. For this reason, he can cite Cardinal Thomas Cajetan approvingly, that Luther's critique would require the building of a new church.²⁷ In this regard, Barth represents the extreme form of the late twentieth-century freedom discourse in theology in the German Protestant context. He seeks to root a theological movement, which is contingent upon the nineteenth century, three centuries earlier, while almost suggesting that Protestantism is essentially a new religion based upon human freedom and inner subjectivity. Although he cannot prove this from his citations of the anti-Erasmus Augustinian from the early sixteenth century, he sees beginnings here for a tradition which settles upon the individual and freedom, and later establishes new and fuller expression in Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). He can thus write, apparently making use of Nietzsche's subtitle to *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* (*Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*) (1878): 'Protestantismus – das ist der Traum einer Religion für freie Geister' (Protestantism – that is the dream of a religion for free spirits).²⁸ In one regard, Barth represents the polar opposite of Milbank. While Barth embraces the post-Second World War renaissance of liberalism and moves theology and history towards it, Milbank rejects it and employs these for the anti-project.

Graf, Ulrich Barth and others are recovering something which was neglected in the earlier parts of the twentieth century in the wake of Dialectical Theology and Barthian anti-liberalism which saw this kind of Protestant liberalism, and the focus on freedom and autonomy in this manner, as sin itself. This is found most famously in the *Römerbrief* (1919), which contributed to the anti-liberal rhetoric which aided the downfall of the Weimar Republic, but also later, with significant continuity.²⁹ In

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 396.

²⁹ Cf. KD, IV/1, para. 60, 'Des Menschen Hochmut und Fall'. Liberal accounts of freedom and liberalism are brought into stark contrast to 'true freedom', that is the 'freedom of faith and obedience', in the later 1920s as well. In *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (1927), while addressing 'Die Freiheit des Gewissens' (§22), Barth turns to 'die wahre Freiheit, die Freiheit des Glaubens und des Gehorsams' in relation to the Spirit in scripture: 'Wo dieser Geist ist, da ist Freiheit [vgl. 2. Kor. 3, 17]. Von dorthier kommen alle Freiheiten. Dort ist aber auch ihre Grenze. Losgelöst von der Freiheit Gottes in seinem Wort, als abstrakte statt als konkrete Freiheit des Gewissens, würden

light of the destructive power of anti-liberal thinking in the early twentieth century, throughout Europe, and not only in Germany, the setting forth of this liberal Protestant tradition among contemporary theologians, including Klaus Tanner, has been a necessary development.³⁰ While the rebirth of

alle unsere Freiheiten beziehungsloser Liberalismus, Subjektivismus, Spiritualismus, Symbolismus sein.' (Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*, vol. 1, *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (1927), [GA II.14], ed. Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1982), p. 530.) Elsewhere Barth speaks of faith and obedience, again in contrast to liberalism, 'Liberalismus, der die Kirche angreift'. (Ibid., p. 503.)

³⁰ It was not always so popular, however. The article on 'Liberalismus. III. Theologischer und kirchlicher Liberalismus', from 1960, authored by the Marburg theologian Hans Graß, in the 3rd edn of the encyclopedia *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, claims that the contemporary meaning of liberalism in 'Kirche und Gemeinde ist gering', although there are some signs of its life in 'bestimmten Bildungsschichten', which nevertheless lack organisation. Although liberalism was not dominant in the church, it did not lack theologians in 1960: '[es] fehlt ... nicht an Theologen, welche das liberale Gedankengut in neuer Weise geltend machen'. Referring to Hirsch, a few Swiss theologians (M. Werner, F. Buri, U. Neuenschwander), Paul Tillich (1886–1965) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), he claims that the new liberal theology, in contrast to the old one, 'hat den falschen Optimismus und Fortschrittsglauben preisgegeben', and knows more now about the 'Abgründigkeit Gottes', the world, history and man. He goes on to claim that it has been influenced by *Existenzphilosophie* and attempts to overcome 'Objektivierungen der Dogmatik, die Mythologie des biblischen Zeugnisses und die Theologie der Heilsgeschichte'. (Hans Graß, 'Liberalismus. III. Theologischer und kirchlicher Liberalismus', vol. 4, p. 354.) Four decades later, things look different; in 2002, Graf writes in the 4th edn of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, in the article on 'Liberale Theologie' ('III. Systematisch-theologisch', vol. 5, pp. 312–13) about the term emerging in the battles of the nineteenth and twentieth century against theological conservatism; the movement sought to legitimise the 'bürgerliche Wertorientierungen', thus the Holy Scriptures are de-positivised ('entpositiviert') through a historical critique while the claim upon absolute truth is questioned. As an alternative programme, he claims that experience-related, new interpretations of old symbols are constructed, or related to new subjectivity philosophy or aesthetic ideas. Graf holds that the close relationship between liberal theology and the 'Project der Moderne' kept it nevertheless in a precarious situation in the early part of the twentieth century, for it potentially, and often in actuality, affirmed traditional patriarchal social structures. Thus in spite of the openness for the diversity of individual ways of believing, many proponents of liberal theology remained embedded in anti-pluralistic integration thinking. He claims that first in the 1960s this begins to change as liberal theology opens up more to democratic thinking and pluralism, while offering a counter vision of Christianity to that of Neo-Orthodoxy. In the 1970s this continues to develop as various classics of liberal theology are newly edited, such as the Schleiermacher edn, and the edn of Troeltsch's work. In relation to these theologians' 'Glaubenslehren', systematic liberal theology concentrates on the concept of religion as an awareness of difference (*Differenzbewußtsein*), which permits the individual a freedom

the German liberal tradition is a response to the historical trajectory of the northern European theological discipline in the last century, and a reflection of the renaissance of liberalism in the post-Second World War era, it is also much more than this. The movement, if one may speak of this broad theological school which seeks positively to determine freedom, autonomy and the individual in Christian theology and ethics, also answers, and critically responds to, in a positive and constructive manner, a contemporary context which may ask what Christian theology has to say to these matters. In the new liberal theology, a free and autonomous individual is often a central part of the answer to these questions.

A Via Media

There were a variety of alternative approaches to freedom in face of the renaissance of liberalism among theologians. Here the work of two Lutheran theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Christoph Schwöbel, and one member of the Church of Scotland, David Fergusson, will be briefly introduced.³¹

Coming from a somewhat different point of orientation than the new liberal theology, Pannenberg also addressed freedom in the later part of the twentieth century.³² In particular, he demonstrates the important relation to the concepts of sin and identity in the Christian tradition while attempting to show that man is both sinful and a responsible agent. Much of the problem discussed with his Catholic interlocutor, the dogmatician, Thomas Pröpper, is the nature and possibility of freedom, transcendent identity

to think, and, as is carefully added in a sub-clause, also in the sense of self-limitation. ('III. Systematisch-theologisch', p. 313.)

³¹ For an example of feminist theologians' treatment of freedom at this time, compare Ann Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), pp. 72–89, 194–254; for an example of liberation theologians' treatment, see Ignacio Ellacuría (ed.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), pp. 143–7, 296–309, 465–7.

³² At least since his edited work *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (1961), Pannenberg has represented a new school of post or perhaps reform-Barthian theology; Schwöbel has called this text a 'programmatic statement of a new theological conception'. (Christoph Schwöbel, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', in David Ford and Rachel Muers (eds), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), p. 129.) The novel idea, found in the various essays from this volume, represented by various disciplines in theology, was that God reveals himself indirectly through his acts in history, pace Barth and Bultmann, who held to more unmediated accounts of revelation. (Other members of the interdisciplinary new school, which later went in different directions: Rolf Rendtorff, Klaus Koch, Ulrich Wilckens, Dietrich Rössler, Martin Elze and Trutz Rendtorff, cf. Schwöbel, 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', p. 145.)

and the corrupted will. Pröpper's critique, published in the *Tübingen Theologische Quartalschrift* in 1990, holds that genuine human freedom is nowhere acknowledged in Pannenberg's theology.³³ Pannenberg sets out an Augustinian conception of the will in relation to sin. He positively articulates it as perfected in orientation to its goal and end in the good, and ultimately God, but he also characterises freedom and human will in bondage to sin and understands man as responsible in spite of his corruption. This theology runs effectively parallel to his critique, in the wake of nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism, of the *imago Dei* in a near Barthian framework. Christ is the only true *imago* and man's freedom is only fulfilled in his redemption in Christ. Pannenberg's correction of autonomous accounts of freedom is also identifiable in Christoph Schwöbel's 'Imago Libertatis: Freiheit des Menschen und Freiheit Gottes' (Imago Libertatis: Human and Divine Freedom) from 2002. The German edition of the English essay from 1995 also deals with the problem of freedom in a broader discourse in relation to theology.³⁴ Schwöbel sets out his position

³³ In a decisive passage, Pannenberg writes in response: 'Daß jeder Mensch in seinem Bewußtsein immer schon unthematisch auf Gott ebenso wie auf das Gute bezogen ist, und zwar auf Gott als den letzten Horizont des Guten, in welchem das Leben des Menschen allein zur Vollendung seiner Bestimmung finden kann, ist eine unerläßliche Voraussetzung dafür, in einem allgemein anthropologischen Sinne von Sünde reden zu können. Wenn der Mensch Gottes Geschöpf ist, so ist Sünde ebenso Selbstverfehlung und also Verlust substantieller Freiheit wie Übertretung des göttlichen Willens. Zur Konkretisierung der Verwiesenheit auf Gott und auf das Gute aber sind die Menschen in den Raum geschichtlicher Erfahrung gestellt, der der Raum der Suche nach der eigenen Identität und damit zugleich auch Raum möglicher Verführung, aber auch des Anrufs zur Entscheidung für das wahrhaft Gute ist.' Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Beiträge zur systematischen Theologie*, vol. 2, *Natur und Mensch – und die Zukunft der Schöpfung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), p. 245. See the critical background review to which Pannenberg responds: Thomas Pröpper, 'Das Faktum der Sünde und die Konstitution menschlicher Identität', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 170 (1990), pp. 267–89. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), and also his *Systematische Theologie*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 277–93. For a summary, cf. Gunther Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenburgs Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), pp. 150–1. See also Oswald Bayer's treatment of freedom in the 1990s: *Freiheit als Antwort: Zur theologischen Ethik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995). He overcomes the characterisation of freedom as autonomy in setting it in a dialogical and responsive framework as 'answer', and then later pairs freedom and reverence (*Ehrfurcht*) together (pp. 74–5).

³⁴ Christoph Schwöbel, 'Imago Libertatis: Freiheit des Menschen und Freiheit Gottes', in idem, *Gott in Beziehung, Studien zur Dogmatik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 227–56; cf. idem, 'Imago Libertatis: Human and Divine Freedom', in Colin E. Gunton (ed.), *God and Freedom: Essays in Systematic and Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), pp. 57–81.

in twelve theses about freedom, a theme which he characterises as the 'Fundamentalprinzip für das Verständnis des Menschseins in der Moderne (und in der Postmoderne)' (Fundamental principle for understanding the human condition in modernity (and postmodernity)).³⁵ The dominance of this principle is the result of a progressive 'Radikalisierungsprozess' (process of radicalization) in its interpretation.³⁶ Schwöbel holds that the centrality of the concept has nevertheless not cleared the fog from the meaning. He seeks to clarify some aspects of this term and refers to freedom in his theological and philosophical account as a part of man's ontological constitution.³⁷ He begins not with the capacity of freedom (free will, etc.), but with descriptions of freedom in terms of the action of a subject with intentions, goals, means and norms. While raising critical questions about the Kantian autonomous subject and his account of the transcendental law (which redefines the law from a correlation of external limitations of freedom to a process in which autonomous subjects determine norms for themselves), he also tracks the shift from self-determination to self-construction and self-realisation, while showing the dangers of this concept for freedom and personhood itself.³⁸ Later in the seventh thesis Schwöbel investigates some of the historical and theological aspects of the problem in the inheritance and development of nominalism, a view of God as a self-realising and self-constituting subject, which he claims is also related to the development of Western atheism.³⁹ Schwöbel thus incorporates the popular theme from the Anglo-American discourse (but ultimately takes it another direction). He goes on to establish the connection between the radicalism of the *Übermensch* ideology of the twentieth century with this orientation of freedom as naked self-realisation and autonomy.⁴⁰ Theses ten, eleven and twelve develop a positive account of freedom. Moving from the Christian understanding of the perversion of freedom in sin, the Gospel, which calls the person to recognise his *schlechthinige Abhängigkeit* (utter dependence [sc. Schleiermacher]) on the grace of God, redeems freedom. The redeemed freedom is 'wesentlich endliche und relative Freiheit' (essentially finite and relative freedom), a freedom in orientation.⁴¹ The redeemed freedom is also the recovery of the creative freedom which has its final ground in God. Schwöbel then

³⁵ Schwöbel, 'Imago Libertatis: Freiheit des Menschen und Freiheit Gottes', p. 227.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 228.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 244–5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 249–50.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 252. He draws upon Pannenberg's *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive* in the ninth thesis.

attempts to reintroduce the concept of the *imago Dei*, and thus the *imago libertatis*, which he previously connected to the rise of the pure autonomous freedom (nominalism) in a simplified understanding of a mere quantitative difference. He reintroduces it by emphasising the necessity of the qualitative and christological aspects of this theological principle of analogy.⁴² He ends with a plea for understanding freedom within the framework of love. While carefully reintroducing – and thus parting ways with some of his Anglo-American counterparts – the critical terminology of *Selbstbestimmung* (self-determination), which was negatively handled throughout the other theses, he presents a positive account of freedom as self-determination by means of a presentation of the popular and closely related late medieval nominalist terminology (absolute and ordained power), which can be applied to both God and man when it comes to understanding freedom. While there is something like self-determination (sc. *potentia absoluta*), it is constricted or confined in the carried out act (sc. *potentia ordinata*); in an analogous manner, love and freedom are not simply equalised, but love is the body of freedom, in God, and freedom the form of love. Love thus presumes a freedom which does not have self-realisation as its final end of all action, but a freedom which has the development of the other as a necessary condition for its own self-realisation.⁴³ Schwöbel can thus set his hopes on a more perfect realisation of the motto of the French Revolution in its non-essentialist triadic structure: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

While slightly more critical of the modern terminology than Graf, and somewhat closer to Pannenberg's account, which made room for sin in the concept of freedom, than Ulrich Barth's near equalisation of Protestantism with the principle, in Schwöbel's account of freedom the primary emphasis seems to lie with a positive but also critical reception of the liberal Protestant tradition and the modern centrality of freedom. There are a variety of other examples of a middle way in the 1990s as well. One of these is seen in the work of the accomplished British theologian of Scottish descent, David Fergusson. His *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, which was published just two years before the turn of the century, engaged the lively debate of the 1990s in a constructive but also critical manner. As he remarks regarding MacIntyre's critique of the liberal society: 'in the absence of any alternative proposal in MacIntyre for the organisation of a pluralist society, we have to make the best of liberalism'.⁴⁴ Fergusson later argues, in the context of

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 253–4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 255–6. He draws upon Albrecht Ritschl's *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* (1875) in his discourse on love.

⁴⁴ (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 129.

a discourse on the church in liberal societies and the nature of ecclesial membership, that an individual's freedom may be 'constrained by the action of the Holy Spirit, yet it ought not to be restricted by any civil polity. There ought to be no compulsion either for or against belonging to the community of the church.'⁴⁵ He continues his theological argument later for 'the protection of individuals against forces which infringe their legitimate freedom'.⁴⁶ He goes on to argue for the dignity of the person and the rights of individuals. This does not lead him, however, to a full-scale annexation of 'liberal theories'; this convergence is rather an 'instance of common ground without common theory'.⁴⁷ As he explains:

The assumptions on which ideals of individual freedom and equality are founded do not reflect ... a commitment to any doctrine of the unencumbered self, or a procedural ethic such as that found in Habermas. . . . Their articulation may, none the less, differ in some respects from the description of freedom and equality of liberal individualism. For example, the importance of participation in the economic and social life of the community may be a more significant feature of the rights of each person for a philosophy or theology which stresses the importance of community for the moral formation and fulfilment of the self.⁴⁸

Fergusson's theology is another example of a middle path in the 1990s between the radical rejection of the modern renaissance of liberalism and the full alignment with the programme. With a more contained critique of modern accounts of freedom, Pannenberg, Schwöbel and Fergusson avoided an absolute negation of the intellectual movement; and with a more sceptical assessment of the Enlightenment tradition, they also avoided a complete alliance.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. See also his recent publication, *Faith and Its Critics* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).