RADICAL ORTHODOXY

Theology, Philosophy, Politics

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Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics

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EDITORIAL:
On Mixed vs Pure Politics

Dritëro Demjaha

T he whole modern world has divided itself into secular technocrats and
religious fundamentalists. The business of secular technocrats is to go
on making mistakes; the business of religious fundamentalists is to
prevent mistakes from being corrected. Another insight from Chesterton (one of
many the reader will have to endure): towards the end of the 19th century, the
modern world divided itself into the figures of the *pure* Progressive and the *pure*
Conservative.[1] The left and the right are in many ways still enamoured with the
'purity' of their positions, a quality routinely but wrongly interpreted as indicative

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[1] G. K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (New York, NY: John Lane Company, 1910), 60.

of consistency. Rowan Williams recently addressed the consternation felt by both left- and right-wing camps vis-à-vis the ideological stance of Pope Francis as signalling a need to move beyond precisely such 'package deal' ethics.[2] But a 'package deal' implies the involvement of intention and deliberation in the packaging of the political position in question. (We may refer to this, more pompously but also more precisely, as 'ideological totalisation'.) Chesterton's point on the other hand (with which Williams is ultimately in agreement), is that the 'consistency' of the left and right derives ultimately from the purity of merely progressing or merely conserving.[3] When Rowenna Davis rightly points out that 'the left has always been better at knowing what it wants to reform rather than what it wants to protect',[4] she is making an observation that, as anticipatory of political advice, is likely to fall on deaf ears. This is not merely because 'conservative' is the word of the opposition and because it is conducive to partisan discomfort to suggest, as Davis does, that for the Labour party to win another election it must learn what it wants to preserve as well as what it wants to transform and therefore to rediscover its conservative tradition.[5] It is also because for a rigorous politics of 'pure progression', praxis is confined merely to the reforming or transforming *act*. This is what stultified the Labour Party's response to the post-referendum need to prioritise the preservation of EU workers' rights and other similar 'progressive' issues which Brexit brought to the fore of left-wing politics in the latter half of 2016. Perhaps it may be said that whilst the conjunction of the pure Progressives and Conservatives naturally leads to a stalemate, the former has no appropriate response to the increasing

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[2] Rowan Williams, 'Pope of the Masses: Is Francis really the people's champion?' *New Statesman* [Online] September 2015 http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2015/09/pope-masses-francis-really-people-s-champion (accessed: 21 March 2017).

[3] Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 60-61.

[4] Rowenna Davis, 'Labour's "Conservative" Tradition' in *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics*, ed. Ian Geary and Adrian Pabst (London: I.B. Touris, 2015), 196.

[5] Ibid., 195, 196.

preponderance of the atavistic desire to return to the *status quo ante*. This is no doubt to be connected with the erroneous perception of our present predicament as a novelty. Of course, most post-liberal political visions (some of which are explored in this issue) are crucially informed by a disposition to recover one's sources, and in a time when atavistic sensibilities are increasingly normalised, thinkers within and around the Radical Orthodoxy movement would care greatly to discern the presentness of the past from its pastness–to borrow T.S. Eliot's formulation.

Indeed, what is certainly increasingly felt today is the pastness of liberalism. The impulse to move beyond it involves at least in part, according to the thinkers represented in this special issue, the recognition of its historical emergence as a corollary of the failure of the political vision of the Middle Ages and of the collapse of Christendom. At the theological and philosophical level, we are attempting to trace what Jacques Maritain, has called 'integral humanism' and to articulate a political position which the genealogy of the collapse of this humanism entails. However the political vision that may be entailed in the final analysis requires us to diversify the typology of progressives and conservatives, the left and the right, and it is also clear that other emerging political visions (which are both increasingly successful and potent in the socio-economic modifications which their implementation engenders) are similarly not reducible to such dichotomisation. At the same time, we should mark the significance of the increasing interest in 'secular' forms of association amongst the 'liberal' segments of the populace in the form of musical concerts and other artistic forums in contradistinction to declining numbers in churchgoing.[6] Thus part of what post-liberal politics is crucially engaged in today is the mobilisation of the unexpressed consensus in Britain (and probably, if not certainly, elsewhere in the

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[6] Which is no doubt connected with growing perceptions about the inadequacies of current liturgical practices.

West) which rejects both technocratic liberalism and atavistic and sometimes fundamentalist neo-fascism.[7]

Most of these reflections lead us in the necessary direction of recognising the inadequacy of the left versus right distinction in contemporary politics. As Rowan Williams writes apropos the Pope:

> Conservative or liberal? The Pope's record might prompt us to ask whether these categories are as obvious or as useful as we assume. As various commentators have astutely noticed, the Pope is a Catholic. That is, he thinks and argues from a foundational set of principles that are not dictated by the shape of political conflict in other areas. It is difficult for some to recognise that his reasons for taking the moral positions he does on abortion or euthanasia are intimately connected with the reasons for his stance on capitalism or climate change.

More than a century of Catholic social teaching has failed to make less severe the disappointment and often surprise characteristic of the responses from the left when the Pope opposes euthanasia or from the right when the Pope repudiates capitalism. But the Pope is a good Platonist and shows us that knowledge, including knowledge of the good and the right–to invoke the Platonic distinction–requires understanding which in turn entails explanation. This is different from the epistemic position designating merely true belief where variously held truths are either isolated from one another or hold together for arbitrary reasons. The inadequacy of these dichotomies may be demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, in relation to the fact that 'left' and 'right' are irreducibly categories of modernity which map certain dispositions vis-à-vis history and tradition that are nonetheless dispositions informed by the sensibilities of modernity.[8] In this sense, 'conservative' and 'liberal' are also categories which

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[7] John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 381-382.

[8] See John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 129-132, 261-261.

simply convey irreducibly 'liberal' dispositions. The contemporary technocratic metropolitan is in some important ways an inheritor of legacies of libertinism, perhaps especially in England, and Pinto has furthered this genealogical insight in a biography of John Wilmot by correctly linking his libertinism with Hobbesian materialism.[9] But the same may be said of the contemporary fundamentalist, ultimately with recourse to the same genealogical endpoint. Secondly, and as Camille Paglia has also recently noted, the dichotomy is outmoded in relation to newly emerging implications of global politics and increased technologisation.[10] Thus the division into left- and right-wing politics is doubly inadequate and doubly outmoded and outdated; it is inadequate in light of any return to pre-modern sources (since these sources are anterior to liberalism), as well as in light of future engagement with post-modern challenges (which to some extent always invoke presentness of the pre-modern).

It is perhaps unsurprising then, that out of modernity's dichotomisation of sensibilities internal to the liberal and modern, which perhaps first occurred with great significance in the cultural sphere, with the uniquely modern battle of the books between 'ancients' and 'moderns' (which was in fact the quarrel between two kinds of moderns), that *culture* has emerged in Western society, as Slavoj Žižek has noted, as our 'central life-world category'.[11] This is sufficiently the case to entertain the idea of the contemporary 'culture war' as a sustaining discourse of modernity's originary quarrel between 'progressives' and 'traditionalists', holding back any kind of post-modern excoriation of modernity. As Thomas Frank has shown with regard to the American context, ideological disagreements along philosophical and economic lines are transposed into

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[9] Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Enthusiast in Wit: A Portrait of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962).

[10] Camille Paglia, 'Women aren't free until speech is' *Time* [Online] March 2017 http://time.com/4707294/camille-paglia-women-arent-free-until-speech-is/?xid=homepage (accessed: 21 March 2017).

[11] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 30.

disagreements along 'moral' and cultural lines, to the effect of setting up a new opposition between the hard-working poor and the 'liberal elite' which really obscures the more basic division between the rich and the poor.[12] This does not, however, only obscure class division, but obscures authentic cultural processes whose political necessity the post-liberal vision highlights.

Instead of merely stipulating (as does Marxism) an overdetermining antagonism which enables the theoretical overcoming of other oppositions which are determined as 'single issue' politics, typically attached to a specific politicised identity, mixed or 'psychic' politics begins with the overdetermination of the human psyche as determined towards a peaceable and just ordering,[13] though it achieves this, importantly, through two additions. Firstly, it recognises the socialist principle (which is nonetheless affirmed, following Maurice Glasman, in unison with Catholic Social Thought) that work, which discloses the personal origin of the human, does designate a kind of concrete universal.[14] Secondly and crucially, it affirms–and this is indicative of its contemporaneity–a kind of primacy of culture (especially in the domain of international relations)[15] which constitutes, in keeping with the Hegelian typology, the 'universal particular'. But the centrality of culture in contemporary socio-political discourse cannot be exhaustively explained by ideological criticism;[16] it occasions the recognition of culture as a supperadded reality to material politics. In other words, it is not that what matters most today–politics–is *really* about culture (as both the liberal technocrats and the atavists differently insist through their focus

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[12] See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

13 Recall Heni de Lubac's criticism of Marxist anthropology in Henri Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. E.M. Riley, et al. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), especially p. 444.

[14] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 70.

[15] Ibid., 356-357.

[16] Frank sometimes intimates this, and many more are likely to affirm it, but Žižek is right to be suspicious (pp. 31-32).

on social over fiscal issues), but that what matters most today simply is culture. For the thesis of 'psychic' politics is precisely that 'the embodied soul evolves in the city and is, therefore, political, just as politics is about the governance of both the body and the soul and, therefore, the city is psychic'.[17]

This special issue on post-liberal and post-secular political visions reboots the *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* journal with a year's perspective on the Brexit referendum. If the vote to leave the European Union in 2016 was a corollary of a rejection of liberalism from a more recognisably 'right-wing' position (as a number of authors contributing to this issue recognise), the 2017 UK snap election signalled a possible new direction for a move beyond the liberal establishment in major party politics. Some perspectives on both the challenges and opportunities that this presents are articulated below.

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[17] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 275.

Virtue Politics

Theology and International Relations Beyond Liberalism:
The Question of Europe

John Milbank, Adrian Pabst, et al.

1. 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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[1] John Milbank, Research Professor of Religion, Politics, and Ethics at the University of Nottingham.

[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 talked 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.

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[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 getium* 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

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[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 included[6]). 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

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[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

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[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

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[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.

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[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

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[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. Louden and G. Zöller (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-Machiavelly, 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

DRITËRO DEMJAHA: 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.

DRITËRO DEMJAHA: 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 Wesphalian 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

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[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 had 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

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[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

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[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 pint 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.

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[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 to 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 know 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.

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[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

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[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

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[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!

Society and the Church Beyond Liberalism:
The Question of Europe

John Milbank and Adrian Pabst

1. Introduction

Adrian Pabst: The European question can be approached in a number of ways, but I want to start with the political debate and then take it to theology. I think that our political debate and discourse in the last few years and decades have very much been about what Europe is, and have in relation to the EU been more specifically framed in terms of the myths that the EU is either (1) a federal superstate that is going to absorb all of its members into a bureaucratic monstrosity, or else (2) that the EU is merely a glorified free trade area where the only thing which binds member countries together is commercial exchange and the relentless commodification which that entails. Of course, neither are true at all, but for some reason and especially in the UK (though increasingly also elsewhere), people have not been able to convey what Europe is really about. Ever since its inception early in the post-war era, Europe has been a strange hybrid and that is why it has rightly been described as a *sui-generis* polity, not

really like anything else that exists in the world. It's not a state; it's not an international organisation; and it's certainly not just a trade arrangement. It has hybrid institutions, where, for instance, the European Commission proposes legislation but also carries out certain decisions. It's got the member states that come together in the European Council through the Council Ministers and form an *ad hoc* executive order. It includes the European Court of Justice, which is in some sense supreme, but not in others because it does not deal in all areas of the law; for instance, it has nothing to say about national security or the army. It's very hybridised; it is polycentric, and it involves overlapping jurisdictions. All of that goes to show that Europe as a political project doesn't fit into the standard theories of either political science or international relations.[1]

2. EUROPE AS A NEO-MEDIEVAL PROJECT

The European Union is in some ways a neo-medieval project.[2] It involves a version of sovereignty that is always already shared; it means that there is this complex space where people can associate that is neither about the state nor the

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[1] John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 363:

> The German constitutional court, in a landmark ruling on the Lisbon Treaty in June 2009, emphasised that the Union in its original outlook is not so much an international organisation or single state as a voluntary association of states. But now that the European Union has been captured by the logic of the market-state, its members need to strengthen the associational model that combines vertical, hierarchical elements with horizontal, egalitarian aspects. Based on overlapping jurisdictions and a complex web of intermediary institutions wherein sovereignty is dispersed and diffused, such a model can help re-embed both politics and economics within the civic and social bonds of civil society. Amid the current crisis of legitimacy, this suggests that the European Union should pursue a truly subsidiary polis that connects supranational institutions much more closely to regions, localities, communities and neighbourhoods. Most of all, the Union requires a much greater sense of a common demos with a mutual ethos and telos.

[2] See Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 83-84, 145, 212-215, 328-332.

market, but essentially about what we would call civil society. I am referring here to 'civil society' in a much more fundamental sense than the mere conjunction of NGOs and the third sector (as it has now come to be known). By no means do I wish to belittle NGOs and the third sector, but it is clear that that is what civil society is now chiefly about.[3] Of course, civil society is about the freedom of association around intermediary institutions. The reason why discourse on these matters this is not purely social-scientific discourse (contrary to what Neil Turnbull will have us believe), but part of a theological argument has to do with that which upholds this freedom of association around such institutions, namely, the Church. The Church was the first institution to guarantee this free space over and against rulers, including the absolute rulers in antiquity, whether in Ancient Egypt or Ancient China. There was no difference between rule and people, the ruler defined the people, the territory, and the state. With Judaism and Christianity, we witness the emergence of this free space with the prophets who hold the kings to righteousness. We witness the Church essentially providing a counter balance to the state. This is the legacy of which the EU is a very, very late and of course vastly imperfect expression. Ultimately, the argument we are trying to make in the *Politics of Virtue* is that Europe is best thought of as a community of culture, because that is ultimately what binds Europeans together above and beyond territorial borders or any kind of trade relations; it is those cultural ties that define us *as* Europeans.

Of course that goes for countries well beyond the confines of the EU, which is why ideally, what Europe *should* become is essentially a Europe that expresses a Constantinian vision which is inclusive of the whole of Europe, not just the Carolingian Europe of France, Germany, and the Benelux. A Constantinian vision which not only includes Britain and Ireland, but also stretches as far as

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[3] In part, because a denuded civil society is more congenial to the expression of the fusion of the two apparently opposed liberal 'revolutions' (of the cosmopolitan left on the one hand and the conservative right on the other), see Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 15.

Ukraine and Russia.[4] Of course, that's not available in the immediate state of European politics; it may take two, three, or even four generations. Nevertheless, if the EU ultimately wants to survive, it needs to recover its cultural vision. It cannot carry on with business as usual, passing rules and regulations that are very abstract and very remote from people's concerns; it cannot carry on dictating to countries saying 'We know what democracy is, therefore implement our model of democracy'; it cannot insist on abstract human rights. It really needs to reflect on and enhance the cultural bonds that are there, even if they are themselves imperfect and–as Philip Goodchild has pointed out–partly destroyed by capitalism and partly by an aggressive form of liberalism. The EU needs to recover this self-conception as a community of culture. What ultimately brought such a community about historically, and what can help it flourish once again, is the Church. The Church invested in public life, the Church invested in the economy, in culture and in education; in society. Without the Church there is no way in which Europe can really thrive. The Church is associated with other institutions (or rather it is related to institutions, since the Church is not an institution but a body) and in some sense is the association of all associations. As such it also provides links with other faith communities. We should always bear in mind that many religious minorities in Europe feel most comfortable not in an aggressively secular Europe, which denies their own religious identity, but rather in a Europe that upholds its own Christians and expresses a Christian outlook and enables other communities to have their own sense of the sacred respected

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[4] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 350; this would introduce the

> novel possibility of Britain herself being the most commanding continental power because she would then pursue the ancient Constantinian vision of a pan-European polity ideally to be extended eastwards. This vision differs markedly from the restoration of the ancient Carolingian unity of France and Germany in the West, which at present faces its most serious intellectual and political challenge since 1939–the migration crisis, the Eurozone crisis, the influx of ISIS fighters, a global economic slowdown, Russia's provocations against Scandinavia and Eastern Europe and the corporate scandals of banks and car companies.

more publicly because it respects, as it were, its own sacred. An aggressively secular Europe simply has no future, not for Christians, not for Jews, not for Muslims, not for anyone. The argument that we are trying to make is that you actually need Christianity in order to uphold a genuine form of pluralism – not a formalistic pluralism of rights or contracts, but a substantive pluralism which ensures that people feel they are respected in their own relational identity.[5]

3. The neo-medieval vision in Europe and beyond

John Milbank: What is needed is something intermediate between nations as well as something like the UN. To some degree there exists a South American union; we need this also in Africa and so on. Adrian and I are also arguing for something which the 1945 Labour government were originally aiming at, though they had to give it up in the face of the Cold War, and that was to have a link between Europe and what was then still the British Empire (which then quickly became the British Commonwealth), in other words linking former dominions

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[5] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 80; this has its precedent in Britain's historical radicalism:

> traditions of courage, commitment, loyalty and leadership shaped the workers' movement in Britain, France and then elsewhere, in resisting the worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Against the forces of the increasingly free market and the increasingly centralised state, British workers set up burial societies to honour their dead, and created cooperatives and mutuals to honour their communities and the places that they inhabited. They forged ties among Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, other Nonconformists, Evangelicals and Jews that gave rise to an almost unique internationalist movement of patriots who honoured their country, its constitutional legacy, literary culture and singularly long history of political unity and organic development. This radical traditionalism transcends reactionary nostalgia whose fatalism is just as misguided as the progressive utopianism of both state communism and market capitalism. In keeping with the oldest socialist traditions in Britain and France, and with an echo of Radical Toryism reaching back to Cobbett, Wesley and Dr Johnson, post-liberals reject both these positions in favour of the endless creative reshaping of traditional prescriptions and the reforming of habits, which can seriously and drastically transform, beyond the illusory reach and damaging iconoclasm of revolutions.

into the European project as well to try to create networks of trade, for example, as well as NATO security situations. This would definitely be part of our vision, so when we talk about the Commonwealth Principle we mean something that can be extended and the EU is the big test and in a way so far it has worked. For all its terrible failings, it has worked remarkably well, though it is now facing a severe crisis. Part of this crisis concerns the national question; 'how do you fit in the reality of national identities?' Notwithstanding the extent to which we see them as having negative features, they constitute very powerful realities and I think that the trouble is the gulf between them. There are no European newspapers; there is no European television; there is a lack of a European conversation if you like, it is too opaque a thing even amongst intellectuals. Maybe churches are in a unique position to start developing that, because there is more inter-European interaction between Christians and theologians than there is amongst other communities. Even the level of knowledge in Britain of what goes on in French intellectual or cultural life is minimal, and this is a shocking situation. So how can people feel European if they don't feel like they are part of a European conversation and exchange, that goes beyond just food and travel?[6] Furthermore, we need to be able to articulate this European identity without it leading to the sense that it is violating peoples' immediate national identities. I know that this is a very difficult thing to achieve, but I think that it is one of the biggest vacuums in Europe. This is what makes people have no sense of self-expression when they are electing to the European Parliament; the fact that there are no European debates, just a series of national debates.[7]

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[6] Note that this surface of inter-European interaction corresponds to the thin conception of English identity described in *Theology and International Relations Beyond Liberalism*. Because the main problem described here refers to the gulf *between* nations, the lack of thick community at the European level problematises the articulation of a thick national self-conception, which, in accordance with the Burkean thesis, is irreducibly European.

[7] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 363: 'For these reasons, the European Union should create a parliamentary system of bicameralism–with a lower house representing the people and an upper house representing cities, regions, nations, professions and faith communities'.

To clarify, we are not advocating a return to any earlier form of political organisation. If this impression is conveyed, particularly in the context of wishing to articulate a neo-Constantinian vision, it is susceptible to the apparent danger of backsliding into something unwanted and repressive. I say that this is a merely apparent danger in part because totalitarianism is a specifically modern phenomenon, and it is totalitarianism that seems to be the perennial danger for some. In so far as our project is post-modern, it continuous with the post-modern accusation that there are features of modernity which now seem out of date, and this suggests something neo-medieval–but only in certain respects. It does not involve at all going back to crucial aspects of the Middle Ages. What it does involve is something very specific, namely the recognition that we seem to have gone beyond this post-Westphalian era of the nation-state. Consequently, international formations once again have assumed and must continue to assume a certain paramountcy so that in contradistinction to the modern account of sovereignty we have a rather more pluralistic model. This is why the Middle Ages become relevant, simply because they had a more pluralistic way of thinking about rule. Moreover, there is a sense in which the Catholic legacy has always favoured more pluralistic forms of sovereignty, which in a way allows the primacy of the spiritual, in the phrase of Jacques Maritain. What then dominates normatively, is not a political force but rather a cultural *focus* of unity such as the Pope. In many ways there is a sort of tendency now towards Empire and Caesarism; we have to deal with the forces leading to that, but the valid concerns need to be bent in a much more benign direction. But I suppose the whole force of our book is that we cannot now rely on liberal democracy as we know it, it needs a mutation.

4. Post-liberalism

Adrian Pabst: There are a number of corrective directions vis-à-vis liberal democracy, in which we can approach this mutation. It seems clear to us that liberal democracy focused excessively on procedure, excessively on formalism, on formal rights, entitlements, and so on. It hasn't properly elaborated what sort of content or substance can give meaning to that. It's not that we want to abolish rights or contracts–that would be absurd–it's that we have seen an inversion of primacy, an inversion of priorities in our political discourse. Rather than talking about more substantial things like the common good, virtue, or honour, we have increasingly talked about ground rules of fairness (Rawls) and have forgotten that no society can work on that level, because it is too abstract for society. We don't all go behind the veil of ignorance to decide what a fair society must look like; it just doesn't work. This is a form of Kantian transcendentalism that as we all know works neither philosophically nor politically. The question then, is how can we have a greater balance between rights and contracts (which we all need in order to have a society, especially a complex one) on the one hand, and make proper space for things like the common good on the other? The common good is not an aggregation, the common good entails all sorts of irreducibly relational goods which we all have in common. Education, for instance, is a supremely relational good. Why? Because we are not all autodidacts; some of us might be for some things but there are always exceptions. Friendship is probably the most immaterial of all relational goods, but these goods are clearly also material; education, transport, health, these are all relational goods, viz., goods you can't have just on your own. But we don't have a discourse for the expression of relational goods as such, we only have the language of private and public goods, and we tend to completely miss out everything in between. So private goods become just things we have for immediate gratification and public goods are centrally determined and dictated things that we all have to have. Therefore we have to ask: how can we bring back, in a renewed and non-absolutist way, the

notion of the common good? That *is* where the debate is now, because we know, for instance, from business, that regulation will only get you so far. People who are criminal will always be a step ahead of any regulation you can come up with. So the real move is not to try to have better regulation, or more regulation, *ad infinitum*, but to try and really encourage, really incentivise and reward better behaviour, virtuous behaviour. That's what we need to talk about, not endless rules, nor indeed endless anarchy and how to cope with the consequences of it – neither will work. In this sense, our project is about the content or even spiritual substance of politics as an art of spiritual and embodied human creatures. If it seems similar to the Russian *sobornost*, that's because it is.

John Milbank: Yes, and we would like to make it clear that this notion of spiritual co-operation and relationality is closely tied to the question of Europe because if we are not Europeans we are absolutely nothing. I think it is evident that it is possible, within both the Church and theology, to have this conversation and this sharing. I don't think that it's the Church is the only body that is capable of eventuating this, but I do think that the Church's contributions are particularly congenial to such a conversation. The challenge then, for the Church is in a way to achieve a *more* substantive unity, without blocking other people from it, and I think that it will require something very practical – an infusion of all sorts of cultural, economic, and social activities with some kind of Christian spirit. Making a Christian difference, as Michel de Certeau has talked about, will be crucial; entering into these discourses that are ineluctably secular but showing how Christianity can somehow make a difference, a difference that can become something attractive.[8] I think that some of the various Catholic lay movements like CNL, as well as other ones, have a very interesting way of belonging to this line of orthodox Christianity but with a strong integration of

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[8] See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1984).

nature and grace reducing closed boundaries. They are open to other sources of genuine wisdom. They almost operate at two levels: a very intra-ecclesial level, but also an area where engagement may be found and encouraged when there are coincidences about vision and practice with other groupings. And so, it is overwhelmingly a matter of culture, and this perhaps makes it a greater difficulty for us compared to the generation of Maritain. You can't totally ignore this question of power and authority without becoming some sort of kitsch theatre that simply reflects essentially secular debates in a kind of theatrical, ritualised, side show. So we necessarily arrive at the problematic question of how we infuse power structures.

In addition, I think that some of the issues that may have admitted to clear positions for our generation have stopped being so clear and we can no longer assume that there will continue to be a secular natural law consensus around everything. We are living in a world where even the Guardian is noticing that, for instance, the Netherlands is systematically murdering handicapped people.[9] And so we can't be quite so sanguine about questions of power, I think. Above all, this requires as its end to help to shape new forms of community that help to create a more attractive way of life that people will simply want to join in on, and for that reason. In that sense, our project is not only not an authoritarian project, but it can't work as one. In fact, we need this basic cultural project if we are going to defeat these new atavistic forces. As for the sources of these concerns vis-à-vis the nation-state and cultural atavism, it might well be that our modern theories of sovereignty are just secularised versions of papal absolutism, but very clearly (as research has shown), papal absolutism was a late medieval

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[9] See Xavier Symons, 'When it comes to euthanasia, not all slippery slope arguments are "bullshit"', *The Guardian* [Online] April 2017 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/13/when-it-comes-to-euthanasia-not-all-slippery-slope-arguments-are-bullshit (accessed: 13 April 2017) and Allen, C., 'The label "incurable" is not a justification for ending a life', *The Guardian* [Online] May 2016 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/31/incurable-not-justification-for-ending-life-netherlands-euthanasia (accessed: 13 April 2017).

invention. Nevertheless, in the face of orthodox and Anglican anarchy, we desperately need the papacy. We need a mixed constitution in the Church that we have never properly developed, in other words we need the Pope in council.[10] What we've got is an over-centralised Catholic church and extreme anarchy in other churches. The real challenge for the papacy is to be really bold. Modern technology makes it possible for the pope to say 'I am the head of all Christians'. The Pope now has infinitely more respect worldwide, even from Protestants, than ever before, and this is the effect of modern media. Now, how can this be creatively built up on? I am personally a heretic about this matter, I think that all these meetings about doctrine and things are a total waste of time. Inter-ecclesial progress will only come practically through increasing inter-communion. One thing I like to say in relation to this is that we are already one Church. The Catholic church already offers communion in certain circumstances. So it is a lie that we are not already one Church. We need to start on that basis, not with the idea that we are striving towards it. So we need to somehow work out *this* better political model which will then start to reverse the secular model–if it is the case that the whole trouble is false-ecclesiology in the first place.

5. The Church

Adrian Pabst: I would also like to point out that what makes the Church unique and distinct from other institutions is precisely that it is not an institution but a living body; it's that it's all about personal rule.[11] In contradistinction to this, what we deal with today are all impersonal forms of rule: laws and contracts. But personal rule is something which people generally long for. Of

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[10] See Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 205-245.

[11] Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 207-208; 218-219.

course, you can take it to a very, very sinister extreme, in the form of fascism. But that is not too say that all forms of personal rule slide into that, you can have very virtuous forms of personal rule. And if you can offer a more virtuous form of personal rule, you can quite effortlessly appeal to this longing. That is where there is enormous potential politically–however we must at the same time recognise that the moment you institutionalise personal rule you get very problematic and often unexpected outcomes. The situation is not uncomplicated, but the fundamental difference of personal vs impersonal rule is crucially important if we are to move forward. Furthermore, what was historically novel and unique about Judaism and Christianity was precisely to articulate something people had never articulated before rather than to merely effect liberation from absolutism. When you look at, for instance, Ancient Egypt, the language of absolutism is of course anachronistic and we are projecting it back onto it, but as we know from the biblical stories, there is longing there for not just freedom *from* absolutism but also for a freedom *to* something positive that is there. This is not just something we invent later on, it is part of what it means to be human. Anthropology actually teaches us that most societies, even those that are, relatively speaking, more hierarchical rather than those that are more egalitarian, essentially function in accordance with this notion of mutual recognition.

JOHN MILBANK: And that is essentially why, as we say, the Church should reinvest in society, the economy, and politics in a plural way; not by dictating to people because that is never going to work, but by trying to form new bonds, new ties that can give people agency. I think a lot of this is about agency about this longing towards something positive, towards the ability to associate freely. A lot of people feel that they have essentially no agency and if the Church can give them both some space and some tools to regain a sense of agency, this would itself be a great victory. But I think that really is where the conversation ought to be at: to try and think of forms of communal, collective agency that aren't linked to just the state or are only limited to a global economy where very few of us

have genuine freedom of opportunity or equality of opportunity. It is essentially about a form of empowerment, not the trivial empowerment of consumer choice, but the empowerment of an agency for the pursuit of one's talents which allows one's inclinations to flourish. Consequently, it has to do with the support of institutions ultimately upheld by the Church. That's what we are gesturing towards.

John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future*. London and New York: Rowman and Lititlefield, 2016, 24.95, pp. x & 406.

The British campaign to leave the European Union, and the campaign of Donald Trump for the Presidency of the United States, channeled and legitimised vicious elements in contemporary political culture: xenophobia, pride, lying, irrationality, hate, greed, anger, and naked ambition were much to the fore in the campaigns. And they have, sadly, remained to the fore in the public conversations which have followed. Without Boris Johnson, the British 'Leave' campaign would likely have lost and it is widely recognised that he joined the campaign not out of anti-EU or anti-migrant conviction but from ambition to replace David Cameron–his rival since school days at Eton–as Prime Minister. Donald Trump began a low key campaign for the Republican candidacy out of wounded pride, having on a number of occasions been told by other Republicans that he was not fit for the office of the Presidency. Written in the two years prior to these campaigns, Milbank and Pabst's historically and philosophically deep, and yet policy rich, book is prescient in its prediction of the collapse of the liberal *status quo* in the UK and the USA which is now evident in the populist turn of the globally 'left behind' against the perceived liberal cosmopolitan consensus in the Brexit and Trump victories.

The core of Milbank and Pabst's argument is that what they call 'liberalism'–which they define through an amalgam of Hobbes' account of the State as Leviathan restraining the war of all against all, Locke's individualist concept of self-ownership, and Hume and Smith's claim that economic exchanges governed by little more than the law of price turn individual vices into collective well being–is the origin of the current 'metacrises' of capitalism, politics, culture, and

the nations. These metacrises were deferred from the end of the last century by foolish post-imperial incursions–from the 'Falklands War', and the tragically ill-conceived 'War on Terror' to the disastrous intervention in Libya. But since 2008 the interconnected metacrises of capitalism, democracy, culture, and globalism (and the metacrisis of nature which also finds subsidiary reference) are increasingly proving beyond the capacity of established political parties, or technocratic elites, to manage or resolve. These metacrises may only be resolved, they argue, by abandoning the tired divisions of left and right, conservative and radical, and by reviving the classical and Christian accounts of moral and political virtue and rejecting the core claims of liberalism.

If it is the work of philosophy to repair the world, as Novalis argued, then this book is philosophy of a high order. Unlike Milbank's earlier sole-authored works, this book is organised so that chapter-length genealogies of the metacrises it describes–in politics, economics, culture and education, and international relations–are followed by policy chapters in which the authors lay out a remarkably detailed imaginary of what a 'post-liberal' politics would look like, albeit fleshed out primarily in relation to the economy, institutions, lands and people of the British Isles, and especially England. The four genealogies have a shared and broadly anti-modern *telos*–they trace the origins of the current crises from the English Tudor Reformation, through the Enlightenment, to modern State and Corporation directed technocratic rule. The four repairs are more fine-grained but they too share a pattern. They have in common the view that the purpose of being human is to be in communion with other souls and other beings, and that human society and its economic, political, and cultural institutions, ought to be ordered so as to enable persons to become more fully human through induction into constructive economic vocations and the contemplation of nature and of God. The purpose of human institutions is to educate citizens to perceive their transcendent and common goods, and to enable, but not coerce, citizens to work towards these goods in collectivities

which are governed by the virtues of 'economic justice and social reciprocity' which are more differentiated, more local, more genuinely plural, and smaller, than the organs of modern States, or superstates like the EU, or modern economic corporations.

Liberal politics has the 'constitution of individualism' and relies on a negative definition of what individuals want, which is freedom from coercion and from limits on their own choices from the needs of other persons or the plans of other agencies. Liberals–or adherents of liberalism which is the more common usage in this book–assume that there are no widely agreed common goods which societies ought to be ordered to foster other than the restraint of theft and civil violence. This conception of political individualism underwrote the rise of an over-bearing State which, particularly since 1945, took upon itself evermore works of charity and of cooperative planning and organisation. In medieval Europe ecclesially-shaped charity and cooperation had fostered the institutions of apprenticeships and trade guilds, common pastures, city governments, land-owner parliaments, law courts, monarchy, universities and schools, and smallholder farming. But secular liberalism gradually dissolves conceptions of common and transcendent goods towards which these institutions are originally directed. And the consequence is the neoliberal turn of political institutions and governance towards economic management in which the dominant publicly recognised values are merely those of capital, consumer goods, and money. Repair of the political effects of these tendencies is identified in the recovery of a Christian conception of political society as a parliament of souls, and of persons as political animals destined to political participation: it was these conceptions which gave rise, in the Christian Middle Ages, to the principal institutions which endure, albeit in more secular form, in British society, but which economic liberalism is dissolving. Repair of the resultant tendency of liberal politics to oscillate between a 'debased popular will' and an oligarchic and technocratic elite is identified in the proposed recovery of the plural and mixed constitution of

the England of the Elizabethan Settlement when governance was exercised in a multiplicity of corporate, personal and societal forms, from city guildhalls to the monarchy. In a Romantic reading of that pre-reformation world, Milbank and Pabst underwrite, surprisingly uncritically, the unique fusion of the ancient order of Melchizedek, from which sacred lineage the English coronation service still traces the authority of the monarch, with the parish system of the Church of England, the Houses of Parliament, the judiciary, and the local government of cities and shires.

The critique of economic liberalism lies at the centre of the book and begins from the recognition that capitalism imposes a secular logic of commodification which desacralises both human life and nature. Drawing on Karl Polanyi, Milbank and Pabst argue that the original turn in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain of persons into wage labour, and of land into rental value, and the resultant disembedding of productive exchange from pre-modern communities and gift-exchange, is the deep cultural origin of the metacrises of the twentieth-first century which were heralded by the 2008 financial crash. The global financial crisis was caused by debt being used to sustain economic distribution, since globalisation had out-sourced much industrial waged employment, and financialisation had commoditised infrastructure, land and most public services. The transition of the economy from one based on land and labour into a speculative economy sees wealth increasingly abstracted from really existing communities of persons, or land areas, and creates a newly disordered capitalism in which artificial scarcities are created. These scarcities–for example the scarcity of employment in continental Europe or of housing in Britain since the financial crash–reflect the needs of finance capital which a technocratic elite decided anti-democratically, should predominate over real human need, causing the populist backlash. The repair of neoliberal economism is found in a bringing together of Bruni and Zamagni's account of an Italian-style 'civil economy' with Catholic Social Teaching and especially the latter's emphasis on social justice

and the common good. The chapter on civil economy is in policy terms the strongest in the book and contains detailed propositions on more ethical approaches to corporate governance, on the recovery of human making as economic vocation, on the benefits of regional, cooperative manufacturing and food production, on the restraint of debt and the sharing of risk, on the 'wise use' of land, and more broadly on the return of an ethical economy.

The third genealogy and policy area the book addresses is cultural liberalism. The broadest of the book's four themes, this chapter ranges widely from libertarianism and political correctness to gender-shifting and the scientific re-engineering of life, including of children. Here the core theological claim of the book is more fully elaborated, which is that the finest fruits of Western humanism, and the resources for its future repair, lie in Christian spirituality and sacramental communion. Secular liberalism is ultimately destructive of humanism, and especially of popular political agency, because of its 'refusal to acknowledge the reality of the soul and the ontologically irreducible relation between the realm of the psychic and the realm of the political' (275). Human life is directed towards its true ends–the parliament of souls, the beautifying of nature and the city through benign production, and the love of transcendent goodness and God–through education. And the debasement of education as the business-oriented, and increasingly business-run, shaping of persons to be resources for and agents in market transactions is among the deepest of all denigrations of Christian humanism currently being realised in what the authors call 'Anglosaxondom'. The cultural repair involves the 're-forming' of formation through a range of recovered approaches and organisational forms including: the abolition of national curricular and a return of power in the classroom to teachers; re-emphasis on British cultural heritage and Christian history in schools; a genuine attempt to reinstitute apprenticeships for crafts and trades on the German model; the reduction in the number of universities and the re-inauguration of other tertiary institutions to promote and sustain technical,

skilled and craft work linked with a renewal of guild-governance of such work; the restoration of genuine self-governance to universities and the abolition of the top-down, debt funded, market-oriented reorganisation of Higher Education in Britain that threatens its charitable origins and purpose, and enhancement of the role of faith schools.

The final theme which is called the 'metacrisis of the nations' covers an even larger terrain than the others, including the history of empire, the origins and travails of national sovereignty, and the emergence of globalisation and its discontents as revealed by Brexit. These last chapters are briefer than what has gone before and more controversial. Empire, and especially its British form, is treated in an uncritical way. But few who have dwelled for any length of time in a former British colonial possession would take the view that Britain governed its empire with a view to advancing a global common good rather than its own interests. It is true that the British permitted churches and missions to build more schools and hospitals than the Dutch or the Portuguese. But the destruction of India's pre-colonial textile economy and the pre-independence violent partition of India and Pakistan; the imperially-underwritten theft of tribal lands by white settlers in Africa and the subsequent division of Africa across tribal boundaries into a number of near-ungovernable 'national' terrains; the long war against independence in Malaya–all these and many more sagas underwrite the predominance of economic over civilising missions in the British Empire. And it is precisely the continuing flows of refugees from ungovernable nations and colonially-decimated economies that is a major focus of resentment among the many British people who, finding themselves left behind by the imperiousness of remote global economic agencies in their own regions, voted in the EU Referendum to 'take back control' of national borders, and re-assert political sovereignty over super-state power, by leaving the European Union. It may be, as Milbank and Pabst argue, that the British Commonwealth, and global networks of cities and regions, represent alternatives to more established

attempts to generate intercommunion and agreement between nations, including most influentially cross-border trade, and the United Nations. However a more powerful exemplar of a true globalism is not the remnants of British Empire, or informal networks of city mayors, but the Roman Catholic Church, which remains the largest provider of schools, hospitals and development aid in Africa to this day, and whose internationalism was at least as much the progenitor of currently existing forms of capitalism and globalism as those liberal-shaped Anglo-institutions and practices which are, rightly, traced in this book to Britain's Tudor Reformation.

In a book of such extraordinary breadth and vision, it is inevitable that in parts its authors will make judgments with which others may strongly disagree. Perhaps the greatest likely source of such disagreement is not over empire however but over the definition of liberalism itself. Anglo-Saxon liberalism carries a huge amount of weight in the narration of the four metacrises the book describes, and at times it seems as if the responsibilities are just too great even for such intellectual giants as Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Smith. But it is precisely in its historical depth and philosophical vision that the authors pull off a rare feat in the human sciences, which is to combine an interdisciplinary meta-analysis, of the metacrises which currently engulf the West, and a sustained and practical imaginary of potential civilisational, ethical, and spiritual pathways out of them. This book is not only an analysis of metacrises but a set of meta-policy proposals which are both remarkably practical and real-world in their form and character while at the same time being situated in a rich and fruitful fusion of classical humanism and Christian political theology.

In Britain, France, and the United States a range of influential post-liberal analyses of the malaise of secularism and capitalism, and the rise of Islamism and populism, have been published, from Gauchet and Manent to Stiegler and Pickety. But none of these treatments has anything like the genealogical breadth

and policy relevance of *The Politics of Virtue*. In this extraordinary book Milbank and Pabst therefore perform a powerful service to British theology. Once the queen of the sciences, theology and the study of religion have been relegated to the lower ranks of the third division–the increasingly under-funded humanities–in most British universities. But the eclipse of theology and the history of religion renders academia peculiarly maladroit at diagnosing, let alone prescribing for, the metacrises of late liberal modernity. In *The Politics of Virtue* theology again finds its rightful place among the human and social sciences, of which it was the progenitor, as the most practical of disciplines.

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Post-Liberal Politics

Liberalism in Search of Vision:
Responding to the Lost Connection between Policy and Lifestyle with the Christian Socialist Movement as a Case Study

Timothy Stacey

1. Introduction

According to post-liberal political theory, liberalism has undermined shared ideas of the good by valorising choice as the only good. The result is that there is no shared vision by which to challenge forces of instrumentalisation. Yet post-liberal theory tends to ground its critique in liberal theory, without sufficiently anchoring arguments in what Jeffrey Alexander has called 'proximate actors and agencies'; that is, in this case, political institutions and processes.[1] In order to do this, the paper offers a slightly alternative genealogy of liberal political theory to that ordinarily provided by post-liberals. It

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[1] Alexander and Smith, 'The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology' in Alexander *The Meanings of Social Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

focuses on political hypocrisy: the notion that there is one rule for the people and another for rulers. It then critically anchors this genealogy in UK political institutions and processes, which it demonstrates tend to undermine a connection between policy and lifestyle. Finally, the paper ethnographically explores a possible response offered by one organisation in the UK: Christians on the Left (formerly the Christian Socialist Movement). While it is recognised that focusing on the UK may be at the expense of international linchpins, the lack of clarity amongst post-liberals thus far as to the proximal actors and agencies through which liberalism operates calls for detailed focus on one area.

Liberalism is a notoriously broad concept which may mean something very different depending on the political context. In the US, liberal is often used to refer to social democrats, while in the UK liberal often suggests *laissez-faire*. For the purposes of this paper I intend three ideas primarily: that all ideas of the good are equally valid; that politics therefore must be and can be undertaken without an understanding of what is good; and that in the absence of an idea of the good, wealth is the best measure of both political success and individual happiness. This is a necessarily controversial argument. First of all liberalism tends to be associated with liberty–the premise of which must be that all ideas of the good are equally valid–but not with a lack of good. Second, liberalism is almost universally acknowledged as a force for good. Actually I agree that any laudable political philosophy requires a commitment to liberty. Yet it is my task to show that the assertion of this principle as an end in itself leads to instrumentalisation.

By instrumentalisation, I mean the orienting of our relationships with things and people as ones of user to resource. The central way, this paper suggests, that instrumentalisation reveals itself, is as a disconnect between lifestyle and policy pervading politicians, what politicians expect of business, institutions and the public, and what individual members of the public expect of themselves.

The consequences of this disconnect are far reaching. Understanding its history and primary features can help us to see a commonalty between a number of seemingly disparate problems: the increasing similarity between parties, the MPs expenses scandal, the banker bonus furore, and the combination of the media hacking scandal and the Murdoch BSkyB takeover bid. Though in some cases starting as far back as 2008, these events remain on the surface of public discourse in 2016. A few years ago, these events seemed to be underscored by low levels of political engagement and riots. Actions to overcome these problems have often be derided as merely scratching the surface: attempts to look beyond old party divisions just seems to lead to shifts to the centre and populism; only a few MPs were criminally charged over their expenses fiddling; the banks only received a levy while bankers continue to receive excessive bonuses; and the present conservative government continues to avoid the full implications of the Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press. As Milbank and Pabst point out, the seeming intractable nature of liberal political philosophy, safeguarded by a Westminster elite that appear out of touch with ordinary people, may well help us to understand current disengagement with political institutions and parties, with some choosing protest over voting, and others voting for far-right populist parties.[2]

2. History: The Fall of Teleology and the Rise of Liberalism

This section seeks to summarise post-liberal arguments, which rely on a genealogical critique of liberal political theory. But it does so with a twist. I focus on political hypocrisy: the notion that there is one rule for the people, and another for rulers. I suggest that this tradition of political hypocrisy feeds into a

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

liberal distinction between a public and private self. Taken together, political hypocrisy and the distinction between a public and private self undermine the ability of politics to play a role in social and ethical renewal. This alternative genealogy then provides me with a basis for anchoring problems with liberal political theory in real institutions and processes in the UK; namely, a lost connection between policy and lifestyle.

Political hypocrisy appears age-old. The Bible offers us a rich history of hypocritical leaders; leaders who preached the virtues of life lived one way but who lived their own in a completely different way. Yet if political hypocrisy is age old, the history of denunciations of political hypocrisy is equally old. Two traditions stand out. The first is that told by the Bible. The Old Testament is full of prophetic voices warning of the dangers of hypocrisy (Jer 7:4-11 ; Isa 1:10-17 ; 58:2-7 ; Hosea 6:4-6 ; Amos 4:4-5 ; 5:21-22). And the New Testament is replete with calls against hypocrisy from one such voice (Matthew 22:15-18 ; 1 Peter 2:1). These voices were not always calling for dissent, but just as often were whispering to rulers, personally pointing out their shortcomings. Amongst these voices there is an implicit conviction that if we can change peoples' hearts we can change politics. This was a tradition that stressed the importance of charity and justice. The second tradition is that of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato political justice is derived from the internal justice of those in charge.[3] And for Aristotle, politics is not a process of formulating and delivering policies but a process of forming friendships towards a conception of the good.[4] This tradition stressed the importance of teleology, of studying the highest end of humanity and exploring how best to bring about that end. For Plato the process of rational self-reform guides good policy, for Aristotle the process of building friendships does.

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[3] Plato, *Republic* (London: Penguin, 2003), Book IV.

[4] Aristotle, *Politics* (London: Dover, 2000).

These two traditions, the Judeo-Christian and the Platonic-Aristotelian, converged in a long line of advice to rulers concerning how best to conduct oneself in office, from around the 3rd century BC to the end of the 16th century AD: whether this meant teaching the future ruler as Aristotle himself did Alexander; writing treatises as with the *Mirrors for Princes* tradition; or actually offering first hand advice. The role of these advisors was to ensure that rulers were good, practicing virtue in the way they carried out the duties of their office. In our contemporary climate where advisors can just as often be called "spin - doctors" this tradition of moral advice can be hard to imagine. So what changed? A number of threads converged.

The first thread was provided by Machiavelli. In his *The Prince*, published in 1532 and ostensibly in the same tradition of offering political advice, Machiavelli did something entirely new. He argued that it is of no use having a conception of the good if one does not have power–an argument that will be very familiar to those following contemporary Labour Party Politics in the UK. Politics should therefore be the amoral task of gaining and maintaining power. And this task cannot be achieved by good action. Machiavelli does not have to be regarded as demonic here. Isaiah Berlin has shown that it is quite acceptable to see Machiavelli as warning against the employment of misplaced ideals about humanity to the detriment of those they seek to serve.[5] Better to see people as they are, as fundamentally evil, and to learn how to manipulate them accordingly. This began a philosophy of what Pierre Manent has called 'the fecundity of evil', whereby harnessing the power of evil is a necessary prerequisite of gaining power.[6]

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[5] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' in Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 1997).

[6] Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinksi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 87-93.

It was Grotius, a Dutch legal philosopher who, with the publication of *On the Law of War and Peace* in 1625, suggested politics could be a science much like physics, constructed without need of reference to God or any other teleological vision.[7] Grotius was seeking a way to denounce the religious violence rife in his time. There are three important features of this philosophy. The first is that it severs the link between policy and lifestlye. If policy is a science, its just execution has nothing to do with the lifestyle of the policy maker. The second is that it equally undermines those outside of the political process: if politics is a science then individuals are cogs within the order it promotes. The third problem is that it begins a process of forcing morality into the private sphere. If morality is not required in politics, then it follows that morality has no place in politics.

Similarly, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, published in 1651, sought a fair means of arbitrating between warring teleological visions. Hobbes posited a hypothetical social contract based on the notion that people wanted to avoid violent death. He said that people should offer allegiance to a leviathan with a monopoly of power. It is to this leviathan to dictate religious policy. Hobbes then, adds a further problem: apart from under the auspices of a leviathan, men cannot be trusted to act in a morally responsible manner. This notion is what John Milbank calls the 'ontology of evil'.[8] On the one hand individuals are expected to be privately corrupt. And on the other hand, and because of this, the state is given almost unlimited authority to intervene in the public sphere. With Hobbes we begin to see the distinction between a public and private self. At this point, however, it is the former that has the upper hand.

Later, the tables begin to turn, and keeping morality private becomes a right. John Locke tells us that we cannot impose issues of religion because no human

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[7] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

[8] Ibid., 420.

can have access to universal laws, because it is impossible to coerce people to believe anything and because anyway coercion leads to more violence than does tolerance.[9] As Charles Taylor has acknowledged, this step with Locke marks the beginning of a trend away from the Platonic-Aristotelian notion that the individual cannot be considered a fully competent human except as part of society, in which the individual is justified in so far as he or she serves society. Instead this idea is turned on its head and society is justified in so far as it serves individuals.[10] Taylor explains that after Locke this idea will increase in intensity, in scope and in popularity so that within a few centuries it becomes the defining concept of our social imaginary.

By way of example, almost two centuries later J.S. Mill argues that one should be able to do whatever one pleases so long as it does not harm anyone else.[11] A famous phrase sums up the principle: 'your liberty to swing your fist ends just where my nose begins'. If policy has nothing to do with lifestyle, the lifestyles of people in positions of public importance are inconsequential. In some ways this is a laudable cultural trend, allowing for people to be true to themselves in their private lives without worrying about public scrutiny. But it also lends to moral relativism. There is no longer a hierarchy of values but of rights. If we deem public discussions of private morality intrusive, we allow morally reprehensible behaviour to spread amongst those in positions of public importance, as well as potentially abandoning people without the education or support to lead virtuous lives. Nor are these problems merely theoretical. We have seen examples of both in recent years, as well as of one informing the other. The most extreme example of this came in the UK riots of 2011. The MPs expenses scandal, the banker

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[9] John Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration' in *A Letter Concerning Toleration, and Other Writings* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010).

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 170.

[11] J.S. Mill *On Liberty* (London: Dover, 2002).

bonus furore, and the media hacking scandal were all offered as excuses for rioting amongst those involved.[12]

The final thread I want to mention is added by Adam Smith, who suggested that the *telos* could not be constructed and implemented but instead was a by-product of primarily selfish behaviour. Says Smith: 'By pursuing his own interest [one] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good'.[13] In the interests of good Smith embraced the fecundity of evil.

All of this gets far more complicated when we discuss Max Weber. I am tracing those thinkers that brought us to our present state of instrumentalisation, a matter on which Weber seems conflicted. In some ways Weber certainly contributed to instrumentalisation, claiming that 'one can, in principle, master all things by calculation'.[14] But as Sung Ho Kim has argued, Weber is ambivalent about what this means. One might suggest that while epistemologically positivist, that is, confident about the technical scope of science to develop a harmonious social order and so in line with Grotius, he nonetheless worries that science is morally corrosive, suggesting that for this order to be implemented, humans must be treated as cogs in a machine. Similarly, *The Protestant Work Ethic* is largely seen as providing a 'non-Marxist genealogy of capitalism', in which values such as self-responsibility and hard work play a key role.[15]. But Kim shows that Weber might equally be seen as neo-Marxist, lamenting the capitalist separation of workers from the means of production. My opinion is that it is best to see Weber's ambivalence as a product of his time. He is simultaneously

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[12] Guardian LSE Reading the Riots, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots, accessed March 6, 2013.

[13] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House 1994), 485.

[14] Max Weber quoted in Sung Ho Kim, 'Max Weber', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/weber/.

[15] Ibid.

confident in the power of scientific method to improve social order, but regretful of its corrosive power.

This same ambivalence permeates contemporary political theory such that even when we look at approaches to tackling the trends I have outlined above, such as the descent of politics into management, or the policy stalemate that arises from the privatisation and diversification of morality, still those approaches themselves are liberal, that is, they do not have any clear idea of the good life to offer. So when we look at Habermas' approach to tackling the descent of politics into management, there is a stalemate when he arrives at pushing for a normative response. Habermas recognises that a normative response is required, that politics must ground itself in a more fundamental legitimacy than the expertise of leaders, but rather than being able to specify what this normative response must be, Habermas can only specify the conditions under which such a response would itself be legitimate; namely, one that is radically inclusive. Hence Habermas says, resting on a Hobbesian analysis, that because past attempts to ground politics in a more fundamental legitimacy have led to violence, 'democratic legitimacy is the only one available today…The idea of replacing it or complementing by some presumable "deeper" grounding of the constitution in a generally binding way amounts to obscurantism'.[16] So for instance, to quote Habermas again, 'a [normative position] is valid just in case the foreseeable consequences and side-effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of *each individual* could be *jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion'. But in the conditions of radical liberalism we have arrived at today, in which there is an infinite array of moral positions, one must ask what normative position could be so universally assented to: could health care free at the point of use be so justified? Could universal benefits? Because Habermas

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[16] Jurgen Habermas, '"The Political": The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology' in Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011), 24

starts from a liberal position, his principle of universal assent is actually a perfect formula of critique for eroding the state. If there is no common good, there can be no goods in common.

It is possible to respond of course that for Habermas the ideal environment for the full operation of the public sphere is when the conditions for liberalism are best satisfied. So Habermas sees liberalism as a prerequisite for building a common good. The point is not to privatise morality but to give people the autonomy they deserve such that all can be involved in building a common good. Once this individual autonomy is achieved, we need to focus on building democratic structures. Yet the whole point I am making is that the notion of privatised morality eventually infiltrates our social imaginary to the extent that is no longer desirable or even conceivable to build a common good; only to create temporary partnerships of common interest. Now, even a cursory reading of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* would clarify that for Habermas it is not liberalism itself but the corruption of liberalism in welfarism and neoliberalism, whereby either the state or companies monopolise the public sphere, that slowly erodes people's autonomy and hence their power to act and bring about change. But again, what is it in our social imaginary that stops us from standing up to these incursions?

When thinkers do look at the social fragmentation that I think Habermas ignores and which I am suggesting must be tackled before we can begin to build a public sphere, again the approach is radically instrumental. This is especially true of the thinker most favoured by those operating in the political world: Robert Putnam. Putnam's framing of social capital has had a profound effect on politicians and policy analysts. All of a sudden there is real concern for the previously considered soft issue of social fragmentation. But this concern is grounded in the realisation that strong communities mean less crime, less need for welfare, better coordination of resources. In other words, the new interest in the social is grounded in the notion that it represents capital: the term does not

just lead us in some mysterious way to think of the social in terms of capital thereby devaluing the social–though it does do this as well–rather it actually makes us think of the social in terms of how much money it saves. Strong communities are cheap communities.[17]

My purpose here has not been to undermine liberalism entirely; liberalism, and the ideas of thinkers discussed above in particular, carries with it some important ideas concerning freedom and wealth creation. My concern is that the discourses and practices used to achieve these ends do more harm than the ends do good. The means lead to a disconnect between lifestyle and policy which is morally corrosive.

3. Contemporary Politics: Adopting the discourses and practices of liberalism

I have already begun to discuss on a theoretical level the ways in which the discourses of liberalism can foreclose the possibility of a morally engaged politics. But in order to demonstrate this point we need to look at the ways liberal discourses have been adopted and turned into practice historically and how they are employed at present. Because the primary vision in Europe generally and the UK specifically is Christian, the story of how teleology has been lost is synonymous with story of Christian decline, both in society at large and in the microcosm of Westminster politics. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, this does not necessarily mean that Christianity must be revived. Today there are many visions that may challenge state and market and provide possibilities for social and ethical renewal.

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[17] For a detailed, far better researched, and interesting reflection on this see Adam Dinham, *Faith and Social Capital after the Debt Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Backhouse has explained that liberalism was first adopted as a creed in opposition to Christian authoritarianism.[18] Liberals promoted the disestablishment of the Church of England in order to free the faith from political constraints and to promote freedom of religious expression. This marks the adoption of the Hobbes-Locke trend of thought. It is against this backdrop that Backhouse sees liberalism today. In more recent history the opposition to authoritarianism plays a key part in defining what it means to be a liberal–as does the promotion of individual rights. But on the one hand social liberalism has been forever bound up with economic liberalism, and on the other liberalism is too often about negative freedom–freedom from–rather than positive freedom–freedom for.

Milbank, an inspiration for both Phillip Blond–Red Tory–and Maurice Glasman–Blue Labour–has said that 'in the face of the secret alliance of cultural with economic liberalism, we need now to invent a new sort of politics which links egalitarianism to the pursuit of objective values and virtues'.[19] What is this secret alliance he refers to? Cliff Alcock, Guy Daily and Edwin Griggs have described classical liberalism, stemming from Locke, Mill and Smith as suggesting that 'the blindly self-interested behaviour of a myriad of individuals interacting as buyers and sellers in a variety of markets–for labour, capital and goods–results in beneficial 'unintended consequences' for all' and that 'individual action is deemed to be superior to collective action (at least in the form of government action)'.[20] In the interests of both social and economic freedom, classical liberals promoted a vision of a small state.

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[18] Stephen Backhouse, *Experiments in Living: Christianity and the Liberal Democrat Party* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 2010).

[19] John Milbank, 'Red Toryism is the best hope of a new progressive politics' *The Guardian*, 22 May 2008.

[20] Cliff Alcock, Guy Daly, and Edwin Griggs, *Introduction to Social Policy* (Harlow: Longman 2008), 187.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, "New Liberals" such as Keynes and Beveridge associated individualism with 'individual self-development rather than simply as assertion of individual rights and negative liberty' and so increasingly the state had a moral and financial role in supporting self-development.[21] But this shift was bound up with pressure from the labour movement.[22] Unless liberalism is supplemented with discourses of equality and fraternity, it always eventually accepts that the best way to spread autonomy is to allow the rich to get rich and for the proceeds of their wealth to trickle down.

This latter argument was championed in neo-liberalism, adopted, and to some extent constructed, by successive Thatcher governments. And the same discourses of neoliberalism were identified during the Coalition government of 2010-15.[23] But socialism too is easily corroded once it accepts the premises and discourses of liberalism. Milbank has said that because Marxism and atheist socialism tend to accept liberalism's premises, that the ends we seek are the maximisation of individual autonomy and wealth, they will always lose to liberalism, which wants the same and delivers them better.[24] The same attitude could also be found amongst New Labour.[25] In particular, New Labour pioneers continued to promote individual wealth so long as it could be redistributed. In

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[21] Alcock, Daly, and Griggs, *Introduction to Social Policy.*

[22] Paul Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 2010).

[23] See for example Hodkinson and Robbins 'The return of class war conservatism? Housing under the UK Coalition Government' in *Critical Social Policy* 3, No. 1 (2013): 57-77; Wright, 'Fantasies of empowerment: mapping neoliberal discourse in the coalition government's schools policy' in *Journal of Education Policy* 27 (3) (2012): 279-294; MacLeavy, 'A 'new politics' of austerity, workfare and gender? The UK coalition government's welfare reform policy', *Regions, Economy and Society* 4, No. 3 (2011): 355-367.

[24] Stacey, 'Workers of the World…Love One Another?*', Telos* 160 (2012): 183-191.

[25] Fuller and Geddes, 'Urban Governance Under Neoliberalism: New Labour and the Restructuring of State-Space, *Antipode* 40, No. 2 (2008): 252-282; Smith and Morton, 'Nine Years of New Labour: Neoliberalism and Workers' Rights', *BJIR* 44, No. 3 (2006): 401-420; May, Cloke and Johnson, May, Cloke and Johnson 'Rephasing neoliberalism: New Labour and Britain's crisis of street homelessness', *Antipode* 37 (2005): 703–30.

the words of Peter Mandelson in 1997, New Labour was 'intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes'.[26] What this attitude fails to recognise is on the one hand the lack of solidarity that results from this relaxation concerning individualism;[27] and on the other, the lack of social responsibility felt on the part of wealthy individuals, and indeed all those that hear the message, when they are encouraged to see taxation as substituting for consciousness.[28] McLellan predicted this would be a problem in 1996.[29] He foresaw that Tony Blair's stress on community was doomed to break down into instrumental factors since in order for a community to behave as a community it needs to stress a vision beyond itself: 'Tony Blair's Fabian pamphlet on Socialism talks of social justice, equality and community–but these ideas are left floating in a way that suggests they could be blown in almost any direction'.[30] For McLellan, as for Milbank, this is evidence of the need for Christian theology to underpin policy.[31] My own research suggests that we need not accept this stark choice between reviving a Christian tradition and accepting total liberalism. Instead it is possible to develop processes of inclusively constructing teleological visions: that is, visions of how the world and relationships could be; that can never be reached but are always ahead of us; that cannot be fully defined and therefore cannot be exclusive.[32] Such visions have often been identified with the

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[26] Mandelson quoted in Shiv Malik 'Peter Mandelson gets nervous about people getting filthy rich', *The Guardian,* January 26, 2012.

[27] Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin, 2009).

[28] Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 45-46; John Milbank *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 315.

[32] Stacey, 'The God-shaped Hole in Post-Liberalism: Why community development matters' in Turnbull, *Post-Liberalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming 2017); idem, 'The Post-Liberal Idea of the Person in Pluralist Settings' in Wood, *Renewing the Self: Contemporary Religious Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

Christian tradition, but similar ideas are available in numerous other cultures. Moreover, in a predominantly Christian country such visions will inevitably involve contemporary Christian ideas–just not exclusively.

The loss of such vision in liberal discourse often applies to civil society too. Here it is worth recalling the *Compass* campaign against the *Commercialisation of childhood*.[33] Although encouraged by *Compass'* victory in receiving commitment from retailers to be more responsible in the way that they advertise to young people, especially with reference to their use of sex and sexuality, many are worried that if anyone had asked Compass just why they were against the commercialisation of childhood, why it was wrong, they would have struggled to provide an answer. Because really, to be against the commercialisation of childhood, we need to be against the commercialisation of life *per se*. It is as if the campaign draws on the last remaining vestiges of a shared idea of the good without having articulated what that idea is. Left unexamined, it is worth questioning whether any such idea will remain.

Of course there is an answer internal to liberalism here: in the interests of autonomy one should not encourage behaviour that has serious implications as to a person's identity unless they can reasonably be thought to have the critical awareness to see those implications. But this argument itself easily dissolves once we begin to interrogate a) what counts as critical awareness b) who gets to decide what a reasonable level of critical awareness is c) how laws based on undermining critical awareness will be enforced and d) whether critical awareness is acquired with age or whether we would consider it unacceptable to use sexually provocative material to advertise products to fully grown adults with a low IQ. This last point relates to a similar problem I was pointed to by Maurice

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[33] Zoe Williams, 'Commericialisation of Childhood'. Online:
https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-
content/uploads/2013/05/thecommercialisationofchildhood.pdf (accessed 27 April 27 2017).

Glasman; namely, Labour's inability to take a critical stance against pornography. From the liberal point of view, pornography, at least legal pornography, so long as it is produced by and with consenting adults and watched by consenting adults is not problematic enough to make into an issue. Specifically in this case what we require is a vision of the common good that does not accept the objectification of vulnerable people. More generally, we need vision.

The stress on negative freedom, freedom from political, social or economic constraints, is a laudable linchpin. But without something prior, it can equally be corrosive. Freedom must be sought with the goal of seeking a common good that affects the way we live our lives. This point has been explored in depth by Chiara Lubich in her aptly titled speech 'Liberty, Equality, Whatever happened to Fraternity?'[34] If freedom simply means freedom from judgement of any kind, then we will lose the possibility of holding politicians, businesses, and people to account.

4. Real World, Real Problems: Faults of today as faults of liberalism

I will cover four concrete examples here with which those familiar with the UK context will be familiar: the increasing similarity between parties, the MPs expenses scandal, the banker bonus furore, and the media hacking scandal. Although many of these issues arose as early as 2008, they remain worth exploring because they are still on the surface of public discourse. I will be taking a fresh look at these issues with a mind to understanding how they could have happened in what are still seen as some of our most cherished institutions.

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[34] Chiara Lubich, 'Liberty, Equality…what happened to Fraternity?' in *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007), 257-64.

The increasing similarity between parties directly betrays a lack of vision. If we look back to the mid-nineteenth century, even though each party drew from Christianity for inspiration, each party had a strong and unique vision. To some extent the alignment between parties shows a triumph of socialist principles: health, education. But there is a similar convergence around free market principles. Even the majority of the Labour Party now largely sees free market principles as integral to not only wealth creation but also public service delivery. The convergence around free market principles is most concerning because as much as being the result of intellectual or moral agreement, it is increasingly the result of weakness. As suggested in the discussion of Smith above, and as I discuss in far more detail elsewhere, without vision it is difficult to stand up to instrumental arguments.[35]

The MPs expenses scandal shed light on a corrosive disconnect between lifestyle and policy. But in order to understand this disconnect, we cannot naively regard the scandal as betraying an inflated sense of entitlement amongst politicians who are only out for themselves. Most people who get into politics do so because they believe in something, because they see an injustice, a problem that needs fixing or have a vision of something better. MPs, especially those representing constituencies outside of London, work hard and spend a lot of time away from their family and friends. When parliament is sitting it is thought that the average MP works 71 hours a week–or one and a half full-time jobs according to the EU Working Time Directive.[36]

But perhaps what the expenses scandal does betray is a loss of the importance of leading an exemplary lifestyle if one is to put forward policies that inspire public engagement. Nietzsche famously said that the early Christians managed

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[35] Stacey, 'The God-shaped Hole in Post-Liberalism'; idem, 'A Post-Liberal Idea of the Person: Religious and Cultural Strategies for Persons as People'.

[36] Matt Korris, *A Year in the Life: From a Member of Public to Member of Parliament* (London: Hansard Society, 2005).

to inspire so many converts because of their ascetic lifestyle. Seeing Christians living in poverty and abstaining from excesses of drink and promiscuity led people to surmise "all that suffering cannot be for nothing." A similar suffering has to be undertaken for most great visions today. The artist, the civil society activist and (personal experience tells me!) the academic alike must undergo financial difficulty in order to work for what they believe in. Scott Atran has undertaken research to show that the same principle draws religious believers into great acts of personal sacrifice: the struggle is a sign of the virtue of the cause.[37] And Graeber demonstrates the same in politics.[38] Today we often hear arguments that if we want the best people to work in politics, we must pay them wages to compete with the private sector. Personally I do not see this. Suffering reminds us that we are doing something meaningful.

As the civil service *Standard of Conduct* suggests, as important as the self-understanding behind politicians' actions is the public perception of those actions. This idea is rooted in the notion that democracy functions on the basis of trust; that politicians and political institutions require at the very least fair, honest and legal behaviour in order to maintain their legitimacy. A recent report by a consortium of academics known collectively as PIDOP demonstrated that one of the key factors in disengagement with conventional politics, namely party membership, voting, and paying taxes, is a lack of trust in politicians or political institutions.[39] And, to reiterate, the Guardian/LSE Reading the Riots research saw rioters citing lack of trust in politicians and political institutions as an excuse for rioting.[40] It is worth exploring further whether the attention the expenses

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[37] Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy* (London: Penguin, 2011).

[38] David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 11.

[39] PIDOP, 'European Policy Brief'. Online: http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/documents/Briefings/PIDOP%20Policy%20Briefing%20Paper%20No.%207.pdf (accessed 1 November 2012).

[40] Guardian/LSE 'Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder'. Online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/interactive/2011/dec/14/reading-the-riots-investigating-england-s-summer-of-disorder-full-report (accessed 1 November 2012).

scandal received and the emotional impact it had were down to its bringing to the surface a number of deeper underlying concerns regarding the disconnect between policy and lifestyle.

The first concern might be privilege. The stereotype of politicians is one of old white men, more specifically old white middle class men. Despite good efforts amongst the Labour party in particular, the stereotype is largely accurate. Moreover, as a Labour MP put it to me recently, Labour, historically the party of the working man and woman, "is slowly catching up with the Tories and Liberal Democrats as a party of the professional middle class". This trend is linked to the much maligned professionalization of politics whereby young people fresh out of a top university begin as researchers for MPs, then become advisors and eventually are selected by the party to become politicians in their own right. It is becoming increasingly rare for people to rise up in an entirely separate industry before entering party politics. People lose a sense of what it is like to be anything but a politician. On top of this there is a Catch 22 situation whereby people need experience before they can work as a researcher. What this usually entails is an unpaid internship, which itself tends to be a luxury of middle class children.

All of this creates a view amongst lower earners that politics is the way the middle class serves the middle class. This attitude goes back at least to Plato's *Republic* when Thrasymachus quipped to Socrates 'justice is the interest of the stronger'.[41] This suggestion is so offensive to politicians not only because they wish to serve everybody equally but more importantly because they think politics is more than merely looking out for interests. Instead, politics is about carving out a meaningful vision of the future–but is it any longer?

The third talking point is the furore surrounding banker bonuses and the unwillingness of banks to lend to small businesses. The surface concern is that

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[41] Plato, *Republic* (London: Penguin, 2007), 26.

the banks and bankers brought about our current economic woes and so banks and bankers should pay. But the deeper question to ask is why we have allowed banks to operate in the way, why we have substituted banking for manufacturing as opposed to complementing one with the other, and why the government fears putting on pressure to cut bonuses and force banks to lend to small businesses. We need the business of banking to be considered as moral at every step. Max Wind-Cowie, researcher at *Demos*, cites the US Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to suggest that this kind of moralisation of banking would not be all that difficult.[42] The CRA 'imposes a statutory obligation, on retail banks, to provide credit services that meet the needs of low and moderate-income communities'.[43] By sharing social responsibility with the private sector in this way, we can restore a connection between wealth creation and moral action.

In their book *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics and Justice*, Larry Elliot and Rowan Williams suggest that the present economic crisis provides a tipping point for rethinking what is important, prioritising moral vision over economic success.[44] It is with this idea in mind that Ed Miliband's call for a more "responsible capitalism" should have been and was heeded. A good step in this direction was the move on the part of Vince Cable during the 2010-15 Coalition Government to make executive pay increases subject to shareholder scrutiny and sanction. We should consider how this idea will play out in majority state owned companies.

Finally, the combination of the media hacking scandal and the Murdoch BSkyB takeover bid, which evolved into a public debate about the appropriateness of relations between politicians and the press as much as anything reminded people of the important role the media plays in holding

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[42] Wind-Cowie, *Recapitalising the Poor* (London, Demos, 2009), 43.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Larry Elliot and Rowan Williams, *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics, and Justice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

politicians to account on the basis of lifestyle. Although the culture is changing on the continent, the UK has led the way in terms of holding politicians to account for their moral decisions. In this sense the UK still has a strong anti-Nietzschean stance. Although some politicians might prefer it were otherwise, we expect a strong connection between public policy and the private morality of our politicians.

5. Towards a Vision: The recent work and campaigns of the Christians on the Left as a case study

For six months in 2012 I acted as a participant observer at Christians on the Left (CotL), then called the Christian Socialist Movement. In the following I will explain how the vision of CotL has helped them to restore the connection between lifestyle and policy. I begin by explaining my methodology. I then explore the history of CotL. I then discuss its effort to restore a connection between lifestyle and policy with reference to three key areas: politics, economy and media. Before I get underway, I want to give a brief intellectual history so that the reader has an understanding of what it means to be a Christian Socialist Movement. I will also have to explain my methodological approach.

The research involved in this paper was undertaken in a six-month period in 2012 while working as participant observer at Christians on the Left. The data provided is taken from a larger study which explored how to develop solidarity in the context of social and economic liberalism on the one hand, and religious plurality on the other. The study involved four groups exploring sources of solidarity in the religiously plural context of London. Data was collected using a combination of interviews, focus groups and ethnographic field notes. Unless otherwise stated, all unattributed quotations are from anonymised conversations with politicians and practitioners met in the field.

The key question then, during my time at CotL, was how did they develop solidarity in this dual context of social and economic liberalism and religious plurality. Their key strategy, I observed, was to restore a connection between lifestyle and policy: reigniting public faith in politics, and politicians' faith in the public. I made regular visits to their offices in Labour HQ, where I undertook most of my writing. I observed them at work, involved myself in their teaching fellow Christians the importance of political engagement, and played a part in their campaigns in order to get a feel of why and how they do what they do.

My methodological approach to empirical research has always been an intellectual and emotional struggle. As the reader will understand from the first section of this paper, the conceptual background I am critiquing is a shift from a politics concerned with what is good to a value-neutral politics concerned with what is efficient. But since I am tired of this point being merely theoretically stated, the intention of my research generally and for this piece in particular is to empirically explore the point in order to draw conclusions relevant for policy. But value neutrality plays an important part in empirical research. So the risk I face in moving from the abstract to the practical is no less than undermining the very reason for my having undertaken my research in the first place.

The process I developed to deal with this discrepancy I call ethno-theology. Ethno-theology involves being open about the normative positions that inspire the researcher before they enter the field. But it also involves critical-realism and hermeneutics. It is critically-realist because it assumes that conceptual background key to the research, namely the decline of teleology amidst the rise of liberalism, may be influencing the actions of participants without their ever using the words. It is hermeneutic because it accepts that this conceptual background is a preliminary theoretical device only, allowing that other ideas may better explain participants' reasons for action, and that better, more inspiring normative positions may arise in one's time with the organisation. I am

extremely thankful for participants' putting their trust in me as a participant in their work so as I could learn how they operate.

In my time working at CotL, it was called the Christian Socialist Movement. This name, while potentially exclusionary, was a far better indicator of the tradition from which the organisation arose. Arguably the ideas underpinning Christian Socialism are as old as Christianity itself.[45] Stephen Beer, Political Communications Officer at the Christian Socialist Movement, points to how the Old Testament offers a radical agenda for redistributing wealth: 'In Deuteronomy 15 we find that every seven years the Israelites were required to cancel debts to each other. Every 50 years, the land was reallocated to its original owners' (Beer 2009). And yet Robert Leach has quite correctly suggested that

> …an obvious problem for those who would claim some mutual dependence between Christianity and socialism is that so many other Christians have derived quite different social, economic and political implications from the same source.[46]

This point is ostensibly supported by the dual influence of John Milbank, arguably the greatest living intellectual influence on Christian Socialism, on Maurice Glasman's Blue Labour and Phillip Blond's Red Tory. Yet to think this divergent appeal betrays a lack of substance is to miss the commonalty between Glasman and Blond and by extension what it means to be a Christian Socialist.

The best way to understand what it means to be a Christian Socialist is to focus on what the former take "socialism" to mean. For Christian Socialists, rather than intending state-sponsored community development, state ownership of industry, state regulation on business or the radical redistribution of resources,

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[45] Kenneth Leach, *Christian Socialism* (Aberdeen: Political Studies Association, 2002), 4.

[46] Ibid., 5.

"socialism" refers to a political philosophy based on stressing social goals such as human dignity, friendship, reciprocity and empowerment.

Its roots are in the early 19th century Anglican distaste with political economy, or, more simply, with competition. Hence Edward Norman tells us that Frederick Denison Maurice would lament that competition was

> "a disease"; a "monstrous and anarchical condition"; "a struggle to get for oneself and to prevent anyone else from getting"…he could not tolerate, he said, "the blasphemous thought that this destructive principle was divine law".[47]

Because capitalism is seen as undermining social goals, Christian Socialism often seems to adopt traditionally socialist agendas. But protecting against capitalism can also mean fighting seemingly conservative agendas such as the promotion of trade guilds, cooperatives, and mutuals, promoting local trade at the expense of the free market and possibly. Moreover, one strand that might tentatively be called Christian Socialist is the Red Toryism of Phillip Blond whereby ostensibly right wing agendas such as rolling back the state are supported. Only in this case the state is not rolled back to promote competition; rather the state is rolled back with the aim of promoting local, community support.

That it takes on agendas of both left and right does not make Christian Socialism all things for all people. It is not a populist movement. Indeed, while both parties seem to shift to the centre, succumbing to economic liberalism on the one hand and social liberalism on the other, Christian Socialism carves out a specifically unpopulist (though one hopes time will prove not unpopular!) centre, being neither economically nor socially liberal.

Finally, it is important to stress what it means to be a movement. In the words of the current Director of the CSM, Andy Flannagan

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[47] Edward R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 16.

> I have become more and more convinced that transformation in countries only happens through movements, and that movements only happen when folks with a passion for certain policies flesh them out in their lifestyle. Our nation has seen too much of those who espouse certain policies but whose lifestyles look no different to anyone else. There are also plenty of us who studiously model a different way of living, that springs from a different set of values, yet step back from arguing to see those values fleshed out in public policy. Both are required, and to be a movement, you need both.[48]

So stressing that the CSM is a movement reminds us that politics is about getting together with people, creating a common good that influences the way people should live their lives, changing your own lifestyle first and creating policies that give people the power to change theirs.

Christian Socialism is unashamedly a politics concerned with lifestyle. Especially under the leadership of Andy Flannagan, CotL stresses ethical practice at every step. *Labour Neighbours* is a programme that began in February 2010 proposing to 'model a new gateway for activism connected to the Labour movement, involving community service, social action, and local community organising'.[49] The idea is to use the influence of the Labour Party as well as local Labour resources and people to galvanise local action. Labour would return to its roots in community organizing–acting as a go-between for the groups that already exist–and community development–providing an opportunity for people with no organisational affiliation to get involved in their community. On the one hand, the idea is that to be a member of the Labour Party must mean more than devising policy–it must mean being involved in one's community; and on the

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[48] Flannagan, 'Put your money where your mouth is'. Online:
http://www.thecsm.org.uk/Articles/160987/Christian_Socialist_Movement/Articles/The_C ommon_Good/Issue_200_Feeling/Can_we_apply.aspx (accessed 24 July 2012).

[49] Ian Geary, 'Labour Neighbours – The Plan'. Online:
http://www.thecsm.org.uk/Articles/160987/Christian_Socialist_Movement/Articles/The_C ommon_Good/Issue_200_Feeling/Can_we_apply.aspx (accessed 24 July 2012).

other, to really change one's community, it is important to link up with organisations that have real power.

The work of linking community activists to party politics is not an easy task. This is particularly problematic amongst faith-based activists. When political theorists and policy makers speak of the rights of people of faith to be involved in the public sphere, they often do so as though the "people of faith" were an army banging at the doors of parliament, demanding to be involved. In fact, the experience of CotL suggests the opposite is the case. CotL involves itself in convincing people of faith that it is not a betrayal of their faith to get involved in politics. Certainly a number of Christians worry that to 'render unto Caesar' means to stay out of politics (Matthew 22:21). Similarly some Muslims I have spoken with in research outside of CotL suggest that involving oneself in man's law may be seen as denying God's law.

The key way that CotL convince people of faith to get involved in politics is to go into seminaries and schools and teach. They use a combination of Biblical argument and appeals to the power of Christian morals to alter action. The most convincing argument in this regard comes from Rob Carr, in 2012 CotL's Office and Communications Manager, who at a talk delivered to the Salvation Army, described the work of CotL as putting 'steel in the spines of politicians' by 'whispering in their ear', giving them the moral confidence to stand up for social issues. The phrase 'putting steel in the spines of politicians' recalls the tradition of offering advice to rulers mentioned in the first section of this article – providing people with a vision beyond instrumentality. CotL reminds its MPs of a vision from which they can derive real-world principles. It does so through writing pamphlets, holding meetings and conferences and forming friendships with MPs.

The CotL approach to economy helps to distinguish them from the "third way" approach associated with New Labour whereby free markets are allowed to flourish so as to increase standard tax revenue for social spending, and from

Fabian Orthodoxy whereby it is enough for socialism to be implemented from above via policy. The CotL idea is to be about both policy and personal action. There are a number of policy initiatives such as the campaign for a financial transaction tax, based on the US *Robin Hood Tax* and aimed at charging banks for financial transactions so as to invest the money on social spending; the campaign to separate retail and investment banks so that people's private savings are free from major risk; and the campaign to increase regulation on banking. Yet alongside these there are also personal action initiatives like *Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is*, which aims to make ordinary people move their money, to switch their bank accounts, to banks that invest in only ethical companies. The point here is to become an ethical consumer, forcing banks to alter their behaviour by voting with one's feet. Government action and individual action must go hand in hand.

Because it is as much about lifestyle as it is about policy, the CSM has a strong focus on raising the profile of its campaigns in the media. It uses and reinforces the media as a tool for holding politicians to account and also as a moral force showing a way to do politics outside of Westminster. This strategy reminds us that the place of the public is not simply to pressure politicians to pass laws that will in their turn change our life choices; it is also, perhaps more fundamentally, about changing the world by gathering together with people to change our own and others' life choices. The media then is not simply a place to hold people to account but to inspire them to act differently. This CSM approach also seems like a far healthier relationship for politicians to have with the media. Rather than hiding from the media, politicians should feel comfortable to talk about lifestyle choices in the media. They do not only represent constituents through expressing the latter's wishes in policy formation but by leading exemplary lifestyles. And leading an exemplary lifestyle itself need not simply mean following tradition; it might mean carving out a new way of living honourably.

6. Conclusion

CotL is, obviously, a Christian movement. But I hope it is clear from the foregoing discussion that I do not think only a Christian organisation could carve out the solutions I have been discussing. This is not a treatise seeking to bring people back to Christ. Certain strands of Christian belief have been employed to drag us into these problems in the first place. And indeed, it is equally possible that any other faith or none could achieve the same outcomes. In my own research thus far I have explored other Abrahimic faiths, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Instead, what I am suggesting is that some belief must hold priority over liberty in order for us to hold off the forces of instrumentalisation.

The point of discussing the actions of CotL is to demonstrate *one* way in which groups are able to challenge the forces of instrumentalisation by restoring the connection between lifestyle and policy. I have already explained that my time at CotL was part of a larger study seeking to understand how solidarity is constructed out of the dual context of social and economic liberalism *and* religious plurality. While CotL offer clear and practical ways of challenging social and economic liberalism, their work clearly cannot speak to the range of religious and nonreligious beliefs found in the contemporary UK, let alone the world. How to address both contexts at once is far more complicated, and something I have tried to address elsewhere.[50]

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[50] Stacey, 'The God-shaped Hole in Post-Liberalism'; Stacey, 'A Post-Liberal Idea of the Person'.

Liberalism as Catholic Social Teaching:
The Case of Józef Tischner

Michal Luczweski

> After its confrontation with communism Christianity awaits
> a new confrontation with liberalism.
>
> Józef Tischner

1. Introduction

Karol Wojtyła, in a conversation with Vittorio Possenti, described Catholic Social Teaching (hereafter 'CST') as a 'revolution of the Spirit' that will make the world more humane.[1] In CST ethics comes before politics and economics–justice before effectiveness. The foundation for engaging in this-worldly matters is reliable conscience and a readiness to witness to the truth, that is, a readiness to sacrifice. Wojtyła saw the strength and

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[1] Karol Wojtyła, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa. Intervista di Vittorio Possenti* (Rome: Lateran University Press, 2003).

originality of CST in its joining of Gospel hope with the realism expressed by the teaching of original sin.

For Wojtyła the most important test of Catholic theory is Catholic practice; bringing forth good fruit. According to Possenti, practice is precisely where the teaching of the Church is ailing most. Wojtyła did not agree with such criticism and invoked his own experience as a worker during the German occupation and his experience of cooperation with workers in communist Poland. Three months after this conversation Wojtyła unexpectedly became the head of the universal Church. A year later he made his first pilgrimage to Poland and launched a flood of enthusiasm that made *Solidarity* burst upon the scene.[2] Here was the proof Possenti wanted: a ten-million movement of workers that became a national movement; a national movement that changed the face of Europe. *Solidarity* provided the best test for the theory in this way. If there is any place where the reign of CST was realized on earth then it was in Poland in 1980.

Solidarity eventually won in 1989, despite its suppression in 1981 by Martial Law imposed by the communist regime, which feared the movement's growing power. In 1989 one of *Solidarity*'s main advisers, a longtime editor-in-chief of the Catholic monthly *Więź* [The Bond], Tadeusz Mazowiecki, became the first non-communist prime minister in the Eastern Bloc. The charismatic Jacek Kuroń, who represented the secular left wing of Solidarity, became the minister of labour and social policy. Adam Michinik, who came from the same left wing of Solidarity, took over the position of editor-in-chief of the largest independent Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

The paradox is that the people whom *Solidarity* brought to power almost immediately threw off its heritage. Mazowiecki, Michnik, and Kuroń concentrated upon, as Kuroń put it, 'endorsing' the Neo-Liberal reforms of

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[2] See George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Leszek Balcerowicz. While the abandonment of the ideals of socialism by those on the left has been well-documented,[3] the abandonment of CST by the Catholics still awaits in-depth analysis. However, in both instances the final effect was the same. In 1989 the previous worldviews were jettisoned and replaced by a new faith: liberalism.

Just as the victory of *Solidarity* speaks about the power of CST so does CST's crisis after 1989 point toward the dangers that stand before the Church. The rapid transition from CST to liberalism transformed Poland into a battleground of these two visions of reality. Therefore, the conflict between the two can be best studied there.[4]

2. Józef Tischner and *Solidarity*

> I was actually in Rome during August of 1980. The pope and I were eating dinner when Italian television showed footage from Gdańsk: the gate of the striking shipyard, the crowd of people, flowers stuck into the shipyard fences. The camera panned onto the gate and between these flowers there was a portrait of John Paul II. And he was sitting right next to me. He cringed. He did not say a word. We also went silent. Everyone was convinced that he was behind this. On the other hand, everyone also hoped that since his portrait, the portrait of the pope, was there people would not go around killing each other.[5]

This is how Fr. Józef Tischner (1931 - 2000) recalled the beginnings of *Solidarity*. Wojtyła's conversation partner was his former student and later one of his closest intellectual colleagues and partners. Tischner was at the center of the

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[3] See Ost, D., *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[4] G. Beyer, 'Freedom as a Challenge to an Ethic of Solidarity in a Neoliberal Capitalist World: Lessons from Post-1989 Poland.' *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 6, No. 1 (2009): 133-167.

[5] A. Michnik, J. Tischner, and J. Żakowski. *Między panem a plebanem* (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 289.

most important Polish controversies for decades. A student of Roman Ingarden, fascinated by phenomenology (Husserl), axiology (Scheler), hermeneutics (Heidegger), the philosophy of dialogue (Levinas), the philosophy of history (Hegel), mysticism (Eckhart) and Polish Romantic thought (Norwid), Tischner was above all one of the most prominent contributors to CST. He always responded enthusiastically to each successive encyclical of John Paul II.[6] In their spirit he developed his own original Christian philosophy of labour.

In front of the TV in Castel Gandolfo sat the two people whose fates became inextricably intertwined with the fate of *Solidarity*. After his return to Poland Józef Tischner became one of the spiritual leaders of *Solidarity*.[7] He accompanied the movement through its most important moments as its chaplain. Tischner said Mass at the Wawel in Kraków, the castle of the Polish kings and the most hallowed place in Polish history. All the leaders of the burgeoning movement took part in this Mass. The text of the homily, 'The Solidarity of Conscience', had a momentous impact on them and became the starting point for a cycle of articles that later made up the now classic book *The Spirit of Solidarity* widely distributed in many different underground editions and translated into many languages.

The sermon Tischner gave during the First Solidarity Congress entitled 'The Independence of Work', was declared an official document of the congress a mere two hours after it was given. This is because no other statement better reflected what the delegates were aiming for.[8] The author of *The Spirit of Solidarity* participated in hundreds of masses, heard confessions, blessed banners,

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[6] J. Tischner, *Idąc przez puste Błonia* (Kraków: Znak, 2005).

[7] See Zbigniew Brzeziński in J. Tischner, and B. Fiore, *The Spirit of Solidarity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984.), vii.

[8] See Jarosław Legięć, *Człowiek w filozofii pracy: Józefa Tischnera* (Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów, 2012), 158.

and after the implementation of Martial Law he continued to serve *Solidarity* as a priest and thinker.

However, in 1989 Tischner abandoned the path he had followed until that point. He went from being one of the most active promoters of CST to one of the most active promoters of liberalism. Therefore, the history of his personal struggles is also the history of the struggles between CST and liberalism.

3. The Experience of Evil

Tischner's philosophy of the time grew out of the experience of evil. He gave this expression in the following memorable words:[9]

> Before doing any philosophizing, especially in Poland, one must make a substantial choice: one must choose between that about which one *can think* and that about which one *must think*. But what we *must think* about does not come to us from the pages of books, but from the face of a person who is disturbed by his fate. In former times philosophy was born from wonder about the world that surrounds us (Aristotle). Then it came from doubt (Descartes). But now, here in our world, it comes from pain. The quality of a philosophy is decided by the *quality of the human pain* that a philosophy wants to express and remedy. Whoever does not see this is close to betrayal.[10]

Twentieth century societies came to share in deep human pain. They were marked by violence, atrocity, betrayal, injustice, and exploitation of labour.[11]

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[9] The frames of my analysis come from the theories that define modernity as a) "desubstantialization of evil" (Ricoeur) and "rendering evil no more evil" (Marquard) b) the displacement of apocalyptic thinking with a vision of the end of history and/or progress (Koselleck) c) the emergence of exclusive humanism (Taylor) and "immanentization of the eschaton" (Voegelin).

[10] See Bobko, *Myślenie wobec zła*; Gadacz, *Filozofia Boga w XX wieku*, 175-188; Marszałek, *Józef Tischner i filozoficzne koncepcje zła*, 9.

[11] Legięć, 271-272; Tischner, J., *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus* (Krakow: Znak, 1992), 207.

According to Tischner, CST is the most profound response to evil and it was expressed in a special way by the spirit of *Solidarity*. CST is supposed to express a person's experience of pain and to address it. Tischner utilized imagery culled from the New Testament in order to render the relationship between them. He depended upon the words of St. Paul to 'overcome evil with good',[12] which became a guiding thread of one of his spiritual heroes, Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, the chaplain of *Solidarity* in Warsaw. Fr. Popiełuszko witnessed to these words with his life and death when he was murdered by the communist secret service. His funeral became an impulse for the renewal of a weakened *Solidarity*. The blood of the martyr became a seed for the movement.

Tischner frequently appealed to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which his readers could transpose onto their own experiences:

> The Good Samaritan's deed is an answer to a *concrete cry* of a concrete man. This is simple–*someone cries for help. . .* The solidarity born at the sight of such suffering is particularly deep. For whom is our solidarity then? It is, first of all, for those who have been hurt by other people and whose suffering could have been avoided for it was contingent and superfluous.[13]

In the homily he gave at the Wawel, the Polish chaplain used yet another Pauline image, which forever remained etched in the minds of his listeners:

> 'Bear ye one another's burdens: and so you shall fulfill the law of God' (paraphrase of Gal. 6:2). What does it mean to be in solidarity? *It means to carry another's burden.*[14]

What does it mean to carry a burden? In the final analysis, it is giving witness to the truth, therefore a readiness to give up your life for your neighbor. The witnesses of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, and earlier Fr. Maximillian Kolbe, were

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[12] Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności* (Krakow: Znak, 1993), 65.

[13] Tischner, *Ethics of Solidarity*, 40-41, my emphasis.

[14] Ibid, 37-38.

heroic. They carried a whole nation along with them.[15] For Józef Tischner the political theology proper to Christianity can be boiled down to the *political theology of martyrdom*. In this way he was close to the vision of political theology held by Erik Peterson who rejected the political theology of the state developed by Carl Schmitt.[16]

4. Annus Mirabilis: 1989

The year 1989 is an immense historical caesura for the Eastern Bloc. The future of CST depended upon the proper interpretation of that date. One thing was certain: this date played a role in the plans of Providence–thanks to Solidarity and the engagement of the Church the evil of totalitarianism receded into the past. In *Centesimus Annus* (22-29) John Paul II interprets the year 1989 as yet another step in the revolution of the Spirit, which did not end with the moment of liberal democracy's coming. In the same encyclical he says very clearly that it is a delusion to think that democratic liberalism overcame totalitarianism, because "a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (46).

Tischner took a different path. In interpreting 1989 he did what Eric Voegelin once described as immanentizing the eschaton. For him salvation history became world history. The year 1989 fulfilled his dreams about independence, dialogue, and of a non-violent revolution that would use persuasion instead of violence. In some ways the coming of liberal democracy brought about the end of history for him. This is because it was the political system closest to the

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[15] Tischner, *Nieszczęsny*, 50.

[16] G. Geréby, 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt.' *New German Critique* 35, No. 3 105 (2008): 7-33.

Gospel.[17] If we resort to the tools of historical semantics, we can say then that Józef Tischner saw 1989 as a 'modern revolution'.[18]

Firstly, a modern revolution brings with it 'new things' in that it is complete, and it accomplishes a total transformation of the social world: economics, politics, and culture. This is the reason why it is connected with deep reforms. In 1989 this aspect of it was well-captured by a neologism coined by Timothy Garton-Ash, 'refolution', that is, the indivisible linking of reform and revolution. Tischner shared this vision completely by noting the total character of the transformations and the necessity of deep intellectual, social, and economic reforms.[19]

Secondly, a modern revolution results in a separation of the present from the past.[20] On Polish soil this was expressed with the concept of the 'thick line' [*gruba linia*] that was used by Tadeusz Mazowiecki to stress that his government would not take responsibility for the communist past. With time the thick line came to refer to a radical break with the communist heritage: the heritage of political, economical, and moral enslavement.[21] Józef Tischner fundamentally agreed with such a vision of history.[22]

Thirdly, a modern revolution opens up to the future.[23] It is accompanied by a feeling of dynamism and an acceleration of time. In accordance with this pattern, 1989 introduced a caesura that not only separated itself from the past and deprived it of any meaning, but also rendered what is to come the most

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[17] J. Tischner, Z. Dorota, and J. Gowin, *Przekonać Pana Boga* (Krakow: Zank, 2002), 49.

[18] R. Koselleck, 'Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time', *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (2004): 43-57.

[19] Michnik et al., 558.

[20] Koselleck, 249.

[21] P. Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Krakow: Słowo/obraz terytoria).

[22] Michnik et al., 559.

[23] Koselleck, 249.

appropriate point of reference. Tischner experienced this when he straightforwardly spoke of a 'sharp acceleration of history',[24] an opening up of time,[25] and of progress.[26] All the richness of these meanings is contained in the concept of liberalism, as it began to function in Poland and supplied the interpretive frames for events. Its contents were not specified by previous experience (such as the experience of *Solidarity*), but by expectations for the future. As a consequence liberalism marked out a far-reaching goal of revolution and gave it an irreversible direction. The revolution can be slowed down or speeded up, but it cannot be reversed.[27] The revolution has no alternatives. There is no place in it for experiments and searching for a third way.[28]

Fourthly, in order to achieve its goals the modern revolution demands engagement. It is connected to activism. This was also part and parcel of the Polish concept of liberalism. Much like other modern –isms, liberalism became a concept that mobilizes, ideologizes, and politicizes.[29] In agreement with this model Tischner saw the new times as a space of unconstrained creativity. Only now could humanity become the creator of its fate: 'For the first time it was possible to think that 'as you make your bed, so you must lie in it. It marked the appearance of a consciousness of self-reliance'.[30] For these reasons he called upon the Church to engage in the building of the new political and economic order. He condemned Polish Catholics for their lack of trust in democracy and freedom.[31] He aligned himself with the camp of Tadeusz Mazowiecki and in

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[24] C. Miłosz and J. Tischner, *Dziedzictwo diabła* (Krakow: Znak, 1993), 129.

[25] Michnik, et al., 704.

[26] Ibid., 559.

[27] Koselleck, 80.

[28] Michnik, et al., 561.

[29] Koselleck, 273.

[30] Michnik, et al., 558.

[31] Ibid, 227.

1993 he also supported (to great and widespread disbelief) the electoral campaign of the Liberal-Democratic Congress, which was the most radical representative of the neo-liberal ideology in Poland.[32]

If 1989 was to be interpreted as a modern revolution demanding deep changes and political engagement, all the while cutting itself off from the past and opening up only to the future, then the Church was faced with some very serious challenges. Above all, a modern revolution does not need the Church to define itself and legitimate itself, because it defines and legitimizes itself, creating its own reflexive philosophies of history. How does this happen? First, it questions the Christian understanding of the new times. Christ no longer 'makes everything new', but man does so instead. Second, the break with the past questions the role of the Church, which is by definition a part of the past. Third, by opening up the horizon toward the future the revolution creates empty time, which can only take shape with the end of history or progress. This contradicts the Christian vision, because its vision for the future is filled with expectation for the *parousia*, the second coming. In other words, the liberal revolution takes away from the Church its authority over time and renders it useless.

5. Christian Liberalism

As he remained faithful to the Church, Tischner could not derive such radical conclusions from his own interpretations of liberalism. He wanted to reconcile modernity with the Church and liberalism with Christianity.[33] His answer was supposed to be *Christian liberalism*. The project of baptizing liberalism did not

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[32] W. Bereś and A. Więcek, *Tischner: Życie w opowieściach* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2008), 261-262.

[33] Here he stood before the same dilemmas as the Council Fathers who wrote *Gaudium et Spes* and earlier August Cieszkowski (1814-1894), a precursor of CST and the most outstanding Polish philosopher of the 19th century.

resolve the difficulties, but hid them instead. This is because Christian freedom differs from liberal freedom. Tischner papered-over the tension between the two with a certain equivocation maintaining that they both talk about the same freedom. For example, when he proclaimed that 'freedom already is',[34] that 'in the world around us freedom has occurred',[35] then such statements hid the fact that one concept covered two meanings: Christian and liberal. On the one hand, in accordance with CST Tischner interpreted freedom as positive freedom, as a 'freedom to'.

> Freedom can never be an absolute value. It derives its appearance of absoluteness from being the necessary condition for the realization of other, absolute values, among them humanity. From this develops a fundamental question of modernity: what is the value which justifies a voluntary loss of freedom? In the name of what value should human freedom transform itself into sacrifice?[36]

Here freedom is not an absolute value, but rather the process of an endless liberation from sin and the gradual preparation to take up sacrifice for the sake of one's neighbor. It finds its fulfillment in martyrdom. Freedom that does not serve the realization of absolute values degenerates into consumption.[37] Tischner considered 1989 as the opening up of a space for the realization of positive freedom understood in this way. On the other hand, however, and this went against his earlier thinking, he identified freedom with political and economic reforms: 'Balcerowicz's plan was the most important answer to my expectations', he said. 'Yes, obviously, freedom, but the freedom to complete the economic reforms, freedom in the face of a concrete project. First, and above all, freedom for Leszek Balcerowicz!'[38]

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[34] Zańko, Gowin, 49.

[35] Tischner, *W krainie schorowanej wyobraźni*, 291.

[36] Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, 147-148.

[37] Tischner, *W krainie*, 86.

[38] Michnik, et al., 559.

Tischner attempted to reconcile these two visions of freedom: 'freedom for Leszek Balcerowicz' and 'freedom to sacrifice'. On the one hand, he called for the deepening of liberalism with a dimension of fidelity.[39] He called for the completion of the liberal revolution through overcoming the one-sideness of negative freedom.[40] 'We understand liberalism in an over-simplified way', he lamented, 'if we judge that it opens the way for relativism and ethical subjectivism. The principle of liberalism essentially contains within itself a demand that possesses all the qualities of an absolute choice'.[41] On the other hand, Tischner strove to move from Christianity to liberalism by showing that freedom is the highest gift of God, 'the grace of all graces'.[42] Yet, he felt all the while that his solutions were far from perfection, '[I]t is difficult to be a liberal during times when we do not know what freedom is'.[43]

After proving that liberalism is tied to (or can be tied to) Christianity, Tischner attempted to rebuild historical continuity by tying the reforms of 1989 with the activities of the Church and the spirit of *Solidarity*. Since *Solidarity* and the Round Table Talks had Christian inspirations the revolution did not present itself anymore as a break but as a continuation. Tischner demonstrated that at bottom Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and Leszek Balcerowicz realized the ideals of CST and the Christian philosophy of work:

> Lech Wałęsa was the leader of the revolution which came about without blood spilling–the place of class strife was taken by the spirit of solidarity. Tadeusz Mazowiecki built institutions of the democratic state of law and at the same time connected the Solidarity movement with Christian personalism, whose beginnings are in the writings of Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain and its continuation is found in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second

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[39] Zańko, Gowin, 49.

[40] Tischner, *W krainie*, 86.

[41] Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 157.

[42] Tischner, *W krainie*, 294; Tischner, *Etyka solidarności*, 214; Tischner, *Spór*, 194.

[43] Tischner, *Etyka solidarności*, 181.

Vatican Council. Leszek Balcerowicz connected the
solidarity utopia with Anglo-Saxon political economics.[44]

Finally, Tischner attempted to baptize the future. According to him, progress
only seemingly liberates itself from Christianity. Even though in the new
situation the Church finds itself in crisis, or even dies off, its mission is still
further realized, 'I do not see the results of secularization negatively. This
civilization, which appears non-Christian, has, below the surface, maintained its
Christian character'.[45] Here Tischner was mainly thinking about the rights of
man, democracy, and civil society: 'Christian truth and values tear themselves
away from the Catholic trunk, live beyond it, and bring fruit outside of
Christianity'.[46] The world is becoming more human now beyond the Church.
What then ought the Church do? It should search for the actions of God in the
world, '[d]oubtless, the humanization of modern societies is being accomplished
by God himself. The works remains even while the author hides'.[47]

6. The Neutralization and Temporalization of Evil

What were the results of these efforts? Tischner aimed to inscribe liberalism into
Christianity, but in reality he inscribed Christianity into liberalism. The attempt
at Christianizing modernity led him to modernize Christianity and to transform
the deepest structures of CST. He rejected the originary experience of evil. It
seems that when he was philosophizing during the early 90's he went against his
credo of 'thinking in values' and stopped gazing 'into the face of a person who is
disturbed by his fate', stopped expressing their pain and counseling them, and

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[44] Tischner, 'The Ethics of Solidarity Years Later', 61.

[45] Zańko, Gowin, 44-45.

[46] Tischner, *W krainie*, 70.

[47] Michnik, et al., 554.

instead he started expressing 'wonder at the surrounding world'. Was this, in accordance with the standards of his earlier thinking, an act of betrayal?[48]

The Polish philosopher clearly acknowledged that after 1989 the 'quality of the pain' lessened. In accordance with the model described by Odo Marquard, Tischner 'rendered evil no more evil'.[49] He had no doubts that after the revolution 'yesterday's experience of evil–evil present within the system, but also rooted in the people, in what is worst in people–has disappeared and humanity again shows itself to us in a glow of a kind of *innocence*, as a creature that is imperfect, which is more a victim rather than the root cause of woe. Today we have the hope that we ourselves can somehow deal with the evil that besieges us'.[50]

Tischner draws a thick line between the experiences of totalitarian evil and the experiences of the new times. Even if under communism there was violence, injustice, murder, and exploitation they have no consequences for the present political and economic order. The evil of totalitarianism has forever receded into the past. The faults of the communists were forgiven: 'Is it possible to pass into quotidian order over possibly the biggest cemetery in the history of the world? Is it possible to close one's eyes to the destruction of the economies of entire nations? After Hitler we had Nuremberg, will we have the *round table* after Communism?'[51] Tischner thought that the guilt of the communists was taken away when they sat down at the Round Table Talks, beside the fact that they were not at bottom communists but pragmatists. Therefore they cannot bear the evil of the whole system. For Hegel the tribunal of history was history itself–there was no place for him for any extra-worldly judgment of history. Tischner goes a step further. He believes that there can be no judgment in history at all.

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[48] Tischner, *Myślenie*, 9.

[49] Marquard, *Glück im Unglück*, 44-58.

[50] Tischner, *Nieszczęsny*, 18.

[51] Tischner, *Spowiedź rewolucjonisty*, 221.

The neutralization of evil that is expressed in Tischner's political philosophy does not make good bedfellows with his philosophical thinking, which constantly circles around the topic of evil.[52] His magnum opus titled *The Philosophy of Drama* was mainly dedicated to evil and all of its masks.[53] In social life evil is an axiom of our experience and comes to us through the originary experience of an evil person.[54] According to Tischner, human life is marked by an ethical horizon which has a metaphysical character cannot be reduced to being (the good) or non-being (evil). Here Tischner does not hesitate to use the figure of the demon. Man and society are not neutral, they do not exist near or beyond good and evil, on the contrary, they are stretched between good and evil, ascent and fall, victory and defeat, salvation and damnation.[55] This tension is perfectly rendered by the metaphor of drama.

Tischner's considerations point to the universal character of evil. There are people who are evil. Evil cannot be rooted out, because it is inscribed into human life. In this sense it cannot be neutralized. These inconsistencies are worked out by the philosopher in *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*, which was the second part of *The Philosophy of Drama*, and in some ways became the summation of his philosophical way. In that book evil transforms itself from a universal element of the human world into a *temporalized* element. Tischner had a very strong awareness of the evils of the 20th century, symbolized for him by Auschwitz and Kolyma. They revealed the tragic nature of the human fate and along with it metaphysical evil, endowed with intelligence, aiming to eliminated the good because it is the good.[56] The totalitarian regimes of the 20th

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[52] Bobko, *Myślenie wobec zła*; Gadacz, *Filozofia Boga w XX wieku*, 175-188; Marszałek, *Józef Tischner i filozoficzne koncepcje zła.*

[53] See Pyra, „Man's Destiny" and special issues of *Thinking in Values* (2nd and 3rd) devoted to Tischner's philosophy of drama, agathology and dialogue.

[54] Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, 139-140.

[55] Ibidem, 53.

[56] Tischner, *Spór*, 44-46.

century promised that they would liberate us from the hell of capitalism, but they led us into an even greater evil. Evil conceals itself, convincing us that in the name of the highest values we ought to sacrifice the values that are closest to us.[57] Following Nabert he writes, '[t]he Enlightenment did not overcome the *evils of history*; it replaced *superstitious atrocities* with *enlightened atrocities*'.[58] It seems that Tischner so enlarges the experiences of evil in the 20th century, identifying them with the concentration camps, that at the moment when 1989 finally locks them in the past, he seems to think that evil itself has been locked in the past. After 1989, he says, 'something of Christianity realizes itself in life; not only in the Church but also around it… [b]etween social life and the principles of the Gospels there is a relative harmony'.[59]

7. The Neutralization of Transcendence

The deconstruction of evil has far reaching consequences for Tischner. If there is no exploitation and injustice, if pain and suffering disappear, then there is no place for the ethic of *Solidarity* and Catholic Social Teaching, which are supposed to remedy these very problems. However, the consequences are even more serious. Tischner understood well that the experience of evil is a source of religion. Religion becomes possible when at the bottom of hell we encounter the good. When betrayal, deceit, and cruelty appear then witnesses to the Good News also appear.[60] The neutralization of evil leads to the neutralization of transcendence and the dying off of the Church.[61] But if the world is already

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[57] Ibidem, 56-57.

[58] Ibidem, 41.

[59] Michnik, et al., 553.

[60] Tischner, *Nieszczęsny*, 16.

[61] Ibid.

imbued with the Gospel then Christianity can no longer be a sign of contradiction, it cannot fight against the 'mighty of this world'.[62]

The neutralization of evil is also accompanied by the transformation of the fundamental picture of God. God is no longer a Just Judge who rewards the good and punishes the evil; he is instead a democrat and liberal who shines on the good and bad. Tischner asks, 'What can better justify liberal democracy than God's love for imperfect humans and imperfect humanity?'[63] But when God can no longer indicate what is good or evil then the conscience can no longer be a fundamental category. Thus, the conscience, after being considered a key concept that shaped the architecture of CST goes from being the source of the ethics of Solidarity and moves to the margins of Tischner's thought. By relying upon Hegel he also moves away from the vision of Kant and demonstrates that the conscience is something arbitrary: '[h]ere the conscience is the direct expression of myself. And since I am unrepeatable the conscience is not subject to generalities. It absolves itself of all responsibilities to the community and wants to pass for the law'.[64] Tischner decidedly criticized the 'moral worldview' that 'today boundlessly trusts ethics'[65] and 'diminishes importance of law and state'.[66] During communist times the conscience was the main source of solidarity, during liberal times it leads to unacceptable civil disobedience. How does such a reconfiguration affect CST? When Christian theory is rejected then practice falls apart.

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[62] Tischner, W *krainie*, 293.

[63] Michnik, et al., 653.

[64] Tischner, *Spowiedź*, 229.

[65] Ibid., 223-224.

[66] Ibid.

8. Prosperity Gospel

After 1989 Tischner *de facto* criticizes and rejects his own earlier philosophy of labour. He goes even further by proclaiming its opposite and then he curiously presents the opposite as a continuation. He stops looking at labour from the point of view of ethics and the issue of whether it contributes to building up people and communities. Instead he begins to look at ethics from the point of view of economic demands.[67] The pathology of labour becomes a lack of capital, and not, as it was until then, exploitation that has a moral aspect. What's more, exploitation–in certain conditions, that is, the conditions of transitioning into capitalism–becomes something acceptable, even desirable:

> It is enough to look at the lines that line up daily in front of the embassies of capitalist countries. Those people have a choice: either to leave for a certain amount of time and let themselves be exploited, or stay and let their lives go to waste. Human nature is strange because it prefers to be exploited rather than wasted. 'Socialism', or whatever it is that you want to call what we used to have, led to an unheard of waste of human and natural wealth. That is the reason why for those who have tasted the bitterness of waste *exploitation is a great relief*.[68]

But Tischner goes even further than this. He rejects the fundamental conviction of *labourem Exercens* about the primacy of labour over capital and begins to proclaim the primacy of capital over work:

> The key for understanding this matter seems obvious: the key is labour and our concepts of it. Previous times not only imposed upon society a specific structure of work, but also a specific conception: it created an immense amount of illusory work and forced people to acknowledge the illusion as authentic work. In effect people were toiling, but they were not working. In our contemporary world of normal work something that does not give birth to and multiply capital is not considered to be work; *the growth of capital is*

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[67] Charles Taylor describes Tischner's ethics of Solidarity as a variety of 'moral economy' incompatible with liberalism.

[68] Tischner, *Etyka*, 183 (my emphasis).

> *the criterion of work.* If some activity takes up time, requires
> effort, or even dedication, but in no way contributes to the
> growth of capital, or consumes capital–it is not technically,
> in the strict sense of the word, considered to be work.[69]

Much as Tischner rejects the primacy of ethics, the conscience, and labour over the economy, he also rejects their primacy over politics. Even though his vision of the state remained deeply pessimistic since he saw the state, along with Weber, as 'legalized rape' and therefore the domain of devils rather than angels, he saw no sense in giving witness against the authorities. He writes straightforwardly that in the new times there is no need for heroism.[70] He even begins to treat the question of martyrdom with a big dose of irony: 'The virtue of witness! One must give witness! We have come out of communism as witnesses to the faith… We were one immense collective witness… The situation is different today'. Those who cannot understand this and continue to witness today seem farcical, '[i]t is such a witness that includes in its witnessing an apocalyptical offense at the world. It is the witness of the offended. The have been offended and… they witness to it. They suffer. Things are difficult for them, even very difficult. And I understand it. That is why I say: this is a dead end'.[71]

Accordingly, his political theology of martyrdom–and he did have reservations about it even before 1989–is replaced with the theology of 'building liberalism and democracy'. With this he moves from Peterson's position to Schimtt's position; from anti-political thinking toward political thinking, from the theology of the eschaton to the theology of the katechon. As a consequence the martyrs of old are replaced by able contemporary politicians: Wałęsa, Mazowiecki, Balcerowicz, and Michnik. Here we have another interesting shift: Christianity no longer demands heroism, but liberalism has started to ask for a

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[69] Ibid., 183 (my emphasis).

[70] Tischner, *Nieszczęsny*, 52.

[71] Ibid., 184-185.

kind of heroism. 'We know well today', wrote Tischner, 'that the systemic transformations we are participating in do not depend upon a change of external structures, instead they demand a profound change of consciousness'.[72] Therefore it is not enough to accept liberalism, we must transform ourselves subjectively–we must convert. 'It was known that the difficult period of systemic transformation would require many sacrifices. But this time, unlike before, these sacrifices would not be senseless'.[73]

Even though martyrdom loses it religious role it becomes the key to understanding liberalism. Unlike the senseless sacrifices before 1989 the sacrifices for liberalism will reveal a profound meaning.[74] What does this liberal sacrifice rely upon? It relies upon the agreement to bear the pain of the economic transformations, consent to unemployment and marginalization. Tischner demanded that the Church and Solidarity should point laud it, 'the specific task of a labour union is caring about rebuilding the entrepreneurial sphere–the sphere upon which the development of labour depends. The price to pay for this is immense. The price is a kind of agreement to unemployment. But will not such a concern for the whole lead to the betrayal of the interests of working people? Will it not reveal itself as suicide for the union as a union?'[75]

The most important ethical debate in Poland after 1989 was the question of holding the communists to account. Tischner saw decommunization as something un-Christian and wanted to counter it with evangelization of the former communists. He voiced the primacy of *mercy* over *justice*.[76] Social stability became the main issue for him; it could be disturbed by demands for justice, because they could quickly transform themselves into contempt for one's

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[72] Tischner, *W krainie*, 85.

[73] Tischner, 'The Ethics of Solidarity Years Later', 61.

[74] Michnik, et al., 561.

[75] Tischner, *Etyka*, 183.

[76] Ibid., 182.

opponents.[77] He agreed to what his friend Adam Michnik called a 'just injustice'. In the name of unity and mercy he called people to accept human errors, that is, errors of the communists.[78] He went on to criticize 'some of these 'politicians of justice', who lean upon the teaching of John Paul II. They suggest that according to his teachings the principle of justice is the highest principle of social life, whereas the principle of forgiveness is important exclusively in the domain of direct human relations. Tischner argued that mercy should in fact be a public virtue. He supported his argument by leaning on the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*: 'It is difficult not to notice that very frequently programs, which start from the idea of justice, which are supposed to serve its realization in communal life, in groups and societies, in practice fall into perversions'. However, the encyclical itself clearly stated that justice and mercy complement each other. Mercy without justice becomes indulgence. Justice without mercy becomes revenge. In John Paul II's vision there is no justification for opposing justice and mercy.[79] Józef Tischner took advantage of CST in order to affirm the liberal order. In hiding the incompatibility between the two he was forced to revise *labourem Exercens* and *Dives in Misericordia*. This allowed him to identify political liberalism with the philosophy of labour, and political liberalism with teachings about mercy.

9. Conclusion: Post-Liberalism

How did it come to this? How could a thinker who was faithful to CST abandon it for liberalism without noticing it? In his confrontation with liberalism the Polish philosopher jettisoned his philosophical tools. He directed the blade of

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[77] Tischner, *Spowiedź*, 226-227.

[78] Michnik, et al., 561.

[79] Stawrowski, *Solidarność znaczy więź*, 64-86.

CST against communism, but abandoned a critique of liberalism saying it was 'less interesting for us'.[80] However much his guides *How to Live?*, *Help in an Examination of Conscience*, stressed the need for cleansing oneself from sin, he did not see a need for the same in politics. When conducting an analysis upon communism he compared it to a pagan political religion, but excluded the possibility that liberalism might become just such a religion.[81] Even though he studied anti-liberal thinkers such as Hegel or Heidegger he did not take advantage of their critiques of liberalism.[82]

What's more, the tools that could have served Tischner in a critique of liberalism were rejected by him. He instead applied them against the critics of liberalism whom he identified as anti-evangelizers, pagans, neo-totalitarians, and followers of political reason. Tischner also did not develop new tools to deal with the new situation. When 'freedom arrived' he did not reach for the classics of liberal thought. As a consequence it seems as if liberalism was for him and existential choice rather than a theoretical one.[83]

Tischner's thinking had to break down in such a situation. Even if like Hegel he strove to unite the world in his thinking this was not possible. There was no way his Christian philosophy, love for the arts, the ministry, and folk religion could be combined with political liberalism. It seems that in his attempt Tischner interposed liberalism's fundamental divisions and contradictions upon his own thinking.

But Tischner's infatuation with liberalism was only momentary. His comrades also began to leave liberalism behind. This was most deeply felt by Jacek Kuroń who found himself guilty for the abuses of capitalism. He compared it to his guilt

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[80] Tischner, *Polska jest Ojczyzną*, 22.

[81] Ibid., 76; Tischner, *Etyka*, 181.

[82] Legutko, 'Czy Tischner był liberałem?'

[83] Ibid.

for communism. Tischner's own path was different and did not lead through guilt, but through suffering. Suffering gave unity to his final philosophical attempts. In 1988 Tischner was diagnosed with cancer of the larynx. The Polish thinker once again encountered pain, once again saw the face of 'the person who is disturbed by his fate'. It was his own pain and his own face. His philosophy began to reconnect with life. The guide through this final path was St. Faustyna. The path led to God through mercy. Tischner dedicated to her his very moving last texts, written during breaks between intravenous drips. Divine Mercy, as the Polish thinker saw it, was supposed to liberate Poles from a religiosity that is politicized and based upon resentment. Mercy does not strive to punish one's opponent, but to save him; it does not want to debase anyone, but seeks his goodness. 'The faith of St. Faustyna', he explained, 'is a calling for the contemporary person. […] People today are so consumed by the will to power. Their idea of life is ruling over the world and other people. Faustyna's *Diary* has another message. More than anything else a person needs mercy. Might, which does not serve mercy, leads a person astray'.[84] With this Tischner came back to the center of the faith and the center of the Church. He came back from being led astray and into error.[85]

On this final path Tischner met with John Paul II who not long thereafter proclaimed Faustyna a saint. Even though he did not live long enough to see John Paul II's final pilgrimage to Poland, which was conducted under the sign of Divine Mercy, he certainly heard the words which his teacher and friend of old uttered during that visit:

> [t]oday, with all my strength, I beseech the sons and daughters of the Church, and all people of good will: never, ever separate "the cause of man" from the love of God. Help

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[84] Tischner, *Miłość nas rozumie*, 172.

[85] Stawrowski, 83-86.

> modern men and women to experience God's merciful love!
> This love, in its splendour and warmth, will save humanity!

However, John Paul II was aware that mercy understood in this way goes beyond every political philosophy and goes against what liberalism ultimately became. The freedom of the nation must be connected to *social charity* (ie. solidarity):

> This is necessary today also, when different forces–often under the guidance of a false ideology of freedom–try to take over this land. When the noisy propaganda of liberalism, of freedom without truth or responsibility, grows stronger in our country too, the Shepherds of the Church cannot fail to proclaim the one fail-proof philosophy of freedom, which is the truth of the Cross of Christ.

Translated by Artur Rosman

Post-Secular Politics

RESURRECTING DEMOCRACIES:
Secularity Recast in Charles Taylor, Paul Valadier, and Joseph Ratzinger

Roshnee Ossewaarde-Lowtoo

1. INTRODUCTION

The signs of "exhaustion, cynicism, opportunism, and despair" as well as a "politics of resentment" pointed out by Jean Bethke Elshtain two decades ago are worryingly conspicuous in the European context today.[1] Most intellectuals have rightly resisted the temptation of perceiving these phenomena as merely manifestations of human egoism. Most of them carefully distinguish between ordinary human egoism on the one hand, and a healthy "self-affirmation," on the other. These two types of "individualism" are antitheses: while the first one undermines democracy, the second one can be "a

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[1] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 27, 37.

potential source of democratic renewal."[2] Along these lines, the quality of political, social, cultural life, and institutions depends on humans themselves, that is, on the "quality" of their will, reason, and heart, or their whole "personhood". It follows that incomplete personal cultivation, also known as "humanization", can lead to the collapse of the entire European civilization. It also means that neither the will nor reason is a constant (or, neutral), but instead has to be continuously (re)formed. This old wisdom lies at the heart of the works of Charles Taylor, Paul Valadier, and Joseph Ratzinger. Taylor and Ratzinger are widely known for their criticisms of radical anthropocentrism; Valadier, a Jesuit philosopher and theologian, is a public figure of French Catholicism, known for his profound reading of Nietzsche. In accordance with this engagement, he holds that contemporary persons must to recover the "appetite to live," and the corresponding desire to "humanize" or "create" themselves.[3]

These three men share the view that anthropocentrism is mutilating because it isolates humans from each other, from the channels of values (Valadier), from the sources of their selves (Taylor), or from spiritual and human resources (Ratzinger). Such isolation is mutilating on both personal and public (civic) levels because sources or values are constitutive of human persons and of their civilizations. Rather than strictly comparing and contrasting these three thinkers' thoughts, I deem it more fruitful to show how they complement each other. Though they certainly differ from each other, there is a remarkable overlap in their theological and philosophical anthropologies in which the notion of gift or gratuity is central. The ideal of solidarity and justice that stems from this understanding of the human differs from conceptions that rely on the idea of the

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[2] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (London: Pan Books, 1984), 59.

[3] All translations of Valadier's works, published in French, and hence all possible inaccuracies, are my own. I have generally translated the French "homme" to "man," though I have tried to use "human" as far as possible.

rational *qua* autonomous agent. This is the subject of the third section. To begin with, I will show how their conception of a secularized society, which they take as a given and established condition, does not exclude religion, Christianity or Christian transcendence, in particular. They all understand the latter term as "overabundant Life", which enables them to reckon with the distance and closeness inherent to Christian "transcendence" and to enter the dialogue with non-Christians. In the second section, the relationship between Christianity (Church) and democracies (State) is further worked out. The idea that the Church is of a different order, and hence has a different "power" appears in all three. And, finally, their alternative understanding of the human is dealt with in the third section.

2. Secularity *versus* secularism

At the very beginning of his *A Secular Age*, Taylor points to two prevailing definitions of "secular" or "secularity," namely, in terms of "public spaces" without references to God or "ultimate reality" and a "falling off of religious belief and practice."[4] He proposes a third definition, related to the other two and yet different: "the shift to secularity […] consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace".[5] This condition is also what he calls the "Jamesian open space," which is our modern condition in the "West".[6] His conception of secularity stands in stark contrast to a "subtraction" account of secularization in which the very existence of religious realities, aspirations, ideas, and practices is

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[4] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

[5] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2-3, 19-20.

[6] Ibid., 549.

cleared off. Secularity is often associated with the "death of God", and this is correct to the extent that one understands it as the collapse of the unique and unifying moral reference "God", "Good" or "common good." But since divine reality or religion cannot be reduced to a set of beliefs, doctrines, or codes, as Taylor, Valadier, and Ratzinger all emphasise, the death of God does not lead to the end of the religious (life). This is the reason why Ratzinger is not very happy with John Rawls' understanding of Christianity as a "comprehensive religious doctrine".[7] While the three espouse a particular understanding of secularity, they are also highly critical of what Taylor calls the "secularist spin" and Ratzinger the "bunker with no windows" because it deprives humans of both human and extra-human resources.[8] In this section, I will try to explain why they perceive a secularized society as a good, and when, according to them, this secularization goes wrong.

Secularization can be defined as a process of *desacralization*, so that society is longer defined in relation to God, but becomes, instead, "self-referential". This is also what is called the "immanent frame", an important concept in Taylor. The immanent frame refers to the new, modern understanding of the social order as "self-sufficient", definable on its own terms, without reference to outside influences. It refers more specifically to the "disenchanted world", free from the caprices of good or evil spirits, which, in the ancient cosmology, were all very much part of human reality and had the power to upset human affairs, making them quite unpredictable. Instead, moderns are no longer vulnerable to the

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[7] Benedict XVI, Lecture of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for his visit to La Sapienza University of Rome (17 January 2008), Vatican Website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080117_la-sapienza.html (accessed 18 September 2015).

[8] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Germany: Visit to the Federal Parliament in the Reichstag Building (Berlin, 22 September 2011), Vatican Website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html (accessed 18 September 2015).

influences of demons, but are deemed capable of bearing responsibility for their deeds (and thoughts). In a strong sense, Judaism and Christianity (particularly with the Reformation) are themselves the sources of the modern immanent frame because of their demonization of various forms of "paganism" and "superstitions", and the idea that "ordinary life" can be hallowed. This religious demythologization has been explicated by Ratzinger in several of his writings, including his (in)famous Regensburg lecture (2006), but also by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. As Taylor recalls, the distinction between "natural"–"ordinary life"–and "supernatural", emerged *within* theology and did not prevent the ardent defenders of "secular", that is, "earthly" life from also being religious.[9] The modern moral order did not entail the end of the transcendent for the early moderns, and it does not entail its end today. Even if the conceptualization of the modern order does not start with the Cosmos, Nature, or Creator, it does not mean that there is no longer an issue of "whether we have to suppose some higher creative power behind it [modern order]".[10] It was, and still is, not unusual for moderns to start from the immanent, secular order, and then arrive at a Creator–even a benevolent Creator.[11] This is an important dimension of the Augustinian legacy that Taylor sees as constitutive of the modern self.

This "shift to secularity" to which Taylor refers, is, in fact, for Ratzinger and Valadier, the end of an insalubrious, indeed unchristian alliance between Church and secular power, and the return to an original state of affairs brought about by Christianity itself. The Church can consequently be herself once again. The separation between political and religious powers, whereby religion cannot accept the weapons of the state to enforce faith, and the state cannot make use

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[9] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

[10] Ibid., note 7, 832.

[11] Ibid., 543.

of the sacral to impose its will, is, for Ratzinger, a "salutary duality" introduced by "Hellenic Christianity".[12] This is also called the "politico-theological" principle. Like most Christian political thinkers and theologians, Ratzinger sees the dictum "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Mt 22:21)" as illustrating the relationship between the Church and the political sphere. The desacralization or demythologization brought about by Christianity does not abolish the political, but limits its power. It counters both the totalitarian state and theocracy. Conversely, "when this duality does not exist the totalitarian system is unavoidable".[13] Though humans are essentially social and political beings, they are not owned by the State, which is itself accountable to the higher law of God.[14] Ratzinger speaks of the Christian "sober view of the state"; the state has to be respected "in its profane character".[15] As soon as the state tries to earn respect or commitment on the ground of promises that bear a religious character, we again fall into the sacralization of politics, which is a permanent threat of modern democracies. On the other hand, the "politico-theological" principle also counters theocracies: the God whom Christians worship does not want the worldly power that belongs to the political. This refusal of power is, according to Valadier, the core of Christian secularity. In contradistinction to Ratzinger and other thinkers, he holds that Mt 22:21 does not constitute a "theory of separation of powers," and can be found in other religious traditions and books (like the Qur'an).[16] According to Valadier, it is the message and the acts of Jesus Christ that explain the separation between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Prince of this World. Specifically,

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[12] Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 161-162.

[13] Ibid., 163.

[14] Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 20.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Paul Valadier, *Détresse de politique, force du religieux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007), 192.

he refers to Jesus' resistance to Satan in the desert and his willingness to submit himself to the judgement of Pilate.[17] This means that the Church does have "power", but that it is the power of a "Word that creates and arouses liberties […] nothing more, nothing less".[18]

Valadier's and Ratzinger's conceptions of secularity are not shared by everyone. Jürgen Habermas' history of secularization, for instance, does not go further back than the seventeenth century. For him, the "bases of the legitimation of a state authority with a neutral world view are derived from the profane sources of the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries".[19] In this respect, it is also significant that Taylor points to the disagreement between himself and Habermas (and Max Weber) on the issue of the exploration of a cosmic order through personal resonance.[20] The latter two thinkers perceive such self-understanding as "pre-modern", while Taylor has precisely gone to great pains to show that modernity is not simply the negation or supersession of an "old" order. Habermas' sharp distinction between the old and the new makes it necessary for him to speak in terms of "postsecularism", which does entail much more than a functionalist approach to religious traditions.[21] Taylor, Valadier, and Ratzinger, on the other hand, could do without the term since, for them, it is an especially distorted form of secularisation that leads to social pathologies. In other words, their thinking enables them to reconcile a secularized society with religion or transcendence. The "secularization" that has developed since the eighteenth century is, indeed, one that is antagonistic to religion because it is closely related to a positivist ideal. This is why Valadier can

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 284-5.

[19] Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" in *Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 24.

[20] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 510.

[21] Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?", 46.

hold that secularization "has also generated these diseases of rationality of which Ernest Renan is most probably the most moving and pathetic example".[22] He speaks of the "degradation" of *laïcité*–the acknowledgement of pluralism–into "*laïcisme*", which is often the ally of "etatism" and scientistic politics.[23]

Though all three have probed into the question of why the mainstream secularization theory is so powerful, Taylor's answer is particularly insightful. Why is the immanent frame presented as necessarily closed while it can be lived as open? The view that closure is "obvious" or necessary is dubbed by him as the "secularist spin", which he sees as especially prevalent in intellectual and academic circles.[24] His concept of spin is a kind of repartee to those who, from Weber onwards, have been accused believers of intellectual dishonesty. Taylor notes that "spin" is "less dramatic and less insulting; it implies that one's thinking is clouded or cramped by a powerful picture which prevents one from seeing important aspects of reality".[25] His argument is that those who think that the modern order *necessarily* means that there is nothing beyond the "natural order" or "ordinary human flourishing" suffer from such imprisonment in a picture. They are what Taylor–following Wittgenstein–says are "caught in a picture." He argues that it is the present "background understanding"–one of the three types of understandings that constitute the social imaginary–that somehow *morally* motivates the closed reading and makes "stories" and scientific "discoveries" plausible and appealing.[26] Humans, he stresses, only respond to "facts" or "discoveries" against a certain "background" that makes sense of these crude

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[22] Paul Valadier, *L'Église en procès: catholicisme et société moderne* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1987), 20.

[23] Ibid., 21.

[24] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549-550.

[25] Ibid., 551.

[26] Taylor, "Modernity and the Rise of the Public Sphere," in *the Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed., Grethe B. Peterson, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), vol. 14, 215, http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/t/Taylor93.pdf.

facts.[27] According to Taylor, it is the image of the "mature" self, capable of "self-authorization" and disengaged reason that dominates modern imagination. He consistently argues that the closed reading is not a necessary "natural" reading, but instead involves a moral stance. The "spin" consists not in acknowledging the latter, but in taking absolute closure as *certain* or "obvious," like a "brute fact". In a similar way, there is also a "spin of openness". The two constitute two faces of the same coin, in their failure to acknowledge that there is such a thing as a "Jamesian open space"; in their failure to distinguish between the "rational certainty" of natural science and "religious truths", and to see that opting for either the closed or open reading (and changing readings) is a "leap of faith" or "anticipatory confidence".[28]

The modern condition–the Jamesian open space–that Taylor depicts was well understood by Pascal who proposed his wager to his non-believing friends, following the Augustinian insight that religious reality first has to be lived in order to be believed. "*If* the act of faith in God should be well-founded," says Taylor–a few centuries after Pascal–then one runs the risk of turning oneself, and worse, many others, "away from the path towards a much more powerful and healing action in history".[29] It is highly significant that Ratzinger has effectively re-coined Pascal's wager, proposing to his "non-believing friends" to try to live as if God exists, "*veluti si Deus daretur*".[30] What drives him is the fear of the "abolition of man" in a context in which bio-technology, eugenics, and cloning are possible. Many have blamed the horrors of the twentieth century on the closed reading of the immanent frame, which time and time again enables the sacralisation of politics and prevents selves from drawing on truly empowering

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[27] See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 568.

[28] Ibid., 550-551.

[29] Ibid., 703.

[30] Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 51-52.

resources. Though religious fundamentalism seems to correspond to the spin of closure, it is more logical to consider it as stemming from the effects of a closed reading of the frame because it also deprives humans persons of sources of humanization. This is a slightly different way of formulating Ratzinger's argument that religious violence is a result of unreason. According to Valadier, anthropocentrism leads to the paralysis of the will, that is, to a weak desire for life, with the corresponding incapacity to affirm an abundant life, which includes alterity, death and suffering. This incapacity to affirm life in its fullness has also been noted by Taylor[31]. There are innumerable reasons for holding, with Taylor, that the "limits of the regnant versions of immanent order", both in terms of theories and (political) practices, have to be overstepped.[32] In the next section, we shall see how these thinkers conceive such a transcendence.

3. CHRISTIAN TRANSCENDENCE AND DEMOCRATIC VITALITY

The distinction between private and public spaces is constitutive for liberal democratic systems. Moreover, we have seen that, for Valadier and Ratzinger, this very distinction has Christian roots. In that model of secularity, Christianity does have an important role in debates concerning fundamental human issues. Hence, though the distinction between the political and the religious should be upheld–for the sake of the human person–our context of democratic weakness calls for a rethinking of the different types of "powers". Christianity, Valadier argues, can find its proper place not by being represented as, or in, a power next to, or above, other powers, but by being a source of inspiration that maintains an

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[31] Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 20-22.

[32] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 732.

open and dynamic democracy.[33] This is what he calls "modern transcendence", which no longer takes God as an objective foundation. For Ratzinger, since democracy is a "product of the fusion of the Greek and the Christian heritage" it can "only survive in this basic context".[34] Along these lines, reason is so intimately related to the religious (symbolic) world that emancipation from this relationship leads to various pathologies of reason. I will further work out this idea of the dialectic between reason and religious world/faith, which is also to be found in Valadier. For Taylor, the transcendence of certain secularist limits means acknowledging the possibility of a "vertical space", or a third dimension.[35] This runs parallel to his consistent argument that integral personhoods require the continuous tapping of "sources", especially the theistic source and nature, which have atrophied under anthropocentrism. On the political level, he sees the effects of such "contact with fullness" in the leadership of Tutu and Mandela, whose exceptional political wisdom has enabled them to guide people towards an "unworldly" standard of justice, beyond retribution, towards "reconciliation and trust".[36]

Politics is the realm of reason, says Ratzinger. "Natural reason" can recognize "the essential moral foundations of human existence and can implement these in the political domain".[37] This natural reason is, however, a "moral reason", since the end of the state is of a moral nature, namely, to strive after peace and justice.[38] This emphasis is necessary because of the dominant concept of reason as instrumental, for politics cannot be exercised by technocrats and scientists. In a democratic state, power is regulated by, and subordinated to, the law. The

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[33] Valadier, *Détresse de politique, force du religieux*, 284.

[34] Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 215.

[35] See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 706.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 23.

[38] Ibid., 24.

latter ensures that the constitutive values of the state can be realized. However, neither the law nor these values are empirical objects that can "simply" be seen and applied by any democratic state. In modern democracies, it is the political community–the "people"–that makes the laws, through tedious deliberation. With respect to this, Valadier points out how, for Jacques Maritain, whom he considers *the* "philosopher of democracy" and the "philosopher of the people", the reason why one can hope in a democracy is a theological one.[39] According to Maritain and Valadier, the only reason why one can still trust the people–despite all episodes of unreason–is because of the faith in a "common humanity" endowed with reason by the Creator. The idea of the democratic people, the argument goes on, is derived from the idea of "God's little people," the "people of humbles" to whom "the beatitudes are promised".[40] But this God's little people are also continuously exhorted to "seek God", to "change their hearts and minds". In other words, the quality of laws depends on the quality of the people, that is, on the quality of their reason and will (heart).

The neutralization of reason and will has made this idea of transformation incoherent. Hence, Ratzinger claims that the Church should and can (once again) assume "the Socratic function of worry", which entails recalling "reason to the greatness of its task".[41] There is, indeed, hardly any other task greater than the legislation of laws that allow human beings to live a properly human life, that moves them to desire the good and to respond to their vocations. Christianity, through the Church, can help heal or purify a weak reason. Ratzinger's conceived relationship between Christianity and reason is also that which distinguishes him from philosophers who have undergone a change of heart vis-

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[39] Paul See Valadier, "Maritain: philosophe de la démocratie," in *Études* 399 (2003/10): 344.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Joseph Ratzinger, "Le christianisme au-delà de la tradition," in Joseph Ratzinger, Paolo Flores d'Arcais, *Est-ce que Dieu existe? dialogue sur la vérité, la foi et l'athéisme* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2006), 111.

à-vis religion, such as Habermas and Rawls. Though Habermas' postsecularism certainly includes religious traditions (Christianity, in particular) into public debates, it still rests on a conception of reason that Ratzinger is trying to correct. The tone of reservation in Ratzinger's reaction to Habermas' postsecular approach to religion is therefore hardly surprising. He notes that "with regard to the practical consequences, [he is] in broad agreement" with the latter (Habermas), "about the willingness to learn from each other, and about self-limitation on both sides".[42] He then goes on to recall his own thesis that religion and reason have to be purified. Similarly, Ratzinger points out that Rawls denies that "comprehensive religious doctrines have the character of 'public' reason though he does see their 'non-public' reason as one which cannot simply be dismissed by those who maintain a rigidly secularized rationality".[43] Rawls' distinction between public and non-public reason, as in the case of Habermas, rests on an understanding of reason that diverges from Ratzinger's. Rawls' thinking, Ratzinger stresses, cannot help us to determine the reasonable since public reason itself is sick.[44]

Valadier also endorses this diagnosis because, according to him, reason is affected by nihilism. He likewise points out the "limits of the Kantian legacy" in Habermas: "if the cosmopolitan project depends entirely on the good will of peoples …what happens when the human will despairs of itself?"[45] The exhaustion and sickness of reason follow from the severance of the dialectical relationship between reason and the religious universe. Ratzinger's argument that reason slumbers if it no longer actively seeks what moves it is expressed in a

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[42] Joseph Ratzinger, "That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State," in *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 77.

[43] Benedict XVI, Lecture of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for his visit to La Sapienza University of Rome.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Valadier, *Détresse de politique*, 27, 88-89.

slightly different language in Valadier's conceptualization of the relationship between modern rationality ("calculating" or secular reason) and the symbolic matrix that is provided by religions. The "symbolic universe of religions," says Valadier, not only provides "the symbolic structures through which man relates to nature, to others and to himself".[46] It also acts as a "reference" for calculating reason; it provides it with its ends and arouses it when it becomes exhausted, preventing it from collapsing into nihilism.[47] Both Valadier and Ratzinger are trying to convey the idea of an *intrinsic* relationship between reason and "faith", which is not presumed even by those who think in terms of the complementarity of reason and religion. (What is implicitly assumed in these cases is a "pure" reason—a "buffered" reason—that then takes into account various moral traditions.) On an anthropological-historical level, it means that religion is that which precedes all other human institutions (including thinking and science); it is that which shapes the living environment of humans. The positivist endeavor to get rid of the so-called "primitive stage" is therefore self-defeating: reason cannot be detached from that which gives it direction (values) because it cannot be detached from the body, including the social body of symbolic relationships. And, these symbolic relationships are typically provided by religions.

The Enlightenment, Ratzinger observes, has in a way recalled the essence of Christianity; and "secularizing trends—whether by expropriation of Church goods, or elimination of privileges or the like – have always meant a profound liberation of the Church from forms of worldliness".[48] Both Ratzinger and Valadier hold that it is when the Church is stripped of all its worldly privileges

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[46] Valadier, *L'Église en procès*, 37.

[47] Ibid., 89; Valadier, *Détresse de politique*, 139.

[48] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Germany: Meeting with Catholics engaged in the life of the Church and Society gathered in the Konzerthaus (Freiburg im Breisgau, 25 September 2011), Vatican Website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110925_catholics-freiburg.html (accessed 18 September 2015).

that it can truly be itself, and can also be credible. Truth does not shine in and through power but in powerlessness and poverty.[49] The Church, Ratzinger holds, can accomplish her mission by "[setting] herself apart from her surroundings, to become in a certain sense "unworldly""; the "Church must constantly renew the effort to detach herself from her tendency towards worldliness and once again to become open towards God".[50] Since Ratzinger has been highly critical of the "ghetto-mentality" of the Church, it is quite clear that he is not preaching reclusion or sectarianism. Instead, he is arguing that the Church has to be of a different order, one that corresponds to the self-giving God. Hence, it has to transcend the "worldly" standards of benevolence, justice, or "merit". This is the theme that Matthew (Mt 20: 6-15) takes up in his "eleventh hour call". The Church, in order to be the sign and instrument of God, has no other choice–calling–than striving after those divine standards, and therefore, as Ratzinger notes in the same address, it cannot adopt the "standards of the world". And this is precisely what Taylor has in mind when he refers to the same parable, which, according to him, "opens the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God: at the height of that vertical space, that's the only appropriate distribution. God operates in that vertical dimension, as well as being with us horizontally in the person of Christ".[51] However, wisdom is required to be able to see and reach this vertical dimension. Taylor notes how, according to Aristotle, the "*phronimos*" has to have "the right dispositions in order to discern the good. Bad moral dispositions do not destroy our understanding of mathematics, he [Aristotle] says, but they do weaken our grasp of the *arche* or

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[49] Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions–One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 108.

[50] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Germany: Meeting with Catholics.

[51] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 707.

starting points of moral deliberation. […]."[52] And, Christian tradition is a source of wisdom.

This line of thought can be translated into the idea of gratuity, which both Ratzinger and Valadier have thoroughly articulated in their work. The Church has to be the "religious universe of gratuity", thereby distinguishing itself from the dominating order of exchangeability. It also has to propose the message that "gratuity is, that [it] is the source of all gift and of all life".[53] The latter message is in itself liberating in a context where the worth of persons seems to be determined by what they do. The Church "has to be the sign of the One [*Celui*] who does not let himself be manipulated, appropriated or exchanged".[54] To enter the order of gratuity is of "no use", but saves; it is one where one can find "beauty" and the "energy to transform the world in order to recognize alterity (respect, justice, charity)".[55] It is noteworthy (and understandable) that Valadier makes recourse to "beauty"–of a deed, of a profession, or of self-creation – to convey the idea of the intrinsic worth of humans, things and acts, that is, of a value that is determined by neither market-exchange nor dominant fashions. The human can be said to have entered the order of gratuity when he or she discovers the beauty of the say-yes and of "self-abnegation;" when he or she "recovers the taste of the divine".[56] He or she discovers the beauty of desiring the good and saying the truth; he or she discovers the beauty of living.[57] According to Valadier, one uproots "in oneself the germs of nihilism" by recognizing, experiencing and living the gift of life, in all its dimensions; under the dynamic of

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[52] Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections*, 12.

[53] Valadier, *L'Église en procès*, 136.

[54] Ibid., 130.

[55] Ibid., 134.

[56] Paul Valadier, "Nietzsche et l'avenir de la religion," in *Le Portique*, 2001, vol. 8, §12, http://leportique.revues.org/199 (accessed 18 September 2015).

[57] Paul Valadier, *Inévitable morale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 11.

gratuity, one desires values for themselves, and not for their social necessity or usefulness.[58] The encyclical *Caritas in veritate* also develops this idea: "The great challenge before us […] is to demonstrate, in thinking and behaviour, not only that traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty and responsibility cannot be ignored or attenuated, but also that in *commercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*".[59] As Ratzinger rightly notes, "the market of gratuitousness does not exist, and attitudes of gratuitousness cannot be established by law. Yet both the market and politics need individuals who are open to reciprocal gift".[60] The idea of gift is the core of the alternative anthropology proposed by here, and the subject of the next part.

4. The anthropological presuppositions of the democratic ideal

"The democratic philosophy of man and society", writes Maritain, "has faith in the resources and the vocation of human nature. In the great adventure of our life and our history it is placing its stakes on justice and generosity. It is therefore betting on heroism and the spiritual energies".[61] Taylor expresses a very similar thought when he says that it is the belief that the human being is capable of *agape*, or a "kind of secularized variant of *agape*", which has fed the "faith in ourselves [Western civilization]" as being capable of "reaching higher moral

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[58] Valadier, *L'Église en procès*, 134-135.

[59] Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate (29 June 2009), Vatican Website, § 36, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (accessed 18 September 2015).

[60] Ibid., § 39.

[61] Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy and The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 56.

goals than any previous age has".[62] This faith or hope in the human does not mean being blind to the "power of evil". Democracy is based on neither the imaginary innocence nor the complete depravity of the human. Instead, as Valadier says, "only those who know the worst of which man is capable can *hope* in him, without illusion and in truth".[63] The Judaeo-Christian approach to the human contains both grandeur or human exceptionality and depravity. It therefore refers to both sin and the greatness of the human soul, or its "transcendent vocation". *If* it is true that all humans are called to a life that can neither be created nor fulfilled by themselves or other humans, and are, by reason of this vocation, also endowed with an irrevocable "dignity" here and now, it would mean that anthropocentrism deprives them of ends proper to them and forces them to lower their aspirations. In what now follows, I will develop a line of thought endorsed by Taylor, Valadier, and Ratzinger, namely, that human nature is essentially the image of God (*imago dei*), which further means that the latter can be conceived as a serious and credible rival to dominant anthropologies that are now determining ideas, feelings and practices. Since the three men are addressing themselves to a general, non-Christian public, I deem it fair to assume that their understanding of human nature is one that a non-Christian could possibly be able to embrace and put in practice.

As is to be expected, the conceptualization of the "image of God" is as difficult as the conceptualization of "God". Ratzinger has gone to great lengths to clarify the Christian image of God. Ratzinger makes it clear that the question regarding who God is and the question regarding who the human is are inseparable. "The biblical account of creation", he notes, can provide us with some "orientation in the mysterious region of human-beingness" by helping us to

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[62] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 367.

[63] Paul Valadier, S.J., "Le Mal Politique Moderne," in *Études* 394 (2001) : 198-207, here at 207.

"appreciate the human person as God's project".[64] This means that humans are called to become what they are. In other words, the *imago dei* is not only what we are, but also what we are meant to become. This is why it can be better concretised by trying to answer the question of what it means to "imitate" God (*imitatio dei*). The *imitatio dei*, for Ratzinger, is nothing else than "entering into Christ's manner of life," or being "like the Trinitarian God".[65] To live like Christ and the Trinitarian God is to live like a God who gives himself continually. "God" is not an idea, but is, as Ratzinger relentlessly recalls, "a God-in-relationship" because he is love.[66] This conception of God resists the idea of God as pure egoism, which seems to be ingrained in modern consciousness, including "secular" consciousness. Ratzinger, indeed, holds that it is this distorted image of God that inspires the understanding of freedom as absolute independence: "the primal error of […] a radicalized will to freedom lies in the idea of a divinity conceived as a pure egoism".[67] To imitate a God who is Love is therefore not an impossible or vague enterprise – even for non-believers – since as Ratzinger points out, "be truly a human being [similarly] means to be related in love, to be *of* and *for*".[68] "Man," he says, "is God's image precisely insofar as the 'from,' 'with' and 'for' constitute the fundamental anthropological pattern".[69]

Valadier also carefully distinguishes between the egoist, sovereign God, on the one hand, and the God who is love, on the other. He explains that

> The divine model of the image, revealed by the Bible and
> hence through the economy of salvation, is that of a God

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[64] Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning…': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 42.

[65] Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 87; *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 198.

[66] Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 75.

[67] Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (Spring 1996): 16-35, here at 28.

[68] Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning…'*, 72.

[69] Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 28.

Logos, Word and reason, wisdom ordering everything and source of a Law that makes [one] live, merciful love, overabundant and inexhaustible. It is to this God that man resembles and not to an imaginary Sovereign imagined by spontaneous religious sentiment. So created, the human being is analogically endowed with the attributes of reason, of wisdom, of a regulating will, of love, which are those of his Creator. Would God be so jealous as to refuse to his creature what he is himself….while he himself is in totality overabundant gift? [...] Hence, the more man exercises his possibilities, the more he glorifies God and conforms to his image, makes himself what he must become… Is this not a remarkable charter for a Christian humanism? Divine by participation and election, man is therefore ontologically related to God, and this is why saint Augustine could say that to know oneself, that would be to know God, and conversely, that the knowledge of God would be the true knowledge of oneself ("*Noverim te, noverim me*"). This means, besides, that man is not a self-enclosed individual, but a being fundamentally relational, like God himself is, capable of Word and of self-communication.[70]

The comprehensiveness of the *imago dei* does mean that these aspects of the human–reason, sensibility, the capacity for sympathy, solidarity and self-sacrifice, the capacity to experience awe or reverence–are included in the image of God. Hence, Valadier does speak in terms of "attributes", but only of a God who is primarily gift.[71] The same line of thought is to be found in Ratzinger and Taylor. We see above that Valadier is able to convey the notion of a God who is both Other and at the same time, intimate, to the human. The ways in which he combines law with love, creator with creature, transcending all kinds of tenacious dualisms in theology (and philosophy) are admirable.

The question of human nature, if not denied, is in the end one regarding the end of the human, that is, his (her) vocation. Within the framework of self-

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[70] Valadier, P., *Morale en désordre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 204.

[71] In this sense, Valadier's approach does not suffer from the same weakness, pointed out by Nicholas Wolterstorff, as the "capacities approach." See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 325, 331-360. See also Paul Valadier, *Un philosophe peut-il croire?* (Paris: Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2006), 78-81.

authorization, such final end or vocation does not make sense since it is up to the individual to "invent" his or her own destiny in a "meaningless universe".[72] Valadier, instead, makes it quite clear that the measure of the human–and hence, human vocation–is God himself, properly understood as gift (self-giving). This is also what Ratzinger recalls when he points to the inseparability of the questions of God and of man. For Taylor, it is precisely this aspect of gift–overabundant love–that is the essence of the "image of God".[73] Consequently, "the highest good consists in communion, mutual giving and receiving, as in the paradigm of the eschatological banquet".[74] Taylor notes that

> Being made in the image of God, as a feature of each human being, is not something that can be characterized just by reference to this being alone. Our being in the image of God is also our standing among others in the stream of love which is that facet of God's life we try to grasp, very inadequately, in speaking of the Trinity.[75]

Lest one be tempted to brush this aside as "Catholic apology," it has to be remarked that others have seen this "communion" as the "dream of democracy," or of "civil society." Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her *Democracy on Trial*, holds that to "share a dream of political responsibility [means] sharing the possibility of a brotherhood and sisterhood that is perhaps fractious – as all brotherhoods and sisterhoods are–and yet united in a spirit that's a spirit more of good than ill will".[76] In the same book, she refers to John Paul's definition of solidarity as our seeing "the 'other'… not just as some kind of instrument…but as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper'…to be made a sharer on a par with ourselves in the banquet of life to

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[72] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 589.

[73] Ibid., 385.

[74] Ibid., 702.

[75] Ibid., 701.

[76] Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial*, 36.

which all are equally invited by God," and notes that "to the extent that John Paul's words strike us as utopian or naïve, we have lost civil society".[77]

The image of God, when understood in this way, is for Taylor more comprehensive than the rational disengaged agent who is a law unto himself (herself), or the being who simply responds to his (her) feelings of sympathy. It arguably "captures the full force of the call we feel to succour human beings as human".[78] This is related to the question regarding what the Samaritan "sees" in the one lying along the road, or what moves him to perhaps risk his own life to save someone else's. Or, in the cases of newborns and growing children, what explains "this sense of awe, surprise, tenderness, which moves us so much when a new human being emerges?"[79] What relates us to each other in "normal" times and in extremis? It is not simply a matter of interpretation and hence of different "perspectives." The question of human nature and vocation is not only a theoretical one. Our perceptions and decisions in cases of abortion, euthanasia, genetic and other kinds of medical-technical interventions largely depend on how we "see" ourselves, others–including the unborn, the dying, and the disfigured–and each other. This "seeing" is not simply a matter of an extra pair of glasses, of a theistic "mindset" or belief, but goes much deeper; it is inseparable from who we are at a particular time of our lives. This also means that it changes as we transform ourselves. Our (implicit) idea and experience of human nature determine the organization of politics, economics–including our production and consumption patterns–and social life in general, including our ways of interacting with each other (disengaged or engaged; embodied or disembodied). And these dominant ways of thinking, feeling and doing things can also be challenged by the ontology of which the *imago dei* is part and parcel. As Taylor

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[77] Ibid., 14.

[78] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 678.

[79] Ibid., 700.

argues, our phenomenology is not fixed, but can be disputed and corrected by the alternatives entailed by an ontology. A circular movement that somewhat resembles the hermeneutic circle is inescapable. But such a circle is far more preferable to the fixation of both ontology and phenomenology, and besides, it does get broken from time to time when there is a transformation.

The priority of love, which we see in both Taylor and Ratzinger, is not merely a "preference", but is a statement as to the "nature" of the human and of God, the vocation of humans and the nature of the relationship between the human and God. Taylor offers the alternative ideal of "communion" as possibly the highest good, which he contrasts to the (neo) Stoic heroism that he rightly discerns in Camus.[80] Such "heroism of gratuitous giving has no place for reciprocity. […] This unilateral heroism is self-enclosed. It touches the outermost limit of what we can attain to when moved by a sense of our own dignity."[81] The bond of love "where each is a gift to the other, where each gives and receives, and where the line between giving and receiving is blurred" is missing.[82] If one holds that such a bond (communion) is a utopia – because there is no such thing as God's love to support our own love – then Stoic courage may well be our highest aspiration. However, without "trying it out", we cannot know this. Hence Pascal's wager: it is less harmful to try to tap a possible theistic source–which is much more than simply "believing" in it–than closing oneself off to it. Agnosticism or indifference regarding whether there is a theistic source or such a thing as "deep ecology" is not without a price because it cannot be separated from our practical lives, which involve conflicts and dilemmas, wars and destruction, and reconciliation attempts, both on personal and interpersonal (social) levels.

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[80] Ibid., 251-252.

[81] Ibid., 702.

[82] Ibid.

5. CONCLUSION

The alternative ontology of the human, proposed by Taylor, Valadier, and Ratzinger, can be an antidote to an all-pervading "crisis" because it releases forces that can vivify both individual persons and societies with new life and dynamism. It recalls the very need of continuous invigoration; an idea that has suffered under what Taylor calls the "naturalist temper". Since the three men address themselves to a non-Christian public (as well), it does have to mean that these ideas, especially their religious anthropology, have to be relevant to non-Christians, and even more so, the "theistic source" has to be accessible to them somehow or the other. From this, it follows that all three thinkers have to claim a certain "universalism" for their propositions, in the sense that they can be endorsed by non-Christians as non-Christians, that is, while they preserve their particular "identities" or differences. Indeed, Valadier notes that there is "a Christian universalism," which, however, "needs to be well understood"; it is not a form of "imperialism or desire of conquest"; instead, "the universal is a task or a duty that imposes itself on all and everyone, a task of opening and humanization of oneself".[83] Similarly, to "open ourselves to God", for Taylor, "means in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms."[84] The need to "open" oneself or reason runs through all writings of Ratzinger. As a result, it cannot simply be claimed that the theistic source is not available to non-Christians. What is also not being advocated here is a return to Christendom, in which Christianity (religion) is the ordering principle of society. Such an attempt would not only be a denial of the "pluralist principle," but would also pervert Christianity. The works of the three men therefore do not hide a strategy to proselytize non-Christians.

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[83] Valadier, *Détresse de politique*, 49.

[84] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 703.

The thought of the three men allow anyone, on certain conditions, to draw on the theistic source (grace). Let me emphasize that I do not wish to trivialize the difference between Christianity and other religions as well as non-believing modes of life, or even worse, to attribute such trivialization to either of the thinkers I have discussed. Yet, since my underlying concern is a worrisome condition that involves people from all walks of life, it seems legitimate to explore the relevance of Christian thinking as an intellectual resource for all. Taylor, who owes a lot to Ivan Illich and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, recalls that "one of Dostoyevsky's central insights turns on the way in which we close or open ourselves to grace. […]We are closed to grace, because we close ourselves to the world in which it circulates and we do that out of loathing for ourselves and for this world".[85] Valadier's conception of God as being Life itself underlies his claim that all civilizations and traditions contain both condemnable elements and "essential values."[86] Our challenge is to continuously distinguish between them. Ratzinger believes that he will find support from adherents of other religions in his fight for the "defence and promotion of life."[87] The idea of life as sacred is, of course, related to the idea of life as a gift, which can be translated into the notion of being given to each other. Taylor believes that this notion "addresses the fragility of what all of us, believer and unbeliever alike, most value in these times."[88] He also holds that it is possible for us humans to live up to the "demands" that such an idea entails. As Celia Deane-Drummond notes, "gift" is

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[85] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 451.

[86] Valadier, *Détresse de politique*, 48.

[87] Benedict XVI, "Apostolic Journey to the United States: Meeting with the representatives of other religions at the Rotunda Hall of the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center of Washington" (April 17, 2008), Vatican Website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_other-religions.html, accessed 18 September 2015.

[88] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 703.

"not exclusively a Christian concept."[89] And this is precisely what makes it such a fruitful idea. But life, any form of life, can only be experienced as a gift–and not as a curse–within a human community that makes each and every one experience the goodness of life, despite all suffering and evil. The creation of such a human community is, I believe, our political and moral responsibility.

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[89] Celia Deane-Drummond, "Taking Leave of the Animal? The Theological and Ethical Implications of Transhuman Projects," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed., Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 123.

Montaigne and Christian Secularity:
An Alternative to Radical Orthodoxy

Benjamin James Wood

1. Introduction: The Contested Meanings of Secularity

Contemporary theological debates concerning the meaning and character of secularity are invariably structured by conflicting historical and methodological commitments. These differing approaches can be broadly divided under minimalist and comprehensive rubrics. On the minimalist front, political liberals and their theological sympathisers tend to define 'secularity' primarily in terms of the formation of a *neutral space*, where diverse communities and individuals can pursue their religious beliefs without interference from other individuals, communities or the state. As the philosopher Robert Audi summarises this principle:

> [The] state should neither favour nor disfavour religion (nor the religious) *as such*, that is, give positive or negative preferences to institutions or persons simply because they are religious. As the reference to both positive and negative preference indicates, this principle requires neutrality, not

only among religions, but also between the religious and non-religious.[1]

Yet, the peculiar paradox of secularism is that its commitment to neutrality depends upon a distinctive set of moral judgements concerning the treatment of individuals by groups and state-agencies. Secularism assumes for instance the normative worth of individual judgement as well as the significance of beliefs which are reached free from coercion. This is grounded in what Audi sees as the two central functions of the liberal state–namely the maintenance of individual liberty and the person's equal treatment before the law.[2] Yet, since the function of these values is to guarantee the free expression of other values and practices, the goals of liberal secularity in this mould are 'minimalist' because such a settlement does not presuppose an all-inclusive view of politics or ethics.[3] This being the case, secularity functions less as a strict doctrine and more like a pragmatic strategy. In this vein John Rawls suggests that:

> Political liberalism does not question that many political and moral judgements of certain specified kinds are correct and it views many of them as reasonable. Nor does it question the possible truth of affirmations of faith. Above all it does not argue that we should be hesitant and uncertain, much less sceptical, about our own beliefs. Rather, we are to recognise the practical impossibility of reaching reasonable and workable agreement in judgement on the truth of comprehensive doctrines, especially an agreement that might serve the political purpose, say of achieving peace and concord in a society which is characterised by religious and philosophical differences.[4]

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[1] Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33.

[2] Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, 38.

[3] Steven Seidman, *Liberalism and the Origins of European Social Theory* (Berkley: University of Calfornia Press, 1983), 39.

[4] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Extended Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 2005), 64.

From such a vantage point secularity does not promote a particular notion of the 'good' to be aimed at nor a single ideal to be actualised. From Rawls' standpoint, secularity is no more than a construction for avoiding the destructive effects of differences of practice and opinion between individuals and communities. Reflecting upon the epistemological implications of Rawls thesis, the Neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty suggests that a secular-liberal society is necessarily one in which 'the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retrain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human life, about the path to private perfection'[5]. In an effort to engage theologically with this reading of the secular, Christopher J. Insole has sought to draw attention to forms of Christian politics which value the neutral space which the likes of Rawls and Rorty seek to uphold. Stressing the constructive nature of the doctrine of sin, Insole argues that the recognition of human falleness encourages 'caution about oneself, compassion for others and a sense of frailty and limitation of human agency'.[6] Linking such a realization with the notion of a limited-state, Insole argues that a truly sin-sensitive politics should refuse the temptation to 'to save human souls by the use of public power'[7]–whether by coercion and privilege. Providing theological validation for a recognisably Rawlsian compromise Insole declares:

> The state must be silent about religious truth, not because there is none, but because it is hard to discern and the attempt to impose upon others leads to conflict and oppression. So we have the characteristic liberal call to religious tolerance, but then justified in terms of the Christian virtue of charity.[8]

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[5] Richard Rorty, 'Religion as Conversation-stopper', in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin: 1999), 173.

[6] Christopher J. Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism*, (London: SCM Press, 2004), 36.

[7] Ibid., 41.

[8] Ibid., 17.

In contrast to this positive reception of secularity, many anti-liberals (in particular within Radical Orthodoxy) suggest that far from being an expression of impartiality, liberal notions of the secular are part of a cultural smokescreen to obscure the ideological nature of the secularist. Re-framing neutrality as a form of negation, Radical Orthodoxy sees secularity as the multiple withdrawal of Christological, ecclesial and teleological realities from Western culture and their confinement to the private sphere. In the wake of such retreat, both John Milbank and Graham Ward see the rise of public culture populated by citizens who replicate reflexive individualisms, rooted in patterns of private gratification, interiority and self-creation. Under secularity, human life is no longer located within a doxological context (that of a 'given' world praising its Creator) but rather as something *artificial*. As Milbank reflects, at the core of secularity is the realm of *factum* (the made) so that the 'conception of society as a human product and therefore 'historical' remains one of the basic assumptions of secular social science'[9]. Interlocked with such a critique, Radical Orthodoxy also seeks to expose the pervasive colonies of moral relativism and anomie within the secular. Finding in its social artificiality the ontological emptiness of nihilism, Milbank mourns the modern dissolution of the human self as an agent of spiritual and moral truth and the reduction of the human being to an expression of instrumental computation or a naturalistic will to survival. One of the most significant casualties of this secular anthropology for Radical Orthodoxy is the human body itself. Under the liturgical patterns of Christendom, argues Ward, the human body was a symbolically charged site of divine imitation whereby each person 'stands analogically to Christ, fashioning icons of the primordial Word'.[10]

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[9] John Milbank, 'Political theology and the new science of politics', in *The Radical Orthodox Reader*, ed. John Milbank & Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, 2009), 180.

[10] Graham Ward, 'The Beauty of God', in *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 42.

Under this Christological scheme, our actions are portals to living and reproducing the presence of God's incarnation, while our bodies are centres of an unfolding mystery of divine creativity. Yet according to the Ward's reading, a secular body has no sacramental significance. It is 'mechanical'[11] and physiological, understood as 'mere flesh'[12] without any metaphysical dimension. As Ward notes, '[T]here is no longer a controlling sacramental world order analogically related to a transcendental principle. We are now the makers of our world and of any meaning, moral or otherwise that we might find in it'.[13] Accordingly, secularity represents not merely the retreat of religion into a clandestine world, but the withdrawal of transcendental meaning from experience, even down to our physicality. In its appeal to privacy, secularity in actual fact initiates a deprivation of our essential nature. For Augustine the private was intimately related to sin (which he understood as *privatio boni*).[14] Taking up this theme Ward sees in the secular postulation of neutral space an institutionalised denial of our need for community. Severed from 'a theological account of grace-bound nature', the secular individual sees sociality as a personal option, something that 'humans make themselves.'[15] Thus, unlike the minimalistic and ultimately pragmatic creed offered by its liberal advocates, secularity is seen to actively promote a form of life which excludes appeals to the transcendental and the sacramental.

What should we make of this contest between minimalist and comprehensive interpretations? So at variance are these two readings of secularity that it is difficult to see how one would begin either to choose between them, or begin

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[11] Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Post-material Citizens* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 229.

[12] Ibid., 222.

[13] Ibid., 229.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 230.

any form of meaningful dialogue. Ultimately, the Radical Orthodox objection to secularity is rooted in the sphere of motive. While secularists declare their politics to be minimalist, Radical Orthodoxy claims to 'know' the real convictions of secularists–perhaps better than secularists do themselves. Rejecting both the thesis of secular minimalism and the Milbankian 'hermeneutic of suspicion', this article sets out a new point of departure, one which consciously avoids the stifling polarities of crusading secularity and embattled Christianity. While taking seriously the Radical Orthodox claim that secularity is a comprehensive and not minimalist phenomenon, I reject the suggestion that such comprehensiveness is necessarily inimical to Christian community or revelation. Through a close reading of the French essayist and nobleman Michel de Montaigne [1533-1592] I point to the existence of a neglected form of Christian secularity, which destabilises dualistic readings of religion and modernity and thus provides space for an alternative. In the first part of this article I consider two contrasting portraits of Montaigne current among academic commentators. The first is Montaigne the secularist. Drawing on contemporary literary and historical analysis, I suggest that many of Montaigne's key philosophical commitments can be understood as conforming to the negative characterisations of secularity as provided by Radical Orthodoxy. Seemingly animated by a self-directing individualism, Montaigne emerges in this discourse as a deeply private self, fundamentally detached from the world around him. Compounded by his cultural relativism and anthropological inquisitiveness, Montaigne appears an unlikely figure from which to draw a positive theological reading of secularity. In a bid to challenge this impression, I examine a second, somewhat neglected portrait; that of Montaigne the Catholic intellectual. Drawing links between the religiosity of the *Essays* compared to the Augustinian tradition, I attempt to recast Montaigne as a sophisticated theological voice, actively engaged in contemporary debates around grace, knowledge and divine intervention.

Central to this account is Montaigne's creative synthesis of Ancient Scepticism and the Augustinian tradition. Examining the impact of this fusion on Montaigne's attitudes towards the church and the state, I illustrate the way in which Montaigne develops innovative model of Christian reflection rooted in a radical vision of grace. Extending this latter account, the second part of this article attempts to knit together these secular and religious aspects to Montaigne's character. Reinterpreting his apparent secularity as an extension of his Sceptically-inclined Catholicism, I suggest that what Radical Orthodoxy perceives as a negation of sacred is for Montaigne an opportunity for a revitalised Christian discipleship. Examining Montaigne's response to social difference, personal privacy and relativism, I position Montaigne as an advocate of a deeply Christian form of secularity which has the potential to provide as an effective counter-argument Radical Orthodox readings and providing new points of encounter between Christians and secularists.

2. MONTAIGNE AS SECULARIST

The image of Montaigne as a proto-secularist in the minimalist mould possesses an enduring appeal within the academy. Such a fact can be explained as much by his biography as a result of the intellectual richness of his *Essays*. Born to a Catholic father and a Jewish Christian mother, Montaigne seems to have developed penetrating insights into the defining religious polarities of his age. In reflecting on the bloody sectarian strife which defined 16th century Europe, Montaigne shows a degree of critical independence from faction. While as a Catholic observer, Montaigne is understandably horrified by the violence unleashed by Protestantism, he nevertheless attempted to understand the central disputes of the Reformation, familiarising himself with the doctrinal disputes of the Calvinists, Lutherans and many other shades of Protestant opinion. Montaigne's intellectual engagement with these arcane quarrels reveals a deep

appreciation of religious differences. Montaigne's inquisitiveness is in stark contrast to the polarising religious politics of mutual suspicion which characterised the period. In his recognition of 'heretics' as constituting distinct and theologically rich communities, he portrays himself as an anthropological observer rather than zealot. Like the minimalist secularist, Montaigne appears to recognise the fact of 'diversity' and possesses little desire to suppress it. Such generosity has been read by a number of commentators to indicate shades of secularity. The British economist Deepak Lal has favourably compared Montaigne's attitudes to the policies of Henry IV of France who attempted to establish 'a religiously tolerant secular state',[16] while political scholar April Carter has suggested that 'Montaigne anticipated the Enlightenment sense of a common humanity transcending diversity of religion and custom, and the Enlightenment reaction to unnecessary cruelties'.[17] In both cases, Montaigne emerges as a significant secular voice because of his tolerance towards religious difference.

Yet alongside these rather Rawlsian snapshots of Montaigne, there exists a more substantial interpretation of his secularity recognisable to Radical Orthodox critics. This is vividly illustrated when we examine Montaigne's recourse to a radical philosophy of privacy. In his work unearthing the roots of the modern world, Charles Taylor includes Montaigne within rich canon of thinkers who express a fundamental rupture with a pre-modern world. Pointing to the existence of a buffeted self' (which formulates an 'an inner realm of thought and feeling to be explored'[18]) Taylor defines the secular as the intensification of an inwardness and self-focus, which leads to a deepening

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[16] Deepak Lal, *Reviving The Invisible Hand: The Case For Classical Liberalism In The Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Princeton University, 2006), 228.

[17] April Carter, *Political Theory of Global Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 2001), 22.

[18] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), 539.

retreat of value and 'enchantment' into the self.[19] This is expressed throughout Montaigne's *Essays*, but seen most vividly in *On Solitude* where Montaigne advices his reader to 'Retire into yourself, but first prepare to receive yourself there'.[20] Combining a highly Stoic contempt of the crowd with an ease with his own company, Montaigne renounces the imposition of public service in favour of an expansive life of self-reflection. In the seclusion of his library, Montaigne writes free-flowing explorations of his experience, expressing conflicting motives, and contradictory positions. He does not strive towards unified 'truths' about himself, rather he simply wishes to present things as they are at the moment of composition. Montaigne notes in his essay *Of Repentance*:

> I do not portray being; I portray passing. Not the passings from one age to another or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention.[21]

Such fluidity of self have led scholars like Patrick Riley to conclude that while Montaigne's introspection superficially resembles Augustinian confessional practice by asking many of the same questions,[22] Montaigne's aim is ultimately secular because his project is insufficiently grounded in a narrative of sin and redemption. While Augustine is only interested in those aspects of life which relate to salvation,[23] Riley suggests that Montaigne sees 'the self' as 'strictly indivisible, that its entire history, its every component forms part of an irreducible totality'.[24] In contrast to *Confessions,* the *Essays* are 'an attempt to give

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[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), 540.

20 Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (London: Everyman's Library, 1943), 221.

[21] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 40.

[22] Patrick Riley, *The Character and Conversion: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau and Sartre* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 61.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

a voice to that totality, to represent the fullness and indivisibility of the self'.[25] Drawing out the significance of these differences, Riley points to the seeming gulf between Augustine and Montaigne at level of meaning. While Riley characterises Augustinian confessional rhetoric as locating 'the self's essence *beyond* the self'[26] in Montaigne 'the soul has no destiny towards which it gravitates'.[27] Riley views Montaigne as rejoicing in 'the soul's 'constant becoming'.[28] Illustrating this visible gulf on the telos of the self, Montaigne reflects: 'I live from day to day, and, without wish to be disrespectful, I live only for myself; my purposes go no further'.[29] Such sentiments leave the contemporary reader with the impression that the self and its subjectivities is at the hub of Montaigne's interest and writing.

The conclusions which Montaigne draws from this fluid conception of self are hardly reassuring from the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy. While Ward has called for the return to a pre-modern vision of sacramentality, Montaigne's private self actually strips the world of such meaning. In the face of the European discovery of the American continent, Montaigne was particularly sensitive to the various ways in which human beings differed from one another at the level of custom. Questioning scholastic formulations of a universal moral law, Montaigne instead envisions human beings as forming their moral judgements in the context of various geographies and biases, which in turn cause the emergence of diverse ethical codes. This causes Montaigne to conclude in his *Apology to Raymond Sebond* that 'the murder of infants, the murder of fathers, sharing of wives, traffic in robberies, licence for all sorts of sensual pleasures, nothing in short is extreme

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.*,* 65.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 763.

that it is not accepted by the huge number of some nation'.[30] The reason for such differences between human beings is for Montaigne a function of perspective whereby '[one] nation looks at one side of a thing and stops there; another at another'.[31] Here Montaigne can be seen to radicalise one of the central philosophical problems generated by the Reformation; the foundation of claims to religious and moral authority. Catholic distain for Protestant innovation was rooted in the view that the followers of Luther had no basis for their religious conclusions other than the subjective impressions of conscience.[32] Montaigne significantly extends this anxiety by implicitly suggesting that this not just a problem faced by Protestants, but something faced by every human being.

Where does this pessimistic epistemology come from? For Montaigne it stems from a close reading of the Pyrrhonian Sceptics. Central to the Ancient Sceptical tradition was the claim that social relationships and customs are a more reliable guide to living than either the senses or the intellect. In this vein, society is structured, not according to rules of philosophical verification, but sentiments and reflexes hallowed by use and time. As Montaigne writes: 'the laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom. Each man holding inward veneration the opinions and behaviour approved and accepted around him cannot break loose from them without remorse, or to apply himself to them without self-satisfaction.' Thus our judgements on important matters are irredeemably prejudiced so that 'what is off the hinges of custom, people believe to be off the hinges of reason.'[33] In acknowledging the insubstantial and variable nature of human mores, we are inclined to view Montaigne's secularity through Radical Orthodox lens; constructionist, self-focused and relativistic. These

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[30] Ibid., 532.

[31] Ibid., 532.

[32] Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Erasmus to Spinoza* (London: University of California, 1979), 8.

[33] Ibid., 100.

features have led a number of scholars to question the nature of Montaigne's professed Catholicism. The liberal-secularist Judith Shklar argues that the innovative content of Montaigne's *Essays* reveal a loss of faith in Christianity, 'though perhaps not God'[34] while the philosophical historian Richard H. Popkin is inclined to the view that 'Montaigne was probably mildly religious, although not much more'.[35] What shall we make of such assessments? While acknowledging Montaigne's role in shaping modern secularity, I suggest that many contemporary portraits of Montaigne underestimate the degree to which theological reflection underlies his secular postures. Far from merely resembling an Augustinian model of confession as Riley claims, I suggest that Montaigne's models of selfhood, ethics and anthropological detachment shows him to be a theologically creative interpreter of Augustine's theology. At the centre of this process is Montaigne's commitment to ancient Scepticism, which offers Montaigne a rich landscape in which to develop his Christian faith. To begin this argument, I seek to establish Montaigne as a contentious reader of Augustine's theology. Examining both the source material of the *Essays* and their historical context, I locate strong theological currents of illuminationism, grace and faith, which defy lukewarm depictions of Montaigne's Christianity.

3. Montaigne as Interpreter of Augustine

In the seminal philosophical and theological struggles of the sixteenth century, Augustine's theological legacy played a decisive role. It was after all Augustine who served as the frame in which both Luther and Erasmus disputed the

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[34] Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984), 10.

[35] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Erasmus to Spinoza* (London: University of California, 1979), 55.

freedom of the will,[36] while Augustinian models of salvation and grace animated the work of John Calvin[37] as much as the Counter-Reformers at the Council of Trent.[38] Whether one was engaged in the restoration of the True Church (as with Luther and Calvin), or saw the reform and protection of Christendom as paramount (as with Erasmus) Augustine was a central authoritative voice. Given this fact, it is no exaggeration to say that being a public theologian in this period meant being a conscientious reader of Augustine–or at the very least a conscientious reader of Augustine's interpreters. On this qualification, many commentators have attempted to disqualify Montaigne as a serious theological voice. Hugo Friedrich in his survey of Montaigne's Christian sources argues that Montaigne reads 'the Bible with the eyes of an intellect fond of hellenistic wisdom'[39] and suggests that Montaigne's use of Augustine is entirely instrumental, lacking an appreciation of Augustine's apologetic objectives.[40] Going further, other readers, most notably the novelist Andre Gide,[41] have suggested that a scarcity of explicit Christian doctrine in Montaigne a covert atheism. While it is true that Montaigne's religiosity was of a highly individual kind, I do not think this disqualifies him from being a significant theological voice. Indeed, despite his Classicism and seeming lightness of doctrine, Montaigne could be seen as actually adopting highly orthodox postures which have their origin in his negotiation with Augustine and his tradition.

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[36] Greta Grace Kroeker, *Erasmus in the Footsteps of Paul* (London: University Press, 2011), 138.

[37] Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 16.

[38] Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23.

39 Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, trans. Dawn Eng (Oxford: University California Press, 1991), 81.

[40] Ibid., 82.

[41] See Wendell John Coats, *Montaigne's Essais*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 95.

Montaigne's debt to Augustine appears in both direct and indirect forms. While Montaigne seems not to have read Augustine's *Confessions*,[42] *City of God* stretches right across Montaigne's *Essays* with citations of Augustine used in such seminal topics as the relation between body and soul,[43] knowledge of God,[44] the freedom of the will,[45] as well as miracles.[46] More significant than these direct uses is Montaigne's vivid adoption of an Augustinian framework to investigate his own identity. While Montaigne's *Essays* are theoretically playful, combining personal anecdote with the various insights of both Classical and Christian authors, his theological trajectories are unmistakably derived from Augustine. Adopting a firm ontological distinction between Creator and created, Montaigne views human existence in profoundly Augustinian terms, stressing the primacy of God's grace in giving human life both its meaning and agency. In his *Apology*, Montaigne reflects:

> Now our human reason and arguments are as it were the heavy and barren matter; the grace of God is their form; it is that which gives them shape and value. Just as the virtuous actions of Socrates and Cato remain vain and useless because they did not direct them towards the end of loving and obeying the true creator of all things, and because they did not know God so it is with our ideas and reasonings; they have a certain body, but it is a shapeless mass, without form or light, if faith or divine grace is not added to it.[47]

Montaigne's connection between the activity of divine grace and human knowledge leads us to consider another key aspect of the Augustinianism present in his work (whether explicitly or not); his frequent appeal to an illuminationist epistemology. One of Augustine's most distinctive intellectual

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[42] Riley, *The Character and Conversion,* 61.

[43] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 1043.

[44] Ibid*.,* 481.

[45] Ibid., 87.

[46] Ibid., 163.

[47] Ibid*.,* 396.

contributions to the formation of medieval philosophy was his doctrine of divine illumination, which attempted to offer a theological alternative to the Platonic theory of knowledge as the recollection of a pre-existing soul. In its place, Augustine postulated an epistemologically activist view of God which views the Creator continually intervening in the formation of our mental ideas in order to correct and fortify them against errors.[48] Assenting to this Augustinian doctrine, Montaigne dramatises it by looking back to the philosophers of the classical past. Making sympathetic use of the figure of Socrates, Montaigne finds a convincing model of a life given over to divine dependence. Finding inspiration in Socrates' practice of contentious doubt, 'never concluding, never satisfying',[49] Montaigne places in himself in a Socratic position, recognising the insufficiency of his reason to discern the truth. It is by this philosophical road that Montaigne discovers his need for the Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination. In the Socratic world of uncertainty, it cannot be reason that delivers us into knowledge, but only God's gracious action. As Montaigne notes at the beginning of his *Apology* on the matter of Christian doctrine:

> I think thus, that a thing so divine and so lofty and so far surpassing human intelligence as is this truth with which it has pleased the goodness of God to enlighten us, it is very necessary that he still us his help, by extraordinary and privileged favour, so that we may conceive it and lodge it in us. And I do not think that purely human means are at all capable of this; if they were, so many rare and excellent souls so abundantly furnished with natural powers, in

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[48] Augustine uses a combination of didactic and luminescent imagery derived from Platonic sources. With this, he perceives Christ as the Truth and our inward Teacher, who reveals to us the real nature of objects or ideas. These, if left without divine encounter, would remain dim to our understanding. The Fourth Gospel's claim, that all are enlightened by the Word [John 1.9] becomes for Augustine an affirmation of epistemic security. In his useful study of Augustine's epistemology, Ronald H. Nash identifies three core elements of the illumination theory: '(1) God is light and illuminates all men to different degrees, (2) There are intelligible truths, the *rationes aeternae*, which God illuminates, and (3) The mind of man can know the divine truths only as God illuminates him'–see Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lima: Academic Renewal Press, 2003), 92.

[49] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 458.

ancient times, would not have failed to arrive at this knowledge through their reason.[50]

As if to underline this illuminationist point, Montaigne goes on to place reason's powers firmly at the discretion of God. Couching this theological claim in the myth of Athena's birth, Montaigne notes: 'For true and essential reason, whose name we steal on false pretences, dwells in the bosom of God; there is her lair and her retreat, it is from there that she issues when God is pleased to let us see some ray of her, as Pallas sailed from the head of her father to communicate herself to the world'.[51] Here Montaigne's allegorical fusion of human reason with the 'ray' of Athena is significant since it reveals a much overlooked Christological dimension to Montaigne's thought. Like the author of the Fourth Gospel, Montaigne wishes to show us that human knowledge cannot be discovered without the encounter between God's Word and the human mind. Following this theological trajectory, Montaigne affirms that while reason 'exists in the soul',[52] it gains its ultimate potency from ideas it gains from God so that 'there cannot be first principles for men unless the Divinity has revealed them'.[53] Without God's intervention, says Montaigne, 'we are nothing'.[54]

Given this radical dependence upon God for knowledge, how does Montaigne think one should live? Here we come to the third element of Augustine's influence upon Montaigne; his conception of Christian life as one of faith. In understanding Montaigne's *Essays*, contemporary scholars tend to emphasise Pyrrhonian Scepticism at the expense of Augustine, when seeking out formative philosophical influences. According to this interpretation, Montaigne's posture of radical doubt needs to be understood, primarily in terms of a loss of

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[50] Ibid., 389.

[51] Ibid., 492.

[52] Ibid., 492.

[53] Ibid., 491.

[54] Ibid., 447.

confidence in religious dogma, a process that Richard Popkin has called this Montaigne's *crise pyrrhonienne*.[55] On the back of such a claim, scholars including Christian Thorne have argued that Montaigne had no interest in 'revitalising Catholic dogma' but preferred to remain aloof from theological disputes and the wider Counter-Reformation.[56] Yet, I suggest that by choosing Scepticism over Augustine when analysing Montaigne, one introduces a false distinction between theological conviction and philosophical reflection. Yet, Montaigne's use of radical doubt leads him, not to the renunciation of formal religious identification (like Spinoza a century after him)[57] but instead to a return to dogmatic faith with a renewed fervency. Indeed, Montaigne condemns Catholics for wavering under Protestant opposition:

> It seems to them (Catholics) that they are being very moderate and understanding when they yield to their opponents some of the articles in dispute. But besides the fact that they do not see what an advantage it is to the man charging you for you for you to give ground and withdraw, and how much that encourages him to pursue his point, those articles which they select as the most trivial are sometimes very important. We must either submit completely to our ecclesial government, or do without it completely. It is not for us to decide what portion of obedience we owe to it.[58]

What explains this apparent contradiction of sceptical allegiance? This incongruity can partly be explained by Montaigne's creative engagement with Scripture. In the midst of the doubt stimulated by the Sceptics, Montaigne's first recourse was to examine Scripture for moral solace. Like Pascal after him, Montaigne found particular spiritual nourishment in *Ecclesiastes*, which taught

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[55] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Erasmus to Spinoza* (London: University of California Press, 1979), 43.

[56] Christian Thorne, *The Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), 102.

[57] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 241.

[58] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 163.

that doubt could serve as a preparation for service to God. The progression of the Preacher from his claim that 'all is vanity' [Eccles 1.2.] to his eventual praise of God, must have offered succour for a young man who according to Popkin, saw 'his entire intellectual world dissolve into complete doubt'[59] because of reading of Sceptics. So impressed was Montaigne by *Ecclesiastes* that the walls of his library at Bordeaux are inscribed with direct and conjectural epigrams from the text.[60] The *Essays* are equally littered with direct quotations as well as multiple allusions to the book, examining many of its core themes including vanity,[61] the common destiny of humans and animals,[62] as well as the necessity to fulfil one's vows to God 'and keep his commandments' [*Eccles* 12:13] in contrast to the futility of obtaining knowledge.[63] One of the titles of his essays, *All things have their season* is a direct quotation from *Ecclesiastes* [3.1].[64] Alongside *Ecclesiastes*, Montaigne also finds a receptive theological companion in St Paul. Emphasising both the anti-philosophical and Apophatic turns within the Pauline corpus,[65] Montaigne is drawn towards Paul's images of Christian wisdom:

> The weakness of our judgement helps us more than its strength and our blindness more than our clear-sightedness. It is by the mediation of that divine learning. It is no wonder if our natural and earthly powers cannot conceive that the supernatural and heavenly knowledge; For as it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after

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[59] Popkin, 43.

[60] T.A. Perry, 'Montaigne's Essay on Vanity and Kohelet' in *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardic History and Culture*, ed. Yeddia K. Stillman & Norman A. Stillman (Lieden: Brill, 1997), 115.

[61] Montaigne, 273.

[62] Ibid., 401; see *Eccles* 9:3.

[63] Montaigne, 444, 447.

[64] Ibid., 644.

[65] Ibid., 468.

that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by
the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" [1
Corinthians 1:25].[66]

Interpreting this motif through Sceptical lenses, Montaigne discovers
theological warrant for the Pyrrhonian rejection of discursive argument. His
doubt is thus transformed from an obstacle into a tool of faith. Yet, is such a
conclusion sufficient to sustain one's religious convictions? Montaigne finds a
positive answer to this question by theologically codifying his scriptural reading
by adopting a roundly Augustinian understanding of faith. Summarising
Augustine's definition, Philip Cary writes, 'Augustine defines faith, not as belief in
Christ but as belief in the mind's need for purification and healing in order to see
God–a belief that makes it willing to following 'doctor's orders', that is, to obey
the divine commands that make for virtuous living'.[67] In this way, Augustine has
faith precede both doctrinal statement and theological proposition, since without
faith, one would neither be willing nor able to hear, much less heed, the call of
divine revelation [Isa 7:9]. The function of the Church according to this
formulation is not to furnish our minds with logical expositions of the workings
of God, the natures of Christ or the dynamics of the Trinity, but rather to train
us precisely in Pauline 'foolishness'; to accept what we do not fully understand
and to believe what reason initially denies. In this mould God is not an object
ready for our study, rather God is a horizon, the end of which we cannot grasp,
yet we are nonetheless propelled onwards towards our goal. In short,
Augustine's conception is primarily mystical and not axiomatic. Faith is not a
solver of problems; rather it is an initiator of an ongoing relationship with the
majesty of God. Montaigne continually appeals to this model of fidelity
throughout the *Essays*, offering it as an antidote to the religious confusion of his

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[66] Ibid., 449.

[67] Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2008), 12.

age. For this purpose he adopts a series of recognisably Augustinian stances which emphasise the primacy of faith in answering religious questions. One of the most visible instances of this approach is found in Montaigne's attitude towards miracles. The most lucid exposition of the Augustinian position on the subject can be found in Chapter 21 in *City of God*; where Augustine mounts a defence of the Christian belief in miracles on the basis of the limitations of human reason:

> [T]he unbelievers demand a rational proof from us when we proclaim the miracles of God in the past and his miraculous and his marvellous works which are still to come which we cannot present to the experience of the unbelievers. And since we cannot supply this rational proof of those matters (for they are beyond the powers of the human mind the unbelievers assume our statements are false whereas they themselves ought to supply a rational explanation of all those amazing phenomena which we observe or at any rate, are able to observe. And if they see that this is beyond man's capacity they should admit the fact that a rational explanation cannot be given for something does not mean that it could not have happened in the past, or that it could not happen in the future, seeing that there are these things in the present which are equally inscrutable to rational explanation.[68]

Reviving Augustine's limited-reason defence of miracles, Montaigne condemns various shades of refutation. Of particular annoyance to Montaigne are those who insist either upon an inflexible understanding of nature, or else, attempt to define God's abilities. The worst offenders for Montaigne are those Scholastics, who, with their enthusiasm for logical definition, would bind God to the laws of nature or the diktat of Aristotelian syllogisms.[69] Montaigne complains in the *Apology*: '[I]t has always seemed to me that for a Christian this kind of talk is full of indiscretion and irrelevance: "'God cannot die, God cannot go back on his word, God cannot do this or that.' I do not think it is good to confine the

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[68] Augustine, *City of God*, 971.

[69] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 475.

divine power thus under laws of our speech.[70] In contrast to such idle speculation, Montaigne prefers an intellectually bounded religion; one which holds as central the ineffability of God and the weakness of human inquiry to fathom Him. While Scholastic thinkers attempted to describe the operation of the divine law through appeal to their reason, Montaigne hazards that we live under a 'municipal law'[71] having no grasp of the universal law which is at God's discretion. In place of a prideful overreach Montaigne suggests (quoting Augustine) that 'God is better known by not knowing'.[72] The true Christian, thinks Montaigne, lives in the midst of this paradox of seeking the unknown, unlike the presumptuous who seek a counterfeit deity after their own fashion.[73] Rejecting the multiple idolatries of philosophers and religious experts of all kinds, Montaigne settles on the 'hidden and unknown Deity' honoured by St Paul in visit to Athens [Acts 17:23], a deity who sustains and orders the world in a way beyond our comprehension.[74] Alongside these general remarks on the mystery of divine power, Montaigne's philosophical Scepticism inclines him to lend support to particular instances of miracles on the basis that it unwise to 'disdain what we do not comprehend' when faced with the 'infinite power of nature'.[75] In place of contempt, says Montaigne, we should take seriously the manifold accounts of those who have been party to the miraculous. This does not mean that we should believe in every miracle we hear, but we should certainly not doubt them all either:

> When we read in Bouchet about the miracles done by the relics of St Hillary, let it go; his credit is not great enough to take away our right to contradict him. But to condemn

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[70] Ibid., 476.

[71] Ibid., 473.

[72] Ibid., 448, quoting Augustine, *On Order* [2.16.42].

[73] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 480.

[74] Ibid., 462.

[75] Ibid., 163.

> wholesale all similar stories seems to me a singular imprudence. The great Saint Augustine testifies that he saw a blind child recover his sight upon the relics of St Gervase and St Protasius at Milan; a woman at Carthage cured of a cancer by the sign cross made over her; Hesperius, a close friend of his, cast out the spirits that infested his house from a little earth from the sepulchre of Our Lord and a paralytic promptly cured by this earth later, when it had been carried to church; a woman in a possession having touched St Stephen's shrine with a bouquet and rubbed her eyes with this bouquet recover her long-lost sight; and he reports many other miracles at which he himself was present. Of what shall we accuse both him and two holy bishops, Aurelius and Maximinus, whom he calls on as his witnesses? Shall it be of ignorance, simplicity, credulity, or of knavery and imposture? Is there any man in our time so imprudent that he thinks himself comparable, either in virtue and piety, or in learning, judgement and ability?[76]

On preliminary inspection this passage seems strange. How could a professed follower of the Sceptics construct an argument in favour of miracles? Such a defence would only be incredible if Montaigne was a pure Sceptic. In antiquity the Ancient Sceptics treated religion as a wholly ritualistic practice, suspending any judgement on the validity or otherwise of religious claims. This was far from Montaigne's view. For him Scepticism was not in opposition to the affirmation of religious truth. In fact, the Sceptical dissolution of certainty invites the mind to renounce its closed assumptions and revel in the ambiguous, the strange and the unbelievable. In such a shadowy world, unhampered by narrow certainties, the miraculous, the fusion of nature and grace is possible. According to the philosopher Ann Hartle:

Montaigne blurs the distinction between nature and grace not because he denies the presence of the sacred in human life, but because he sees the presence of grace everywhere. Or to put the matter in skeptical terms, human reason cannot make the distinction between nature and grace. In this sense,

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[76] Ibid.

Montaigne's skepticism is his faith; faith cannot assume to know and does not need to know whether the cause of any given action is nature or grace.[77]

While theological critics of Montaigne tend to condemn him for his drastic diminution of reason and his reliance on faith (fideism) Hartle points us towards the profound strain of orthodoxy which underpins many of Montaigne's seemingly heterodox positions. For all its unsettling power his Scepticism is both open and moderate, bound to a Christian tradition which it both defenders and nurtures. In an age which saw Europeans Christians die for abstract doctrinal disputes, Montaigne attempts to use doubt to bring people back to an earlier Augustinian conception of Christendom, one in which doubt serves to impart a greater sense of dependence upon God, in place of intellectual prowess. The Augustine who rallied against the conceit of the ancient philosophers finds new intellect energy in Montaigne, who rejects the stale logic of Scholasticism in favour of a God of mystery. The universe is not an elegant system of propositions to be argued about but a fully providential creation underpinned by the unknown and unquantifiable. Such a trajectory not merely expresses a reverence for the miraculous, but a desire to see the end of a poisonous sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics.

In his appreciation for theological incompleteness he eschews the fixed positions which were driving Christian Europe apart. Such innovative responses tell us something significant about his character. Montaigne was a man of considerable intellectual gravitas. His *Essays* offer more than a personal exploration of himself, but contain a kind of experiential theology which attempts to understand fully and seriously the logical and personal consequences of the doctrine of grace by testing it in various fields. Far from being a merely casual reader of Augustine, Montaigne is a fully engaged interpreter, possessing a

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[77] Ann Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

theological sophistication which is little appreciated by his secular admirers. Keeping this Augustinian portrait firmly in view, I proceed to examine its implications for the secular readings of Montaigne we encountered earlier. Rejecting any disjunction between his secularity and religiosity, I posit that Montaigne's approaches to social difference, selfhood and anthropological reflection are in fact innovative re-workings of Augustinian legacies. Montaigne's *Essays* do not marginalise Christian faith and practice; rather they are an attempt at finding new models of faithfulness in the midst of the institutional disintegration of Christendom. Emphasising in particular the didactic function of his secular turns in relation to relativism, selfhood and anthropological distance, I claim that Montaigne offers a distinctive mode of discipleship which provides an alternative reading of the secular.

4. Montaigne: Relativism and Grace

At the heart of Montaigne's theology is the notion of obedience. For Montaigne, God possesses manifold opportunities to reveal his nature to human beings through physical signs; in miracles and in the sacraments and ceremonies of the Apostolic Church. By what Montaigne regards as 'a common supernatural inspiration' shadows of the true faith are also communicated to those who have not even heard of the Church of Christ.[78] In these diverse communications God seeks to instruct us in making known our arrogance, tempering our hubris and chastising our vanity.[79] Yet, in a world of competing sects and doctrines, how might we best follow the call of God? At first glance Montaigne's solution to this problem is deceptively simple: we must learn to rekindle our capacity for faithfulness. Yet what does such a rekindling involve?

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[78] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 526.

[79] Ibid., 504.

As a Catholic Montaigne turns firstly to Scripture and tradition in order to sketch the direction of his thought. Following Augustine's account of the fall in *City of God*, Montaigne takes us back to the distant past in which human beings were governed solely by 'a law of pure obedience;'[80] that is to say, their reason in subjection to divine authority.[81] In this original state of virtue there is no need for philosophers, schools or disputation. Under the equanimity of heavenly order, every human being lives as a Sceptic, their souls undisturbed by the intellectual anxieties of questioning and doubt. Thus in Montaigne's rendering of Paradise, God's grace allows each of us to experience Pyrrho's ideal of ἀταραξία without effort. This is only a slight modification of the original Augustinian material on Montaigne's part. When describing the original serenity experienced by Adam and Eve, Augustine probably had the equivalent Stoic notion of ἀταραξία in his mind.[82] Montaigne's substitution of Stoicism for Scepticism in no way compromises the integrity of the original Augustinian reading. It constitutes a respectful gloss rather than a contortion. Rather than conceiving of Scepticism as an alien presence in an otherwise orthodox account; it is a fruitful tool which allows Montaigne to depict and ideals of Christian discipleship more faithfully.

If there is a paradise in Montaigne's Christian faith, there is also a fall. Drawing directly upon scripture, Montaigne argues that sin entered the world through an arrogant desire for knowledge. Lives which once conformed to a godly pattern of simplicity and peace are now disfigured by irreligion, violence and self-hatred, all because of an overreaching desire for knowledge. Not content with the natural bounds that God has provided it, the speculative mind 'does nothing but ferret and quest, and it keeps incessantly whirling around, building up and becoming entangled in its own work, like our silkworms, and is

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[80] Ibid., 437.

[81] Ibid., 436.

[82] Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9.

suffocated in it'.[83] Yet there is something of the humanist in Montaigne which refuses to believe that this original grace is entirely lost to us. He imagined its continuance among far away peoples like the Brazilians or else in the lives of non-human animals, those with the benefit of not being corrupted by intellectual calculation.[84] As we shall see, these musings are mainly rhetorical devices with the purpose of recommending the cause of his favoured philosophical school, the Ancient Sceptics. As a Catholic Montaigne did not believe that the Sceptics had in themselves any special revelation which the Scriptures did not also possess, yet he did believe that Sceptics provided excellent preparation for the Christian. By emptying the mind of all its cherished beliefs and certainties the Sceptical method cleared the way for reliance upon God alone. In this act of Pyrrhonian *knosis* the human being becomes a 'blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he will be pleased to engrave upon it'.[85] In the discussion which follows, I suggest that Montaigne's secularity is in actual fact elements of this self-emptying strategy. From this perspective, I suggest that Montaigne shows us a way in which secularity has the capacity to be harassed to the service of Christian faith and practice. What might be seen as secularism's most disconcerting face for Radical Orthodoxy becomes for Montaigne an opportunity to live according to faith. Let us first consider the most controversial aspect of Montaigne's secularity: his commitment to cultural relativism.

As we saw earlier, Radical Orthodox critics see the normative acceptance of cultural relativism as part of the general pattern of the secular, namely that of value-negation. Relativism marginalises precisely what Radical Orthodoxy seeks to sustain; the retrieval of multiple ecclesial, theological and ethical universals from an increasingly fragmented and anomic modernity. Yet, if cultural

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[83] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 995.

[84] Ibid., 440.

[85] Ibid., 455.

relativism represents the suppression of universal meaning for Radical Orthodoxy, cultural relativism is for Montaigne merely a fact of life. The discovery of the New World taught him the utter fallacy of the Scholastic notion that the human family was able to live according to a single moral standard deducible by reason. If there was rationality at play in the diversity of customs among the world's peoples, Montaigne sensed that such rationality was not reciprocally intelligible. '[A] man calls barbarous whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the customs and opinions of the country we live in' (*Of Cannibals*).[86] Such modernist-sounding remarks have led some readers to discern in Montaigne a clear anticipation of Nietzsche's model of cultural relativism.[87] Yet, unlike the atheistic Nietzsche[88] Montaigne's relativism is theologically and not nihilistically motivated. While Nietzschean relativity presupposes a universe without transcendent meaning, Montaigne's version attempts to show us how far we have fallen in the sight of God. While in the beginning there was a single moral law, sin has caused deviation and dilution. Such an immorality which reaches the grossest degree; that of a Christendom which simultaneously proclaims the truth of God and finds itself more brutal than those 'savages' who have not heard of Christ. Noting of the brutality of the wars of religion in his native France, Montaigne remarks: 'I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts (those of cannibals) but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own'.[89] If relativism shows us how disordered our world has become, Montaigne also has a didactic function in mind. If we are confronted with contradictory models of morality and custom,

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[86] Ibid., 185.

[87] Philip Hodgkiss, *Making of the Modern Mind: The Surfacing of Consciousness in Social Thought* (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 73.

[88] Nietzsche was himself a reader of Montaigne; see Jessica Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80-81.

[89] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 189.

how shall we choose between them? Not by reason, says Montaigne, since with reason we will simply see our cultural prejudices reflected back to us. The resolution to relativism can only be achieved by turning away from our own facilities and towards Divine Revelation, which transcends both rationality and culture. So while the 'world is nothing but variety and dissimilarity'[90] Montaigne's illuminationism prevents him from sinking into nihilism. Indeed his commitment to relativism is not a permanent position, but rather a stepping stone to faith. By carefully studying the diversity of sects, schools and tribes of humans, Montaigne is convinced that our faith in God's grace will increase, as we realise that our own intellectual powers are insufficient in achieving a measure of certainty. Rather than comparing Montaigne to Nietzsche, it would be wiser to compare him to Karl Barth. With his stress on the primacy of God's revelation and distrust of rationalist theology, Montaigne anticipates Barth's contention that one cannot 'logically' read God's intentions from the world around us; rather God must actively reveal Himself to us through Scripture and the Church. In a deeply Montaignian passage in *Church Dogmatics* Barth reflects:

> [The] knowledge of God certainly doesn't come without our work; it also does not come through our work, or as the fruit of our work. At this very point the truth breaks impetuously and decisively before us; God is known only to God; God can be known only to God. At this very point, in faith itself, we know in utter dependence, in pure discipleship and gratitude. At this very point we are finally dissuaded from trusting and confiding in our own capacity and strength. At this very point we can see that our attempt to answer God's revelation with our views and concepts is an attempt undertaken with insufficient means, the work of unprofitable servants, so that we cannot possibly ascribe the success of the attempt, and therefore the truth of our knowledge of God to ourselves, i.e. to the capacity of our views and concepts. In faith itself we are forced to say that

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[90] Ibid., 296.

> our knowledge of God begins in all seriousness with the knowledge of the hiddenness of God.[91]

It is this vision of a mysterious God which lies at the heart of Montaigne's relativism. In a world where revelation is the only channel of contact between creature and Creator, there is no automatic natural, ontological or theological order which can be read and understood by the powers of human reason alone. Far from arguing for relativism out of a desire to negate values (as Milbank and Ward fear) Montaigne's apparent secularity emerges out of a desire to uphold the mystery of God. Realising the failure of all human beings to adequately comprehend the divine law, Montaigne uses the bewildering array of customs in order to illustrate our need of radical dependence upon God through his Church and Sacraments.[92]

5. Montaigne and the Augustinian Self

What does such an attitude of dependence mean for Montaigne's understanding of the self and how might it be considered secular? If we are to believe Riley's reading of the self in the *Essays* Montaigne's view of human identity is diametrically opposed to the theological personhood of Augustine. While Augustine places his true individuality in relation to God, Montaigne is seen to

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[91] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics The Doctrine of God, Volume 2*, ed. by G.W. Bromiley, T.F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 1957: 2004), 183.

[92] As to why the Church should be exempt from such radical doubt, Montaigne gives little in the way of a direct answer. However, one can offer formulate a viable theory by considering the sources which influenced his Scepticism. Like Augustine before him, Montaigne is a contentious reader of Cicero's philosophy (see Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 80). Reacting against dogmatism and systematisation in typically Ciceronian ways, Montaigne rejects the necessity to be consistent–applying (like Cicero) Sceptical tools to his own doubt (Friedrich, *Montaigne*, Ibid.*)* An insistence on blanket rejection of belief would sit just as uneasily with the Sceptical attitude as blind allegiance. To insist that the church must be doubted would transform Scepticism into another dogmatic rule among many. Thus, Christianity is preserved from the philosopher's scrutiny for Montaigne on the paradoxical basis that to abandon his faith would be to negate the open-minded pragmatism worthy of a Sceptic.

turn inward, mining the content of his subjectivity for new meaning. In short, Augustine represents the relational identity of an older Christendom and Montaigne represents something new and ultimately disruptive; a culture of literary narcissism which presumes, to quote Ward, the 'the citizen as consumer who now designs his or her own lifestyle, manners and morals'.[93] Such an analysis of Montaigne evokes not merely the dissolution of religious identity as a central driving force of action, but also suggests the kind of self-absorbed identity which cares little for the lives of others. Yet such an interpretation deprives Montaigne of his religious substance, ignoring the theological motives which underlie his act of personal disclosure. Confirmation of this claim can be found when we examine both Montaigne's motives for writing alongside his commitments to the privacy and mystery of personal identity. All three elements reveal a deeply Augustinian understanding of self and world which confounds the expectations of theological critics of secularity.

In declaring his motives for writing the *Essays*, Montaigne assures us of two things. Firstly, he makes clear that his private compositions are not intended to replace his identity as a professing Catholic. As Malcolm Smith has suggested, the *Essays* allude to Montaigne's practice of one of the most significant practices of Catholic self-disclosure; the sacrament of penance. A particularly vivid hint of Montaigne's religious practice in this regard is found in his essay *Of Vanity* where he tells us that during periods of severe illness 'I reconcile myself with God by the last Christian offices and thereby find myself more free, and unburdened, feeling all the more triumphant over the sickness'.[94] As Smith observes the use of the phrase 'Christian offices' suggests 'the practice of the penitential sacrament'.[95] Regardless of the precise rite being described here, Montaigne at moments of

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[93] Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125.

[94] Montaigne, 913.

[95] Malcolm Smith, *Montaigne and the Roman Censors* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981), 72.

peril finds completion in the lap of the Church and its sacraments. His *Essays* record his life (and attempt to give it context) but they do not replace the Church. Whatever benefit the *Essays* perform for Montaigne, they do not have the reconciling power of the Christian faith. Such a conclusion is further bolstered by Montaigne's second reassurance, that his *Essays* (and the person represented in them) do not signify a rival locus of theological, moral or philosophical authority to that of the Church. While it is true that Montaigne experiments with many narratives other than Christianity; playing with Stoic, Platonic, Humanist and Epicurean masks, they remain just that, masks. He never adopts these postures as comprehensive doctrines of life. Indeed, his Scepticism inclines him to reject such systems precisely because they profess a certain comprehensiveness of form. In this vein, the ancient philosophers are points of clarification for Montaigne, but they never drag him towards any exclusive or dogmatic position other than to reinforce his Sceptical Catholicism. Scholars like Judith Shklar misunderstand the nature of Montaigne's attachment, despite being sensitive to Montaigne's devotion and evident delight in the ancient philosophers. The French writer's ongoing dialogue with Hellenism is not, as Shklar calls it, 'a return to the philosophers of antiquity' to the exclusion of Christianity, rather it is part of Montaigne's eclectic but Christian method of seeking continual points of interrogation of his beliefs and prejudices.[96] Antiquity is a potent for space for Montaigne's education in this respect but not an alternative way of life.

Alongside these motives, Montaigne's account of privacy offers further validation of the profoundly Christian convictions which underlie his understanding of the self. As we saw earlier, Ward defines the liberal-secular recourse to privacy as positing a sphere of lack and separateness which is divorced from the public demands of the Christian Gospel. Implied in such a

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[96] Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984), 10.

model is the suggestion that privacy is deeply anti-Christian practice, seeking as it does a 'room of one's own', rather than a space of mutual fellowship proclaimed by the Church. Superficially, Ward's negative interpretation of privacy maps comfortably onto Montaigne. In the seclusion of his library Montaigne claims an identity outside institutions, whether that is the church or the state. In an era when both monarchies and ecclesial authorities were tightening their grips all over Europe, Montaigne made individuality and idiosyncrasy the subject of his work.

To talk of 'I' in a century of an increasingly religious 'we', Montaigne appeals to the neutrality of his own self as a place of freedom and retreat. In this internal terrain, he was not of any party, except perhaps that of the human race. Montaigne is free to invent, experiment and innovative, while the world around him is stifled by authority. In making himself a text to be read, Montaigne develops a radical identity which never fully obeys the rules of 'the world'. Montaigne as a textual construct is always open to multiple interpretations which are private and personal. This being true, it is easy to assume rather lazily that Montaigne's secular space is divested of ecclesial or theological authority. This is where the Radical Orthodox understanding of secular privacy breaks down. Montaigne indeed claims himself as a proper subject of examination, yet he refuses to disinvest the self of either its communal or theological significance. While he claims the space of his library as his 'own', his *Essays* are written not for himself; rather they are public works with the intention of being read by others. In writing of himself, Montaigne considers that he is undertaking a supplementary form of religious confession which is more lucid than his private inarticulate confessions.[97] By making public his cherished privacy, Montaigne hopes that Christian readers might glean a degree of moral education in regard to the proper conduct of their bodies and souls. In his essay *On Some Verses of*

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[97] Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 780.

Virgil, he prays: 'God grant that this excessive licence of mine might encourage our men to obtain freedom, rising above these cowardly and hypocritical virtues born of our imperfections; that at the expense of my immoderation I may draw them on to the point of reason'.[98] So while Montaigne might be secluded his thoughts are harnessed towards communal ends; an object not foreign to Christian confessional practice where exploring private sins serve as a means of educating and improving the reader. Yet along with this moral function, Montaigne perceived introspection as a means of strengthening his model of Christian dependence by emphasising the mystery of the self.

   As Montaigne goes deeper into the contents of his mind he discovers a startling truth. Instead of finding a fixed identity complete with personality traits, Montaigne discovers only a state of radical contingency. The collection of impressions and memories under which we understand as 'Michel de Montaigne' is an entity that is forever shifting, and consequently is analytically inexhaustible. Inward observation, he discerns, does nothing to abate the deep mystery of the self. 'I have seen no more evident monstrosity and miracle in the world than myself. We have become habituated to anything strange by use and time; but the more I frequent myself and know myself the more my deformity astonishes me, and the less I understand myself' (*Of Cripples*).[99] While Riley places such remarks in the context of a mind which revels in its 'becoming', the words 'monstrous' and 'deformity' seem odd in the context of a positive affirmation of ontological instability. Does Montaigne give us a clue to the significance of his choice of words? A clue is provided in the form of a short essay *Of a Monstrous Child* in which Montaigne discusses various strange examples of physical deformity. Eventually leaving the cause of such outward peculiarity to God Montaigne closely echoes the language he uses to describe his inner-self.

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[98] Ibid., 778.

[99] Ibid., 958.

> What we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the
> intensity of his work the infinity of forms he comprises in it;
> and it is for us to believe that this figure that astonishes us is
> related and linked to some other figure of the same kind
> unknown to man. From his infinite wisdom there proceeds
> nothing but that is good and ordinary and regular, but we
> do not see its arrangement and relationship.[100]

Such remarks are almost certainly a conscious imitation of Augustine's own discussion of 'monsters which are bound to be born among us to human parents' in *City of God* (16.8).[101] Yet when we read *Of Cripples* beside this second essay it is possible to uncover an intriguing theological trail which further confirms the depth of Montaigne's Augustinianism. If our inner-world is monstrous and astonishing, and completely understood by God, it is difficult to escape the following; that while the self is a mystery to us, the strangeness of our personality finds its true meaning in God. Far from Riley's notion of a Montaignian self utterly devoid of transcendence, the subjectivity of the *Essays* is constantly looking outwards. Another being needs to fathom it in order that it makes sense of its own mystery. Fusing this needful self with the earlier account of privacy, we can see that if Montaigne's identity is a secular one, then the privacy he enjoys is certainly not indolent. Rather, it is directed towards God, who is at the root of self-understanding.

Now Montaigne's interpretation of personal identity takes on a distinctly Augustinian tinge, since Augustine agrees with Montaigne that we are a mystery to ourselves without God. While it is difficult to account for this Augustinian tenet by using obvious sources like Confessions[102] the same theological conclusion can be inferred from the theory of Augustinian illuminationism, which Montaigne was certainly familiar with. Such a conclusion is also

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[100] Ibid., 654.

[101] Augustine, *City of God*, 663.

[102] Montaigne probably never read Augustine's declarations concerning of the mystery of the selfhood in *Confessions*, 10.8.15 and 10.17.26.

consistent with his strong model of epistemological grace. Such a framework sees the flowering of human action and intellect as directly related to the dispensation of God's wisdom on uncertain souls. In this context the self's radical instability becomes a further tool of discipleship. If we are a mystery to ourselves, we must seek our Creator–the one to whom nothing in creation is a mystery. In this 'theological turn', our self-sufficiency is dissolved as our radical reliance is understood. What then is the ultimate goal of these postures? In the final part of this chapter I consider this question through a close study of Montaigne's use of anthropological distance. By imaginatively representing the lives and customs of other cultures, I pinpoint a significant vehicle through which Montaigne articulates the final destination of his Christian-Sceptical project. Idealising the world of American natives as a return to Eden, Montaigne dramatises the philosophical life of tranquillity towards which he aspires.

6. Anthropology and the Retrieval of Eden

In the opening discussion of this article, I suggested that Montaigne's apparent aloofness from the social world encourages view of the Renaissance essayist as a proto-secularist of a very particular kind. By standing outside other communities and 'looking in' Montaigne not only validates difference, but acknowledges distinct communities. The 'other' is no-longer merely a 'heretical' aberration but rather something to be considered and studied in its own right. As I suggested, this anticipates in key respects the values of the modern-secular state, in particular the social toleration of difference. Yet, this is not the whole of Montaigne's 'modernist' reputation in this area. With his active process of seeking respectful interchange with *the other*, Montaigne has also been connected to the rise and practice of anthropological analysis. Placing Montaigne on the cusp of modernity, commentators frequently cite Montaigne's essay *Of Cannibals* as representing an anthropological '*locus classicus*' on the representation of

'otherness'[103] while others commended his cultural relativism.[104] In this vein, Ben-Ami Scharfstein finds in Montaigne's *Essays* echoes of the cultural anthropologist 'who comes to recognise the equal validity of all customs which are not inherently cruel or do not offend the simple truth'.[105] Some commentators have gone even further, suggesting that Montaigne is 'the father of anthropology'.[106] Such a depiction is at first glance persuasive, since it acknowledges Montaigne's acceptance of cultural diversity, but also the contextual nature of human judgement–an insight which has become increasingly central to contemporary debates within cultural anthropology. As Ida Magli remarks:

> The absolutely pragmatic nature of cultural anthropology– the trait most strongly striking anyone who approaches it– arises from its clinging to concrete behaviour, to the daily experience of a given human group, circumscribed in time and space, without drawing general conclusions, unless comparing this behaviour and this experience with those of groups, circumscribed in time and space as well. Comparatism became a scientific doctrine in which, nevertheless, no anthropologist forgot, even for a moment that what the scholar deduces always remains a mere growth of his capacity for understanding. It does not exist in reality; does not correspond to any one group observed as an object of inquiry.[107]

Extending Magli's constructivist analysis further, Ioan M. Lewis argues for the merits of 'experimental ethnography' which considers how cultural

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[103] Laurence R. Goldman, 'From Pot to Polemic: Uses and Abuses of Cannibalism', in *The Anthropology of Cannibalism* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1999), 1.

[104] For an anthropological appraisal of Montaigne's relativism, see Clifford Geertz, 'Anti Anti-Relativism', *American Anthropologist* 86, No. 2 (1984): 262-278.

[105] Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Philosophers: Their Lives and the Nature of their Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 163.

[106] Pat Duffy Hutcheon, *Leaving the Cave: Evolutionary Naturalism in Social-Scientific Though*t (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996), 34.

[107] Ida Magli, *Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1980: 2001), 3.

anthropological accounts of individuals and communities are produced by the concerns and preferences of the researcher[108]. In both cases, the study of *the other* necessitates an awareness of the partiality of the observer. Anticipating this contemporary development, Montaigne embraces a radical mode of subjectivity in his engagement with *otherness*. While Montaigne the essayist and social critic frequently looks beyond the insularity of his library, he is constantly reminded that his conclusions cannot be divorced from his own sense of embodiment. Unlike earlier philosophers who attempted to abstract their sensual wants and desires from the performance of thinking, Montaigne realises that our evaluations are not independent from our physical conditions. Illuminating this point in his essay *Of Repentance*, Montaigne notes: 'Others form man; I tell of him and portray a particular one, very ill-formed whom I should make very different from what he is if I had to fashion him over again. But now it is done'.[109] Thus, even when Montaigne talks about 'others' in traditional anthropological terms (i.e. as subjects to be studied) these explorations are part of his underlying phenomenological aim of describing himself.

If Montaigne is a proto-anthropologist as some interpreters imply, this is yet another reason for him to be rejected by Radical Orthodoxy. As we observed earlier, Milbank views the Social Sciences through the lens of a nihilistic secularity in which all social relations are transformed into artificial creations.[110] While pre-modern Christendom conceived of the social world as a shared gift of God, Milbank contends that social scientists (the anthropologists included) commit a serious heresy by treating the realm of culture as *homo faber*, the human making of human institutions'.[111] Such a world not merely confines

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[108] I. M. Lewis, *Social & Cultural Anthropology in Perspective*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1985: 2003), 368.

[109] Montaigne, *The Collected Works*, 740.

[110] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 26.

[111] Ibid., 27.

theology to the margin of knowledge, but also promotes a covert politics of liberalism which presumes 'only the isolated, self-conserving individual'.[112] Yet does Montaigne really fall into the scope of Milbank's critique of the secular? While a connection between Montaigne and anthropology is common there are two significant anomalies which incline us to question its validity of this association.

Firstly, such an understanding fails to account for the distinctive Sceptical epistemology, which underlies the *Essays*. While secular Anthropologists attempt to construct convincing accounts of *the other*, Montaigne has no such ambition. Renouncing any attempt at 'regimenting, arranging and fixing truth' Montaigne instead prefers free-flow of his own imagination as shaped through books and his own daily experiences.[113] This approach well suited him since he had little faith in his ability to recall facts correctly[114] and was even less certain that the object of his attention would remain fixed long enough for him to analyse it.[115] In accord with these distinctive starting premises, Montaigne's method of inquiry possesses an aesthetic rather than an analytic quality. Instead of immersing himself in another community, all Montaigne offers his reader are a series of images which are continually constructed, tested and overtaken by newer, and more beguiling impressions. Montaigne in good Pyrrhonian fashion does specify a systematic end-point to this conveyer belt of images; his aims consist in a form of pragmatic self-criticism, summed up by the arch-Montaignian question, 'Que sais-je?' ('What do I know?'). While such fluidity possesses a passing resemblance in experimental ethnography mentioned above it ignores a crucial warning given by Lewis–'There is a danger that the writer of the ethnographic text may

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[112] Ibid., 51.

[113] Montaigne, *The Collected Works*, 454.

[114] Ibid., 25.

[115] Ibid., 740.

become so self-indulgently intrusive that the culture he seeks to depict in all its rich authenticity recedes into the background and becomes merely a pale outline or setting for the anthropologist's exercise in introspection. Ethnography then becomes anthropological travellers' tales'.[116] Yet, while Lewis finds such introspection problematic, for Montaigne such an exercise is of central philosophical importance.

Secondly, Montaigne's engagement with other cultures is peculiarly uninterested in social facts. While the anthropologist attempts to document the customs, institutions and practices of cultural *others*, in his *Essays*, Montaigne prefers to use foreign landscapes as canvases for his own personal musings. This approach is epitomised by Montaigne's familiarity (or lack thereof) with the ingenious American cultures he purports to depict in *Of Cannibals*. While this text possesses all the prerequisite generosity towards difference characteristic of a Rawlsian secularist, Montaigne's comprehension of otherness is rather limited. Dependent upon the reports of others and a cursory encounter with an American native, Montaigne lacks the experience to effectively judge their lives and communities with much validity.[117] In the space left by such an absence of facts, Montaigne uses Classical authors to construct an Arcadian setting where its inhabitants are possessed of a nobility Montaigne finds lacking in his native France. He interpolates his discussion with quotes from the Latin poets Sextus Propertius and Virgil, and in this way he argues that in the Americas we find a simpler world, filled with the kind of natural harmony which obsessed the artists and poets of the Renaissance. Far from the corrupted and degenerate men and women of latter-day Christendom, this new terrain preserves specimens of *homo natura*–beings, lacking all guile and artificiality:

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[116] Lewis, *Social & Cultural Anthropology in Perspective*, 268.

[117] Ibid., 185.

> I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato did not know of them [these indigenous people]; for it seems to me that what we actually see in these nations surpasses not only all the pictures in which poets have idealised the golden age and all their inventions in imagining a happy state of man, but also the conceptions and the very desire of philosophy. They could not imagine a naturalness so pure and simple as we see by experience; nor could they believe that our society could be maintained with so little artifice and human solder. This is a nation I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupations, but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat.[118]

Taken too literally one is inclined to view such passages either as self-indulgent fabrications or as heretical sentiment. Fabrication, because Montaigne could not have known the truth of what he claimed; heretical because his ideal natives suggested (in contrast to Augustine) that the fall is either reversible or not total. Does it follow that Montaigne finally parts company with Augustine? Such conclusions are only tenable however if one assumes that Montaigne's aim is to persuade his reader that he is concerned with an authentic account of these foreign lives–yet as we have seen, this is not Montaigne's concern. Framed as they are by Western allusion, these depictions are not the product of a writer attempting to understand a people from the inside, but rather the work of an idealist, seeking some semblance of his model of perfection in a contemporary setting. Thus as Tsvetan Todorov has rightly argued, in representing cultural difference, Montaigne actually attempts to draw radical otherness into Occidental categories by appealing to the Greek and Roman past, thereby making this far off land and its peoples merely an extension of European cultural identity. As Todorov notes:

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[118] Montaigne, *The Collected Works*, 186.

> The knowledge of societies that can be found in [Montaigne] remains piecemeal and in fact is entirely subordinate to his didactic project, the criticism of our society. The identity of the other is never acknowledged even if it is idealised for the needs of the cause.[119]

In imagining something beautiful and unspoilt across the ocean, Montaigne discerns a position from which to condemn his own society, finding in New World natives the idyllic life he felt best reflected what he believed human nature really 'meant to be'. In this way Montaigne's act of examining other cultures at a distance is not even partly Rawlsian. Far from refusing to judge other societies and ways of life, Montaigne spends much of his *Essays* doing just that. The essay *Of Cannibals* sees Montaigne merely reversing the usual burden of judgement among his Christian contemporaries. He shifts his allegiance from European Humanism to a paradisiacal landscape which reveals to us what we have lost. What does Montaigne believe such an imaginative project can achieve?

If we read the idealisation of the American natives through his general commitment to the exploration of his own subjectivity, we begin to see the strategic function of such descriptions. By contemplating the New World inhabitants Montaigne constructs a narrative in favour of his own philosophical posture; that of Pyrrhonian Christianity. According to this reading, the otherness represented in the *Essays* is not an attempt to depict something external to the reader but rather to represent artistically and theologically Montaigne's own longings and aspirations. Key to making the connection is the theme of 'nakedness', central both to Montaigne's depiction of cultural strangeness as well as his understanding of Scepticism's aims. For Montaigne 'nakedness' is the chief symbol of a mind released from the confusion of opinions, one which embraces a life guided by Divine Grace. It is this vein that Montaigne describes the disciple of Pyrrho as being 'naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness, fit to

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[119] Tzvetan Todorov, *Morals Of History*, trans. Alyson Waters (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 40.

receive from above some outside power'.[120] The task of making oneself 'naked' is also a key stylistic objective of the *Essays* themselves:

> If I had written to seek the world's favour I should have bedecked myself better and should present myself in a studied posture. I want straining and artifice because it is myself I portray. My defects will here to be read to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you that I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked.[121]

Here Montaigne blends the figurative and the literal, connecting his act of self-disclosure with physical nakedness, a move which substantially blurs subjective and objective states. Just as Montaigne seeks the tranquillity of divine grace through his Pyrrhonian philosophy, those who are unclad show us the goal of the Sceptical project. In this imagery we observe Montaigne as an advocate not of a cultural anthropology but a theology of restoration. Underneath Montaigne's idealisation of the cultural other in the *Essays* is the intriguing theological proposal that the discovery of the New World offers a bloody and war-weary Christendom a canvas upon which to rediscover a renewed mode of discipleship. Yet, unlike the colonising John Locke a century later who saw American as a literal new beginning, Montaigne was content for this new frontier of America to remain largely a figment of the mind. In picturing a new Eden of naked simplicity across the ocean Montaigne has a spiritual anchor for his philosophy of Augustinian Scepticism. Yet, if primeval nakedness reveals the furthest point of the philosophical quest for Montaigne then it simultaneously reveals the methods needed to achieve this goal. By unburdening ourselves of the clothing of opinion and convention we can live more freely. Montaigne's noticeable distance from his society is not straightforward

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[120] Montaigne, *The Collected Works*, 455.

[121] Ibid., 2.

relativism, much less disinterest. Rather it is meant to designate a life which does not inordinately concern itself with faulty human opinions but is principally concerned with following the will of God. Far from upholding an anthropological gaze that negates transcendent meaning, Montaigne advocates the use of what is distant and exotic to illustrate a life under grace.

7. Conclusion: Redefining Secularity

The object of this article has been to offer an affirmative alternative to Radical Orthodox accounts of secularity by establishing Michel de Montaigne as a significant theological voice within the bounds of the Augustinian tradition. In particularly it has sought to uncover Montaigne's value as a significant intermediary towards a Christian vision of secularity by offering theological explanations for outwardly secular-modern attitudes and practices. Drawing into contention the rather polarising narrative of faith and secularity as provided by Milbank and Ward, I claim that Montaignian theology forwards the provocative claim that secular space in its relativism, privacy and fluid identities can facilitate patterns of discipleship. Montaigne illustrates that his secularity is not the negation of theological values but their elucidation in various contexts. While I think it highly unlikely that such an interpretation of Montaigne will gain much traction within anti-secular theological circles, I do suggest that Montaigne's religious thought has the potential to undermine habitual patterns of thought, moving discussion off more polarised terrains. In this respect, if in no other, Montaigne has the capacity to contest overly simplistic accounts of the relationship between religion and liberal secularity. Such a move has the potential not only to encourage a different range of responses to complex theological and historical questions, but perhaps also to provide an opportunity for dialogue. With its strong Anglo-Catholic texture, Radical Orthodoxy may find in Montaigne's dual resistance to Protestant innovation and Scholastic

consolidation an intriguing expression of faith with which to seriously engage. Yet in offering such alternative theological reading, Montaigne's theology possesses a defensive as well as dialogical function. Positing the existence of a Christian mode of secularity serves to clear the way for a more substantial re-reading of Christian responses to modernity, in particular to liberal politics with which secularity is invariably twinned. Since secularity is both a backdrop and feature of self-described liberal societies, to re-define or indeed theologise the secular is also to suggest, at least tentatively, the co-dependent claim that a Christian liberal politics can be inferred from the Montaignian-secular space. By articulating a theological grounding for pluralism, privacy and individual autonomy Montaigne helps us uncover an obscured form of liberal modernity with tolerant generosity at its centre. Rejecting trajectories of nihilism, atomism and normative atheism, Montaigne imagines secularity as a settlement which preserves the dignity of the individual's spiritual life while acknowledging cultural diversity. In these commitments Montaigne's Sceptical theology offers a striking challenge to public theologians who seek to depict secularity in monolithically negative terms. By fusing autonomy with discipleship, Montaigne offers a compelling bridge between Christendom and the character of our contemporary world.