

Virtue Politics

THEOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BEYOND LIBERALISM: The Question of Europe

John Milbank, Adrian Pabst, et al.

I. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF THE QUESTION OF EUROPE

JOHN MILBANK:¹ The religious dimension of the question of Europe has been severely neglected. I'd like to put forward a few controversial theses about theology and international relations which slightly sum up the positions that we are putting forward in our book.² The core of these positions would be that I can't see any reason why Christianity would be very sympathetic to the idea of the nation state. That is perhaps the core of my positions. It seems that the nation state has come into being because of the failure of Christianity; because of the failure of Christianity as applied locally to the field of international relations

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² John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

which entailed something like Christendom.³ It is clearly true that in the past, right across the world throughout global history, there was no such thing as the nation state. Borders were extremely permeable and the relationship between private domains on the one hand and public realms on the other was extremely fluid. Even by the time of the 18th century a lot of struggles remained dynastic rather than being genuine struggles between nations. In many ways, the world was construed in terms of empires and regions much more so than in terms of what we would now think of as the state—the state being a very modern world. Government was much more dispersed, there was no clear distinction between local economic roles and central political roles and it was only in the early modern period that people started to talk about the state as denoting a very strong central authority. It seems to me that Christianity was inherently in favour of the notion of free association and of very dispersed modes of sovereignty.⁴ The very tension between the *regnum* on the one hand and the *sacerdotium* on the other tended to favour a certain kind of plurality of jurisdiction and Christianity repeatedly gave encouragement to the emergence of new formations with their own rules like guild bodies or monastic bodies as well as later the orders of friars. People lived within extremely complex webs of overlapping jurisdictions which were perpetually qualifying each other. Though there was obviously a lot of endemic conflict, nonetheless the situation in which there was both a sense of a complicated overarching unity within Europe and endlessly fragmented local divisions. This became more conflicted towards the end of the Middle Ages and that tended to see people flee toward much more formalistic solutions and tend towards something much more like a monopoly of violence and to see state authority as a solution to anarchy. That was formidably compounded by the Reformation and the subsequent division of Christendom.

³ Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 50-51; for the relationship between the decline of Christendom and the subsequent competition of nation-states, see p. 100.

⁴ Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 146.

This became the final post-Westphalian solution: to make confession and statehood coterminous with one another as a new principle of order. Of course that left a problem of international anarchy. The *ius gentium*, the law of the nations is removed from the governance of natural law and becomes a formalistic law of first occupancy. And then everything goes into reverse. The natural law becomes based on the *ius gentium* law of first occupancy and is construed in terms of rights and property; so one moves roughly from Grotius to Hobbes, I think, in that order. There develops a sense that international relations always has priority over political theory, which is something that I think is sometimes overlooked. Gradually, with the rationalisation of religion during the period of the Enlightenment, religion as an emotive attitude is replaced in the Romantic period by nationalism. Thus the co-belonging of confession and state is compounded by ethnicity as a third component.⁵

In addition, the cult of the absolute monopoly of power and absolute sovereignty isn't particularly justifiable in theological terms because it guarantees rights and authority self-referentially rather than deriving them from inherent equity and obedience to the natural law. You are legitimated by virtue of possessing that sovereign monopoly of violence which can be justified either by the will of the one at the centre, or more democratically by the will of the many people, but in either case you're appealing ultimately back to will rather than to any inherent notion of justice. The second problem, theologically speaking, concerns the nation and the way that it becomes a quasi-religious substitute for religion, with disastrous consequences in the 20th century (and many fear that

⁵ Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 8; It is probably fair to say that religion as an emotive attitude, particularly vis-à-vis the post-Westphalian priority of international relations over political theory is closely connected with communitarianism, which actually 'tends to lack a real political dimension, confining itself to a nostalgic one-sided appeal to group rights, autonomy and plurality, however important this emphasis must be'. Hence it is susceptible to nationalistic and ethnocentric expansion.

those consequences can be repeated again, myself included⁶). Against that background, perhaps the most unique thing about Britain, as the Cambridge historian Robert Tombs argues in a recent and very big book, is that it did not have a settlement clearly based on the coincidence of state and confession because with the so called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689 a compromise was arrived at between the Anglican party and the so called Puritan party that became the non-conformist party.⁷ In effect, it was recognised that there were two religions in Britain. To say that would be an exaggeration but *in a sense* that was *de facto* what came to be the case. This is so much the case that Tombs shows you that the more Anglican areas on the map of England remain the more Tory voting areas to this day.⁸ Thus from 1689 onwards Britain moves in a more liberal direction which is why the Whig party, which was an alliance of these post-Puritan forces and aristocratic Enlightenment forces, is dominant in the 18th century. The supposed establishment is not really dominant and this is partly what gives rise to the Jacobite rebellions in the 18th century which have now been revealed to be more important than previously thought. One can also say here that there is still lurking within this Anglican-Puritan division a Catholic-Protestant division. Catholics in fact increased their strength in England during the 17th century and the Catholicising tendency in Anglicanism is very important and it was thought to be possible to return England to the Catholic faith up to the late 17th century. One can say this more of Britain than of any other European country: that the post-Reformation controversies remained unresolved albeit translated into different terms. Britain has always had a religious division between two groups and a semi-official sanctioning of both. In nearly all other European countries the main division has turned out to be

⁶ See also John Milbank, et al., 'After Brexit? The Referendum and its Discontents', *ABC* [Online] June 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/06/24/4488874.htm> (accessed: 20 March 2017).

⁷ Robert Tombs, *The English and their History* (Milton Keynes: Penguin, 2015), 259-261

⁸ Tombs, *The English and their History*, 508-511; map on p. 510.

between religion and secularity, with the latter supposedly taking the form of the left and the former that of the right. One could argue that in the case of Europe, it's the divisions over religion that are really primary. But in Britain the divisions which take priority are internal to religion which is why we've never had secular and religious parties or anything like that. Our left has also tended to define itself in religious terms in so far as it is in some sense the heir of the Puritans and the non-conformists. This is a generalisation but there is nonetheless some truth in it. Tombs argues that this is one reason why the English, though they've never had so many conflicts, are terribly sectarian. We have incredibly sectarian arguments, for example over issues like education, which just don't exist in Germany or France.⁹ It is as if people instinctively identify still as either Cavaliers or Roundheads and have no need for rational arguments for public or private schooling. These are tribal conflicts. They're irrational in a certain sense. I think one can see this going on now, in terms of the horrendous debate we're having over Brexit. One can't exactly say that the two sides line up very clearly in terms of the division I've talked about, but one can relate it to that division and the debate is in the end undeniably a sectarian struggle, something to which the British are unfortunately prone. Britain has never had very serious violent squabbles in comparison to continental Europe. We've got this incredible long history of very powerful central government because it's how England has had to survive in relation to the Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, and the Continent. It's had to have a massively strong central government, rule of law, and so on in order to survive. In that sense it's very stable. But in another sense, there are these very unresolved sectarian squabbles going on. I think this is part of the reason why the current debate so irrational; it is because of the tendency of the

⁹ Tombs, *The English and their History*, 512, 514-515. The second determinant to this preponderance of sectarianism in English political culture is the legacy of Victorian sectarianism, though these are not doubt related to earlier developments alongside the Catholic-Protestant division (p. 512).

British to split themselves up into two parties, that are more like badges of identity than fully thought through, rational positions.

The religious background is relevant to the way in which the British find it difficult to understand the EU programme and in particular its Catholic character. In many ways, the EU was set up by Catholic thinkers like Robert Schuman who were very much trying to overcome what they saw as the debilities of the nation-state and to recreate some sort of European unity. Their model was not one of seeking for a European super-state nor was it one of a merely free-trading area. I think the British find it incredibly difficult to grasp this idea of a loose cultural and legal unity between several states that will guarantee peace. This is ironically despite the fact that Edmund Burke was in many ways the biggest long-term visionary of precisely such a Europe. Though it is perhaps not such an accident that Burke was of Irish origins. Ultimately, because of their Protestant legacy, especially in its Puritan form but also in many of its Anglican forms, the British are massively wedded to the nation-state and to the idea that liberties are guaranteed by having an absolute, central authority. In many ways this is a kind of English delusion; we forget that our common-law legacy—in its best form that allows for equity—is closely linked to both Roman law and Catholic influence in the Middle Ages, something that I think Pope Benedict was very anxious to say when he visited England in the palace of Westminster. But somehow in British-Whiggish mythology we see our legal institutions as always having been in a kind of protest against Europe despite the fact that this is a complete fiction.

The other problem for this British cult of separateness is that England has never survived on its own. We are the largest nation anywhere that doesn't have a state; the English do not have a state and they never have had a state—apart from two very short periods in our history. Throughout the Middle Ages we were conjoined with Wales and had suzerainty over Ireland. For most of the Middle Ages we were linked into a lot of France—we were never on our own.

We were on our own in the early modern period, and some enduring links to Wales and Ireland notwithstanding this was totally unsustainable because the British civil war was brought about when the Scottish Covenanters invaded England right the way down to the Humber. As all the recent research tends to show, the English tend to delude themselves by thinking that the civil war was the last war of religion in Europe and that it was an expression in England of the Thirty Years War. We only got ourselves out of this situation, however, by forging this new double kingdom with Scotland.¹⁰ The prospect which opens up if we vote for Brexit is that we will be on our own! Scotland will leave, Ireland will break up into flames; and eventually, it will leave as well. Wales could easily leave as well. Polls show that even Northumberland could vote to join Scotland. (Northumberland has always existed between England and Scotland.) The prospect would be an England on its own which has never ever worked. I'm trying to rather randomly point out several dimensions of this debate, some of which link into religion.

2. THEOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

JOHN MILBANK: International relations is the area traditionally coloured by the *ius gentium*. It is an attempt to theorise the relations between nations. In the Anglo-sphere, it is dominated by certain competing theories. The dominant

¹⁰ Tombs, *The English and their History*, 259-260:

A Whig-Tory compromise emerged. [...] Thus England emerged – one of the last countries in Europe to do so – from two centuries of religious and political turmoil, after a unique succession of religious reformation and counter-reformation, conspiracies, civil war, regicide, republic, military dictatorship, restoration, renewed civil conflict, invasion and a second revolution. The outcome was an uneasy and ill-tempered compromise which soon included an unpopular union with Scotland. The possibility of a state and society based on enforced uniformity of belief and practice, whether Anglican, Presbyterian or Catholic, turned out to have gone for good.

theory assumes a situation of international anarchy—this is a sort of exacerbation of the Grotian position. Nations are treated like individuals in a competitive struggle with each other and you try to resolve that struggle with various formal rules. In the American tradition this often takes the form of so called ‘IR realism’, where you’re thinking in terms of acting in your own interest. That’s in competition with various more Kantian and utopian theories of international relations—which a sometimes merely a variation on that initial theory but are much more optimistic about what can be achieved through these various formal arrangements. And then a third model, which Adrian and I advocate in the book is much more Burkean and argues that in international relations culture has priority over either politics or economics.¹¹ In other words, people are always already connected by language, religion, fashion, habit, culture, and that good friendly fraternal relations have to grow out of that soil more than anything else.

¹¹ Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 357-358. As Burke writes in Edmund Burke, ‘The First Letter on a Regicide Peace’, in *Burke: Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 316-317:

In the intercourse between nations, we are apt to rely too much on the instrumental part. We lay too much weight upon the formality of treaties and compacts. We do not act much more wisely when we trust to the interests of men as guarantees of their engagements. [...] Men are not tied to one another by papers and seals. They are led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies. It is with nations as with individuals. Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nation and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners, and habits of life. They have more than the force of treaties in themselves. They are obligations written in the heart. They approximate men to men, without their knowledge, and sometimes against their intentions. The secret, unseen, but irrefragable bond of habitual intercourse holds them together even when their perverse and litigious nature sets them to equivocate, scuffle, and fight, about the terms of their written obligations. [...] There have been periods of time in which communities, apparently in peace with each other, have been more perfectly separated than, in later times, many nations in Europe have been in the course of long and bloody wars. The cause must be sought in the similitude throughout of religion, laws, and manners. At bottom, these are all the same. The writers on public law have often called this aggregate of nations a Commonwealth. They had reason.

This is particularly relevant for the current situation of globalisation where we suddenly become aware of the way in which religion transgresses national borders and can have an influence quite outside and beyond them. We seem not to know how to really deal with that phenomenon. *That* is where this cultural perspective becomes important. Because it may be that only religions themselves can start to deal with these problems dialogically by considering their relations to other religions.

ADRIAN PABST:¹² One could say that the reason international relations theory doesn't even work on its own terms is because it always makes the assumption that there is this original anarchy. Just as Hobbes assumes that there is an anarchy in the state of nature that has to be resolved by delegating power to a Leviathan who protects us in exchange for this transference of power of life and death, so in international relations there is an assumption that nation-states are originally in conflict with each other. There is always-already a kind of anarchy internationally and there are three ways of resolving that. First, you can go with a very impoverished realism of the Hobbesian-Machiavellian type where you say that it's just the power that will create order. Whether it's the city-states in Italy, or later on the nation-states of the Dutch republic or the British Empire, it's always a single hegemon that will make sure that some kind of order emerges out of anarchy. Second, there is the Grotian model, which is much more based around notions of international law, so it presents a formal arrangement to regulate interstate relations. And third, as John said, you have a Kantian or you might even say Rousseauian utopian model for a cosmopolitan vision. All three in their different ways assume that there is this original anarchy,¹³ and out of

¹² Adrian Pabst, Reader in Politics, University of Kent.

¹³ The Kantian or 'utopian' model, perhaps contrary to immediate appearances, also assumes this priority of violence with warfare seen as a necessary evil for its regulation, see Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History', in *Anthropology, History, Education*, trans. R. Loudon and G. Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 114-115.

anarchy comes artifice through either power, a formal arrangement, or some kind of cosmopolitan vision. In that sense, the fourth way, that we try and advocate is the idea that association is actually far more fundamental, far more primary, to individuals, to communities, and to states as well. No state emerges out of nothing. No individual is originally isolated, subsequently becoming part of some social contract. Rather, you're always already born into a political order as both Aristotle and Plato maintained. Indeed, most fundamental to human life are social relations. We are social beings as Augustine, Aquinas, and—in another tradition—Maimonides would have said. It is this fundamental sociality over against Hobbesian asociality that characterizes our position. Hobbes-Machiavelli, Grotius, and Kant all assume in different ways an original asociality with social relations emerging through some specified process. It is against this background that we want to say that international relations theory lacks the important notion that association is more primary than anarchy. Thus the real alternative to anarchy is not artifice, but association. Burke is a thinker who can then link patristic and medieval ideas to more modern conceptions in part because he is perhaps one of the main political thinkers, at least in the Western tradition, who claims that we are not really bound together as individuals or states by formal treaties and that what actually links us together is a form of mutual obligation. We have obligations to one another, to preserve our duties, to preserve our lives, even to preserve the environment in some ways. There is a sense of reciprocity and mutuality that characterises Burke's thinking which then others like William Cobbett, John Ruskin, and William Morris take up and augment. The only school in IR that does that, up to a point, is the English School of international relations. But the English School, in the end, comes down too much on the side of Grotius, on the side of formalism, rather than on the side of real realism, viz., not the realism of Machiavelli and Hobbes, but the realism you can trace back to Graceo-Roman philosophy all the way through to the Middle Ages. That kind of realism basically says that we are not totally

depraved after the Fall; yes the created order has been disrupted by it, but there endures in us an original, potentially peaceful, and harmonious ordering, and politics is basically about trying to restore that rather than saying that there is anarchy and that the only response to that is artifice.

JOHN MILBANK: I think that in many ways the model that Adrian is trying to spell out is an international relations parallel to a personalist relationalism on a more intimate level. If personalism says: 'look, it's not the isolated individual you start with, it's not a collective totality you start with, it is rather relationality and interaction', then we're try to say the same thing at the level of international relations; that it's not the isolated nation-state that you start with, it's not some kind of aggregated super-state or dominant empire, but that it is rather the question of the relations between these things that are primary. This is not a sphere of anarchy if you take into account the cultural dimension and if you take into account all the forces and influences that naturally cross boundaries including religious forces and influences. The argument for the priority of international relations over political theory involves first of all that idea that you don't begin with an isolated nation—this is already interconnected to other things—and also the idea that the first problem that a nation faces is not so much 'how do I keep order within the nation' but 'how do we stay together in the face of outside forces?'. These are both very important—and here the realist element kicks in—but the latter problem is probably slightly more paramount. English history, as I've tried to explain, certainly illustrates that very well. If England has all these things that other nations envy, like very strong central authority, a relatively non-anarchic history, and a certain constitutional balance, it is ultimately because of how it tried to stay together in the face of what lied outside it.

3. ENGLAND AND EUROPE

DITËRO DEMJAJA: You've indicated that it might be very paradoxical for the English to feel as if there were some tension between the national and the trans-national—

JOHN MILBANK: Yes, because we've always played the trans-national game.

DITËRO DEMJAJA: Exactly. Could you perhaps say a little more about how these perceived tensions between the national and the trans-national might really be a product of certain developments in modernity and in particular how trans-national finance actually contributed to the dissolution of trans-national medieval bodies thus aiding the formation of the modern nation-state?

ADRIAN PABST: The crucial point is exactly the one that you mentioned: that a lot of these divisions are internal to a certain modern logic which hasn't even reflected the reality of the modern era very much because until the 18th and 19th centuries we mostly had imperial forms of political organizations—for better or for worse—you had dreadful examples of colonialism but also imperial forms which were much more reciprocal than would be allowed by the absolutely sovereign nation-state.¹⁴ But these tensions are really internal to the modern era. What's interesting about the *current* era is that it is much more neo-medieval in a real sense because sovereign power is now not so much about the state, the territory, and the people, in the Westphalian sense. It is much more about cities that are often operating independently from their nations or—as we might say—their territorial inter-land; new forms of empire emerging—again, for better or for worse—and it's about the resurgence of religious organisations which cross borders. It is much more like the world was before Westphalia, and indeed the Westphalian period may come to be seen in history as a very short and

¹⁴ Of course, an alternate transition from empire to nation-state is the transition from empire to commonwealth, cf. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 377.

exceptional period not truly reflective of fundamental human ways of organising as Pierre Manent has also suggested.¹⁵ For before the modern era most forms of organisation were broadly speaking about the city or city-state, some form of empire, and some religious authority. And these institutions under a different guise are very much in resurgence now. So the national and the global are really in that sense artificial modern categories. But they have of course a life today because of certain institutions, as you say. You have global finance, you have institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation; a whole range of global governance institutions that are largely disconnected from a more embedded form of politics and a more embedded economy and I think that's the big problem.¹⁶ On the one hand you get this abstract globalism with an imposed system of finance and an imposed cosmopolitan identity and on the other hand you get an atavistic and nationalist response to it. These two constantly fuel each other because the technocrats will say 'in order to keep you safe from the populists we need to be in charge' and the atavists will say 'well look at what the technocrats are doing to you'. *This* is the big debate about the EU at the moment. On the one hand you might say that the EU might be bridging that gap, but on the other the EU is still too much associated with the disconnected technocratic elite against which there emerge these horrible populist and nationalist responses.

JOHN MILBANK: I think that's right. And I think that from the theological point of view we have to confront the thinned out nature of Western civilisation because we've lost touch with what really symbolically unites us. Consequently, we're

¹⁵ Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. R. Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), and idem, *The City of Man* trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ See Milbank and Pabst, 321. For an 'alternative' view on the status of the nation-state vis-à-vis post-liberal politics, see Goodhart, D., 'Globalisation, Nation States, and the Economics of Migration' in *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics*, ed. Ian Geary and Adrian Pabst (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015), 121-140.

reduced to the merely instrumental and technological which we regard as our glory. But if we revert back to the thinking of people like Spengler who maybe was not entirely wrong, then this is a sign of civilisational decline; if you completely lose touch with what symbolically unites you then you won't survive in the very long run. This is why we're challenged by Islam. So I think that the problem for theologians is that the reactions to globalisation, as Adrian has said, are atavistic. When a people's sense of its identity is so thinned out; for the British it's just drinking beer, eating fish and chips, and doing football chants. The tragedy is that the British probably don't even know that they're historically connected to Rome and Athens and Jerusalem more than they are to Thailand or wherever else they go to the beach on holiday. This is the dire situation that we are now in. People need much thicker versions of their identity. And if you had a thicker version of British identity you would know that it cannot be opposed to a European identity and that it is profoundly linked to Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christianity which aspire towards something universal. We're currently stuck with *ersatz* versions of these things and I think that this is the real challenge to theology. More immediately and in terms of the current debate, there are specific illusions about the nation-state. One part of the Tory party thinks that you can have an isolated nation-state that will compete in the global market, ignoring the fact that it is now so invaded by international forces and that this vision is now just non-viable. The idea of the city of London belonging to Britain is no longer viable. And this is matched by the left-wing illusion that you can still have social democracy in one country – which is not true either. These are realistic restrictions of neoliberalism which require Europe, but if you want to go beyond that, as I would, if you want to qualify neoliberalism to make it more humane, you can only do that at an intermediate and international level as people like Yannis Varoufakis have argued.¹⁷ Thus, not

¹⁷ See Yanis Varoufakis, *And the Weak Suffer What They Must* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016).

only is the nation-state incredibly problematic from the point of view of Christianity, it is also, for reasons that Adrian has mentioned and that I am adding to, not viable.

ADRIAN PABST: We just disagree on the football, because I think it is an extremely English and European game.

JOHN MILBANK: Yeah, I want everybody to play cricket and rugby.

4. THE PRIMACY OF THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

NEIL TURNBULL: These two discourses that you are trying to marry—theology and international relations. For me this sounds like international relations and theology rather than theology and international relations. It sounds like philosophy is dropped off the agenda here in favour of social-scientific discourse with some theological sprinkles. I'm wondering whether international relations is the more powerful discourse and whether you are in real danger of being subsumed into the social-scientific paradigm. My question is: how do you maintain authentic theological reflection without allowing theological insights to become drowned in a sea of social-scientific data?

ADRIAN PABST: There is always a risk when you engage other discourse that you might be constrained by the terms of the debate as they have defined them. As far as the discourse of this book is concerned, the issues we are presently discussing come in the last two chapters of the book and not the beginning.

NEIL TURNBULL:¹⁸ I knew you'd say that.

¹⁸ Neil Turnbull, Principal Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Nottingham Trent.

ADRIAN PABST: We set out the terrain very clearly and we're also referring back throughout the book to ideas we've developed in earlier parts of the book. That would be my immediate defence. But I would also reject that claim that international relations is the dominant paradigm in our discourse because we do not accept the legitimacy of its terms and are constantly challenging them: sovereignty is not absolute, it's not linked to the state—it's something very different from what international relations assumes it is; the primacy of anarchy, once again, is something we strenuously reject as an assumption; and finally we reject all of the assumptions that people make about where we are today in terms of the liberal world order which it is claimed works very well because it is rules-based. We use the language [of international relations], it's true. Some of the language, such as that of institutions, but we don't actually accept the fundamental logic of international relations. Otherwise we would be trying to correct a certain international relations theory. Instead, what we're saying is that the field has forgotten about the primacy of association and that's what we want to restore to political philosophy and ultimately to it.

With that said, the early writings of the English School of international relations are profoundly theological. When you consider the influence of Donald McKinnon, when you consider the work of Herbert Butterfield, you realise that this is not a social-scientific discourse; the secularisation of international relations happened in the 60s—unsurprisingly—and it is the later proponents of the English school like Hedley Bull who take it in such a secular direction. The early writings of Martin Wight, Herbert Butterfield, and Donald McKinnon are a long way away from the social-scientific schools that you are rightly questioning.

KING-HO LEUNG: You can say the same thing about American international relations theory as well, from Niebuhr who was a theologian to Morgenthau who was writing against social science.

JOHN MILBANK: There has always been a very interesting interaction although we feel that Niebuhr conceded far too much to a kind of brutal realism.

KING HO-LEUNG: Yes, though I wonder whether you can say that the anarchic tendency of early international relations theory is actually the product of a bad reading of Augustine and that this dialogue we are now having concerns these two ways of reading Augustine.

NEIL TURNBULL: Do you call your position 'Christian Realism'¹⁹ merely as some kind of add-on to something more profound, intriguing, mysterious, mystical, transcendent, etc., because 'Christian Realism' is not where you end up in the international relations sense?

International relations has been dominated by a particular model of the relationship between nations which has been understood in terms of the relationship between nation-states operating in a Machiavellian power game and within international relations this is known as 'realism'. Recently there has been a post-structuralist moment in the field that has brought in Levinasian ideas about friendship etc. in order to transcend this quite brutal model. 'Christian realism', it seems to me, is nonetheless still that realist model but with a sense of Christian morality.

JOHN MILBANK: Absolutely not. That is not what we mean and that should have been absolutely clear. What we mean by 'Realism' is much more a refusing of both the formalistic positions and the utopian positions, in favour of something allied to realism in the metaphysical sense, thus taking seriously the substantive relations before you which is supposed to be related to this Burkean priority of culture.

¹⁹ Milbank and Pabst, 339, 358-361.

KING: To clarify, in international relations theory, ‘Christian Realism’ was developed by the Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr who has a very pessimistic view of human nature and for him the theorist and politician have a certain ethical view and must try to minimise the evil that humans will do to each other. What John and Adrian are trying to say is that that is not a proper Christian or realist way of understanding human nature and trying to reclaim what such a real realism is.

5. CONCLUSIONS: FREE ASSOCIATION

PHILIP GOODCHILD:²⁰ I agree with much of what you’ve said but I wonder if there’s a problem with starting with the priority of association in our contemporary modern context. Because isn’t part of the logic of modernity a kind of evacuation of association in any kind of thick sense? Do we actually associate anymore? I think this might be intimately tied to European exceptionalism in that Europe is the one region in the world that is highly secularised, and it’s intimately tied to our digital age, our financial globalisation, our changes in work practices etc.. And it is intimately tied to perhaps a kind of accelerating secularisation in Britain today to the point where I have recently been reading material from the 1940s and 1950s and I just can’t recognise that such things could be said anymore about the relationship between theology and the public—except, of course, by yourselves. Otherwise, most average voters have not only not heard of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ but they only see an active model of association, such as for example Islam, as something that’s deeply threatening; an invasion from outside against their own private space, which is neutral rather than anarchic (in a Hobbesian sense). It is possible that a Brexit vote could be seen to defend that space. It is possible that a Brexit vote might

²⁰ Philip Goodchild, Professor of Religion and Philosophy, University of Nottingham.

come from a sense of nostalgic loss; we need to recover some form of association because the technocrats are taking it from us.

JOHN MILBANK: I think these are incredibly important points because in a sense we're trying to reinvent something that's evaporating. We would ultimately accept the argument that if you lose association and interpersonal reciprocity you lose the basis of human existence and society and I tend to feel that there is more of the latter in the Brexit vote. I don't think it's that people necessarily think that they won't still be able to live their private lives as they want to; I think that the Brexit vote reflects much more the loss of the identity of the streets, of where people live and of the sense of familiarity which is incredibly visceral and is therefore, I think, a wanting of association. Most people aren't listening to people who may be religious or theological but I think that the latter do nonetheless have a certain task to persuade people into deeper accounts of association and in a way, religions have a sense of a tradition that things can change and yet also somehow remain the same. Without that we tend to hang on to something extremely fixed. And Brexit signifies an inchoate longing for the completely impossible. But also, I should say, a *valid* sense that the interests of an awful lot of people in this country, especially in the North and on the margins elsewhere have been horrendously neglected; they have been badly hit by immigration amongst other factors. But this is happening across Europe. One irony of this is that there's nothing atypical about these British problems, they're repeated in every country in Europe and anti-Europeanism is growing across Europe and the same is happening with Donald Trump in the United States—metropolitan forces have neglected the very legitimate grievances of ordinary people. But that doesn't mean that you can celebrate it when it goes in a poisonous direction. They have to be addressed. I think that your gloomier perspective is entirely true, but I don't know what to say other than that we need to reinvent association somehow no matter how impossible that may seem.

ADRIAN PABST: I also agree with you entirely Philip. Your description of where we are is certainly accurate. There are very few forms of genuinely participatory association. However, what there is, throughout all ages, and our age is here no exception, is a certain longing for it. And it can take many forms, like pop music, or even football hooliganism (at its worst). More recently, it can take the form of engaging in social media. So I'm not entirely sure that a thicker model of political association would be so easily rejected *if it were* on offer. I think you're right that there's a certain part of the population that might be suspicious – that might see it as an invasion of their private space—but I wonder whether it is numerically just a minority. Where these thicker forms of association are on offer they are accepted; there are new forms of religious worship amongst young people which are not superficial, new forms of social enterprise, new forms of civic participation—these are all examples of a thicker form of association. Now they're not coherent. They do not amount to a single model which neither can nor ought to be imposed. But these examples show that if such a model were on offer there would be a great take out.²¹

JOHN MILBANK: I think that one of the great tragedies of Britain that's not repeated elsewhere is that people who think themselves very British, often white working-class people living in the North or along the Eastern coast have—for reasons that have nothing to do with their own fault—totally lost touch with what it is to be British. Indeed, they don't know about the Glorious Revolution. Whereas some people who are immigrants, people coming from the Caribbean or from Asia will know more an awful lot more about the British legacy. And that's partly because—certainly in the case of Caribbean people—they remain religious. One of the strange things today is that though people have this sense that London's supposed to be really alien, it's actually full of British immigrants who because of post-colonial history tend to be very British in a deep sense. In a

²¹ See Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 381-382.

way we're facing the tragedy of the margins which is witnessed by religious statistics: London is much more churchgoing than Wales and Scotland which would have been unthinkable even 30 years ago. It seems extraordinary that this is now the case. Our leaders are not articulating very well to people these ideas; that for instance these London incomers are not all strangers because we made sure in the first place that they were not strangers!