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European Self-Reflection between Politics and Religion

The Crisis of Europe in the Twentieth Century

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Religion and Secular Modernity: A Historical Perspective on the Ratzinger–Habermas Encounter, 19 January 2004

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One of the central *crises of Europe* is the duality religious–secular. Throughout the modern age Europe has lived with this division which has in some respects been fruitful, but which has also caused a vast amount of conflict and suffering.[1] A series of narratives can be followed as regards the origins and development of modernity. One possibility is to regard modernity as the period when humanity has endeavoured to understand itself exclusively on the basis of its own forces. The principal tool to reach autonomy from humanity's *self-imposed nonage* (Kant) is a notion of self-founded and self-sufficient reason. Since religion implies the reference to an Other who precedes and defines humankind, it is entirely logical that modern thought has – at least in some of its traditions – avoided the integration of religion into its different manifestations.[2] Tacitly or explicitly, to be modern has been understood as entailing the apostasy of religion.[3] This prejudice against religion finds a conspicuous expression in the current of thought that has been termed *the hermeneutics of suspicion* (Ricoeur). In this modern tradition, religion is regarded as having a merely substitutive function. Either religion is the concealment of ideology (Marx), is the consequence of resentment and will to power (Nietzsche) or it is the manifestation of a psychic need for wish fulfilment (Freud). Consequently, given that religion is not regarded as a substantial reality in itself, it is understood as a phenomenon that will be left behind by historical progress. From this perspective, history has a specific *telos*, that of a religion-free society. As soon as the compensatory nature of religion becomes a commonly

shared insight, then – if the argument is continued – it will finally be unmasked as yet another anachronistic phenomenon similar to absolutism. A world united under secular reason is the politico-philosophical utopia of this tradition.

Allegedly, however, militant secularism is an illegitimate child of Rationalism if a more dialogic notion of Enlightenment and reason is adopted. The Kantian tradition is said to be exemplary of a notion of reason that is anti-dogmatic and regards any idea as open to discussion and critique. In Kant's philosophy, religion is not dismissed but it has a subordinate position with respect to a thoroughly anthropocentric reason that is given the task of criticizing religion and revealing its rational content in a moral law divested of all religious clothing. In this understanding, religion is a product of human reason and consequently – even if it is not understood as a falsehood, as in the tradition of the hermeneutics of suspicion – it is still considered a phenomenon that historically will be left behind when society becomes sufficiently enlightened. In the following, a brief sketch will be drawn that aims at illustrating the position of religion in both speculative and political modernity by taking, respectively, Kant's thought and Mannheim's sociology of knowledge as paradigmatic references.[4] Subsequently, the two lectures read at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria on 19 January 2004 will be presented and commented upon from this historical perspective, since this event may announce a new relationship between the secular and the sacred.[5]

Speculative Modernity

If the definition of modernity is accepted as the epoch that seeks to found itself on an exclusively human basis, then its roots can be related to – at least – Descartes and Spinoza.[6] Descartes can be regarded as the initiator of the philosophy of the subject because he posits subjectivity as the main principle of philosophy. Descartes' methodical doubt leads him to establish the thinking subject, the *cogito*, as the one thing about which cannot be doubted. In this way modern subject-centred reason makes its decisive entry on the philosophical scene. Descartes is not a deist – in keeping with the biblical tradition he considers that the analogy with God's infinite rationality is what guarantees human finite rationality to have a correct insight into the world. But his setting the subject as the centre of philosophy opens the way for eighteenth-century Deism and subsequent doubt.[7] If Descartes sets the subject as the philosophical fundament, Spinoza is a decisive thinker as regards the critique of religion. Spinoza's philosophy is strictly naturalistic, that is, it considers that nothing exists outside or above nature. In his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), a work that was the cause of great scandal in its time, he considers the relation of religion to both philosophy and politics. With respect to the relationship between religion and politics, Spinoza's chief aim is to advocate for freedom of thought and to separate the state from any single religious conviction.[8] With respect to the relationship between philosophy and religion, Spinoza finds that religion expresses human fears and emotions as imagined supernatural occurrences. However, one aspect on which religion and philosophy are not at odds is morality, since religion teaches, by means of the imagination, the people how to live correctly.[9] The only philosophical truths embedded in religion are the basic moral precepts. In this way, Spinoza's naturalism leads to regarding religion as a historical phenomenon that will only reach its truth when its ethical basis is detached from theological doctrines.[10]

In Kantian thought, both Cartesian subject-centred philosophy and Spinozian critique of religion are continued. Kant's epistemology is thoroughly subject-centred: anything I can know about the world necessarily carries the marks of my perspective. We can never know anything in-itself, because that would require that we observed the world from no point of view, from a divine, omniscient perspective. Even if he limited the knowledge of the world to our perspective upon it, Kant wished to refute a sceptical position like Hume's, which threatened to undermine the objectivity of the sciences. A central claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87) is that even if anything we know about the world is always dependent on our perspective upon it, it is possible to obtain universally and necessarily valid knowledge.[11] In this way, Kant represents a very firm belief in subject-centred reason as a means to obtain both empirical and theoretical knowledge. With respect to our knowledge of God, however, Kant is more sceptical because he considers that finite subjective reason is incapable of attaining knowledge about God. The link between divine and human reason is broken, and human reason is now regarded as self-founded and self-sufficient. In his reflections upon religion, Kant considers the moral law – what we ought to do – as the essence of religion.[12] According to Kantian philosophy, religion is an articulation of practical reason that should be divested of rituals, hierarchies and doctrines.[13] Philosophy must carry out this task by determining what can be accepted of the content of religious traditions. In the work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793), Kant develops his understanding of religion under four general headings (*Stücke*). The fourth heading especially contains strong critiques of institutionalized religion and expresses a utopian belief in a universal *ethical community* united by means of a full established moral order. This will, in turn, lead to a perpetual peace among the nations.[14]

This historical sketch attempts to exemplify the scepticism inherent to Kantian and modern thought as a whole in the sense that religion is expelled from the theoretical domain and relegated to live in the shadow of philosophy and culture as a kind of absent presence. At the same time that Kantian philosophy evidently is a link in a tradition possessing its own logical development, it could also be ventured that it was Kant's anti-authoritarian impulse that led him to this subtle subversion against what can be regarded as the first of all authorities, God. Isaiah Berlin regards this anti-authoritarianism as one of Kant's main concerns:

> In a short essay called 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"' Kant lays it down that enlightenment is simply the ability of men to determine their own lives, the liberation of themselves from the leading-strings of others, the fact that men become mature and determine what to do, whether it be evil or whether it be good, without leaning excessively upon authority, upon governesses of one kind or another, upon the State, upon their parents, upon their nurses, upon tradition, upon any kind of established values on which the weight of moral responsibility is then squarely laid. (Berlin, 1999, p. 70)

Berlin stresses how this aspect of Kant's philosophy became the most influential part of his thought for the following historical development: 'The only thing worth possessing is the unfettered will – this is the central proposition which Kant put on the map. And it was destined to have exceedingly revolutionary and subversive consequences, which he could hardly have anticipated' (ibid., p. 78).

It is noteworthy that when it comes to characterizing one of the most important rationalistic philosophers, Berlin does not focus on reason but on the 'unfettered will', that is, on the emancipatory intention embedded in Kant's philosophy. As part of that same emancipatory momentum, Kantian thought has led to a strong sceptical tendency in modern thought and culture. From Kant onwards, human reason is considered entirely autonomous, entailing that neither philosophical nor political arguments can be based on religious convictions. Doubt has literally become institutionalized in modernity. At the same time, religion is not simply erased, but a diffuse religious feeling substitutes the reference to institutionalized religion.

One consequence of this understanding of religion as a product of human reason is the Romantic elevation of art in general and poetry in particular to the status of religion. The creative imagination of the poet becomes identified as the origin of all myths and religious thought, and consequently the poetic word becomes the word of foundation, a primordial access to the world. As the biblical creator God, the artist's mind has the power to forge an entirely self-sufficient world, and even to create epiphanies, that is, manifestations of the (poet's) divine (mind).[15] Even if the Romantic religious mood becomes less explicit in subsequent aesthetic periods, art remains understood as a source of ontological and quasi-religious meaning. It is remarkable that an evolution begins in a manner very similar to that of the understanding of religion during the previous centuries, but now with respect to the aesthetic product. A socio-intellectual rivalry appears between, on the one hand, art and its alleged religious, elevated cognitive content, and, on the other, scientific-technical rationality. This can be observed in the debate described by Lepenies (1988) between, on one side, writers and literary critics and, on the other, sociologists about which discourse, literature or sociology, should have the privilege of being the life-orientating knowledge. When the social sciences emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they aspired to achieve the role of a rationally founded rule of life as a substitution of the religious worldview. This ambition can be observed with Auguste Comte, whose work *Système de politique positive, ou traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité* (1851) merely by its title expresses the aim of founding a new secular religion (Lepenies, 1988, pp. 19–46). In nineteenth-century England appeared the dispute between Matthew Arnold, who claimed literary criticism to be the best guide for life, and Thomas H. Huxley, who argued that sociology was the best tool to understand the individual and society (ibid., pp. 158–74). The price at stake was which discipline in the education system should carry the values and ideals for life that religion once had endowed.[16] A similar debate would take place in the twentieth century between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow (ibid., pp. 155–8). In the Weimar Republic the same dispute appeared between the famous Romanist E.R. Curtius and Karl Mannheim as regards the rivalry between literary studies or sociology as the bearer of values and self-concept (ibid., pp. 313–33). As Lepenies notes, these debates are manifestations of 'the contention between the Ancien Régime and the modern age, Restoration and Revolution, Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment' (ibid., p. 12). Remarkably enough, this cultural war takes place between entirely secular forces, given that literature has replaced religion in this rivalry with sociology, which in turn (mostly) plays the part of scientific rationality.[17] It seems as if a sort of *dialectics of Enlightenment* – although not in the same sense as in Adorno and Horkheimer – sets in if religion is repressed. When religion is expelled from society or thought, then another instance will try to occupy its place by offering the existential and moral meaning that religious tradition provided. However, as soon as this position is occupied, scientific reason will target this new lodger as an enemy and consequently try to eliminate it. Secular reason seems unable, by its own forces, to make superfluous the meaning content provided by religion.[18]

Another version of this dialectics can be observed in the philosophical tradition of the critique of rationality that sets off with Romanticism and Nietzsche and which takes a very strong position in twentieth-century thought through philosophers such as Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno, Bataille, Foucault and Derrida. This is the speculative-historical starting point in Jürgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985). In this work Habermas aims at discerning two lines of philosophical modernity, one rationalistic and another one of the critique of reason. The latter is a heterogeneous tradition that nonetheless has in common the intention of replacing reason with another principle that then is supposed to be the true primordial philosophical notion, be it the will to power, eroticism, or writing (*écriture*). Subject-centred reason is unmasked as an instrument of domination that alienates the self in relation to itself, to others and to the world.[19] The tradition of the critique of reason rejects the elevation of reason to that of an absolute measure[20] and claims – in this way reinstating at least some features of religion – other principles as the way to *true* emancipation, realization or at least insight into the nature of the human being. A sort of negative of religion appears with this tradition. Nietzsche supplants Christian redemption with the superman's acceptance of the eternal return, Derridean *écriture* is an inversion of the Judaeo-Christian ontic *logos*, and Adorno and Horkheimer aim at revealing, in order to achieve insight into the true human condition, the eternal return of the myths in spite of the domination of inner and outer nature by reason. The intention underlying *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is to analyse and refute this tradition. These philosophers are all representatives of a critique of rationality that eventually leads to scepticism. The cause for this is, according to Habermas, that a notion of reason based only on the subject – as has been the case from Descartes through Kant to Husserl – leads to a loss of faith in reason. As a substitution of subject-centred reason, Habermas has proposed a notion of *communicative reason*.[21]

It is worth noting that in the narrative that has been displayed in the above, the central notion is that of reason. The relationship between reason and religion has been conflictual in modernity because in the modern philosophical tradition, religion is not given an autonomous position but is only regarded as a derivation of reason. It is completely logical that a notion of reason regarding religion as a primitive manifestation of itself, or perhaps even as its depravation, will tend to integrate it by eliminating, 'rationalizing' it. In twentieth-century philosophy the notion of a self-sufficient and self-founded reason that is able to provide objective insight into the world has been abandoned. In its place, at least three different concepts of reason have emerged.[22] One is a notion of reason in the Nietzschean tradition that eventually leads to a thoroughly sceptical attitude with respect to its use as a means to knowledge. A second one appears in the tradition stemming from Hegel and Marx that regards reason as a socio-historical phenomenon. This position is not clearly relativistic, but still it applies a perspectival and relational understanding of reason that considers that at least social phenomena appear differently at different historical moments and from different social positions. Finally emerges an understanding represented by Habermas and a series of philosophers from the English-speaking tradition who regard reason as embodied in everyday practical communication and thus possessing a vital connection to the socially given lifeworld. This latter understanding of reason leaves room (even if not all its adherents are willing to take this step) for religion as a world-opening and meaning-giving domain rooted in the lifeworld that, from its own presuppositions, may nourish the philosophical discourse. This is the theoretical background for Habermas's lecture on January 2004 that will be commented upon below.

Political Modernity

Simultaneously with the development of the above-sketched philosophical questions, the political role of religion has also changed during the modern age. The Middle Ages saw the appropriation of a very considerable temporal power by the papacy, something which was a source of conflict with the secular powers. At the same time, it is also a fact that long before the emergence of the territorial states, at least since pope Gelasius I (492–96), the religious and secular are separated as two distinct spheres. Throughout the Middle Ages the spiritual and the secular were intertwined in many ways but they never coalesced into a monist caesaropapism. During the Renaissance the emerging modern territorial states became confessional, and this religious identity would serve as a source of political loyalty (as has been argued by Heinz Schilling, among others).[23] State confessionalism became the rule after the Thirty Years' War, as expressed by the maxim *cujus regio ejus religio*, which implied the confessional character of the state and the subjects' compulsory adherence to the faith of the sovereign.[24] Confessionalism entailed close collaboration between absolute monarchs and church, to the extent that the monarchs achieved direct power – also in Catholic kingdoms – over church-internal affairs. In a parallel way, the church would serve the state as regards the religious identification factor.[25] When seventeenth-century Rationalism developed into eighteenth-century Enlightenment, political ideas appeared that in the long run would become the basis of the constitutional state: tolerance, freedom of speech, equality, democracy, individual rights and so forth. As part of this same development, from the eighteenth century onwards the tension between the secular and religious world understandings became explicitly antagonistic. Scientific discoveries and technical progress seemed to corroborate the claim that human reason is the sufficient means to dominate nature and organize society. The culmination of this historical development towards an entirely secular state appeared in a paradoxical way with the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. Emilio Gentile has, among others, analysed the way in which many twentieth-century states developed a *religion of politics* ranging from civil religions coexisting with traditional faiths to totalitarian religions that claimed exclusivity and whose deities became identified with nation, state, class, party or race. This neopaganism had its most conspicuous expression in the Nazi, Fascist and Communist regimes before and after the Second World War. In the years after the Cold War the appropriation of the religious feeling by the state seems to be vanishing,[26] but, parallel to this evolution, the social cohesion upon which the modern European states were built is in danger of fragmenting, as Habermas pointed out in the lecture he gave at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria in 2004. However, before we turn to the dialogue between Ratzinger and Habermas, a short reference must be made to Karl Mannheim's notion of political utopias.

Mannheim (1893–1947) is remembered as one of the founders of the sociology of knowledge. His work, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), may be useful in the present context, since it establishes a relationship between thought and socio-political conflicts.[27] Mannheim considers that in the modern age the intellectual and the political are deeply interrelated. Modernity carries scepticism and social restiveness with it as a consequence of the breakdown of the medieval understanding of the world guaranteed by the church:

> At the beginning of modern times, the Protestant movement set up in the place of revealed salvation, guaranteed by the objective institution of the Church, the notion of the subjective certainty of salvation. It was assumed in the light of this doctrine that each person should decide according to his own subjective conscience whether his conduct was pleasing to God and conducive to salvation. Thus Protestantism rendered subjective a criterion which had hitherto been objective, thereby paralleling what modern epistemology was doing when it retreated from an objectively guaranteed order of existence to the individual subject. (Mannheim, 1976, p. 31)

In this way a subjectivism is established in the social world that will develop towards a sceptical attitude. According to Mannheim, scepticism pervades all social groups because of the political development of modernity:

> Nor was it conducive to the public belief in an objective world-order when most political states in the period of enlightened absolutism attempted to weaken the Church by means which they had taken over from the Church itself, namely, through attempting to replace an objective interpretation of the world guaranteed by the Church, by one guaranteed by the State. In doing this, it advanced the cause of the Enlightenment which at the same time was one of the weapons of the rising bourgeoisie. (Mannheim, 1976, p. 31)

One specifically modern social phenomenon can be found in the political utopian movements. Mannheim regards the utopian movements as a feature of modern times, caused by the dislocation of the medieval social and intellectual organization:

> As long as the clerically and feudally organized medieval order was able to locate its paradise outside of society, in some other-worldly sphere which transcended history and dulled its revolutionary edge, the idea of paradise was still an integral part of medieval society. Not until certain social groups embodied these wish-images into their actual conduct, and tried to realize them, did these ideologies become utopian. (Mannheim, 1976, p. 174)

Mannheim finds four forms of utopian mentality in modernity: Chiliasm, Liberal-Humanitarian (Enlightenment) utopia, Conservative thinking and the Socialist-Communist idea. It is a feature of utopian thinking that its aim is to destabilize the given social structures:

> The concept of *utopian* thinking reflects the opposite discovery [to that of *ideology*, related to the dominating social groups] of the political struggle, namely that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. (Mannheim, 1976, p. 36; emphasis in original)

With the modern age arises a political struggle that is articulated both in political and in speculative terms. In Mannheim's description, utopian thinking is above all an incentive for action in order to pursue the interests of the group. The relevance of Mannheim's ideas for the following presentation of the Ratzinger–Habermas encounter is to be found in the intertwining of thought and political struggle. As will be seen below, the dialogue between two conspicuous representatives of the Catholic Church and the Enlightenment tradition respectively has an array of political implications that may or may not be characterized as utopian in Mannheim's sense, that is, as a thinking that has as its main objective the conquest of political dominance.

Jürgen Habermas's Lecture at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria

Habermas opened the encounter with a paper entitled 'Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?' He started out by addressing a central question as regards the justification of the constitutional state, that is, whether the liberal-democratic state is based upon normative presuppositions that precede it. Are there culturally and traditionally given ideals that in fact nourish it, or can it rest exclusively upon rational principles? This suspicion is rejected, arguing that the democratic state is justified on the basis of the constitution that the associated citizens endow themselves, and not on the domestication of a pre-existing state power. In this way Habermas distances himself from a tradition of public right – 'from Laband and Jellinek to Carl Schmitt' (Habermas, 2006, p. 26) – that operates with such a prejuridical substance.[28] On the contrary, Habermas argues, there is no aspect of the political power that is not completely pervaded by constitutional right: 'Before the age of constitutions, the *prince* was completely sovereign; but the transition has left no gap that an equally sovereign *people* would need to fill, in the form of the ethos of a more or less homogeneous people' (ibid., p. 27; emphasis in original).

In this way, Habermas rejects the notion of *sovereignty* in the sense of a primordial authority that once resided with the absolute monarch and which later, with the advent of nationalism, was transferred to the people who then became the locus of undivided authority. Habermas considers that reason alone is the sufficient ground upon which the constitutional state can be built, and in this way he apparently follows the Kantian paradigm that regards the individual and society as self-founded foundations (later it will be seen in what respect he nonetheless diverges from this tradition). Habermas, then, adheres to the idea of the endowment by reason of a constitutional order, that is, he considers that the authority upon which this order rests is purely rational: 'The proceduralist understanding of the constitutional state, inspired by Kant, insists (against the Hegelian view of the law) that the basic principles of the constitution have an autonomous justification and that all the citizens can rationally accept the claim this justification makes' (Habermas, 2006, p. 30). At the same time, however, the working of the constitutional state is dependent on its citizens as not just receivers but as also the democratic co-authors of the law. Citizenship is part of a civil society that is pervaded by pre-political sources that connect the workings of the state with the lifeworld of society. And the democratic state depends on this link if it is not to degenerate into technocracy. Even if society is much less homogeneous today than just one generation ago, and 'the republican attitudes have become detached to a great extent from this pre-political anchoring' (ibid., p. 33), this does not preclude consensus with respect to the constitutional order. Habermas mentions the self-critical 'politics of memory' (ibid., p. 33) of the Holocaust and other massacres as an example of such a *constitutional patriotism*.[29]

At the present historical moment Habermas admits the existence of a danger for the constitutional state, namely that if 'the modernization of society as a whole went off the rails, it could well slacken the democratic bond and exhaust the kind of solidarity that the democratic state needs but cannot impose by law' (2006, p. 35). In such a process, every individual would only seek his or her own interest and use the subjective rights as arms against the others. He sees evidence of such a process in the uncontrollable dynamics of the global economy and in the regulation of private domains by market mechanisms. A privatization of citizenship is taking place that is enhanced by the growing political indifference of important segments of civil society. Economic dynamics and administrative power are progressively inhibiting social solidarity and thereby also are the collectively shared values and codes being eroded.[30] Habermas considers, in sum, that the bond between politics and the social lifeworld is in danger of breaking down. Two consequences arise from this divide. In the first place appears the loss of citizen solidarity with the state and the consequent fragmentation and privatization of society. Second, the degeneration of democracy to technocracy can occur given that the break of the link between the state and the lifeworld of the citizens will only fuel the systemic development of state institutions and private companies.[31] Furthermore, if this happens at the national level, the decision-making processes at the supranational level are depoliticized to an even higher degree, entailing growing disappointment as regards international law. This latter global level will be a central theme in Ratzinger's lecture, as will be seen below.

Habermas thus acknowledges that even if the purely rational foundation of the constitutional state is flawless at a theoretical level, at a practical level it may be questioned whether modernity will be able to stabilize itself on the basis of secular reason alone. The fact that he calls this problem 'an open, empirical question' (2006, p. 38) entails at the very least uncertainty as to whether an autonomous secular reason is the sufficient means to sustain the democratic system. This doubt occasions an excursus in which Habermas argues that – as a consequence of the development of philosophy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – religion must be taken seriously as a cognitive discourse. He considers that a philosophy that is aware of its fallibility and of its fragile position within the differentiated structures of modern society will insist on the generic distinction (which is not meant in a pejorative sense) between the secular discourse that claims to be accessible to all and the religious discourse that is dependent upon the truths of revelation. Such a philosophy

> *differs from Kant and Hegel* in that this act of drawing the grammatical borders does not make a philosophical claim to determine what (apart from that knowledge of the world which is institutionalized in human society) may be true or false in the content of religious traditions. The respect that accompanies this refusal to utter a cognitive

> judgement is based on the respect due to persons and ways of life that obviously derive their integrity and authenticity from religious convictions. But more is involved here than respect: philosophy has good reasons to be willing to learn from religious traditions. (ibid., pp. 41–2; emphasis added)

Given that an axiom of secular modernity has been that religion would disappear in the same way as absolutism and feudalism, the position taken by Habermas is remarkable, and the more so because it is not only grounded in the fact that religion actually subsists in secular surroundings, but also in the philosophical idea that faith and reason can learn from each other. According to Habermas, the secularization of society should now be understood not as the disappearance of religion but as a process of mutual learning between the secular and the sacred.[32] A vast structure of normative concepts in Western thought has its origin in the Jewish-Christian tradition. As an example he mentions the idea that the understanding of the human being as created in the image of God has a secular translation in the notion of the absolute dignity of any person. In this way, he argues, the biblical concepts are opened beyond the limits of the religious community and reach out to other religions and to non-believers. This is an illustration of Habermas's idea that rationality has its origin in the lifeworld, which obviously includes the religious tradition. In this way, he clearly distances himself from the idea of a self-founded reason:

> when reason reflects on its deepest foundations, it discovers that it owes its origin to something else. And it must acknowledge the fateful power of this origin, for otherwise it will lose its orientation to reason in the blind alley of a hybrid grasp of control over its own self. (2006, p. 40)

Habermas considers that, throughout its history, Western philosophy has assimilated a long series of Christian ideas, and that this process is an unfinished project.[33]

The last part of Habermas's lecture extracts the consequences of his reflections about philosophy and religion as regards the conditions of the public debate, in particular the relationship between religious and non-religious citizens. In this part of his text, he distances himself from a very common rule of modern democracies, namely that religious arguments have no validity in politics unless they are translated to purely secular viewpoints. This idea entails, as Habermas argues, that the role as member of a religious community becomes dissociated from that as citizen, and since the liberal state needs the social integration of the citizens beyond a mere *modus vivendi*, he considers it necessary to avoid that the state unilaterally – as is in fact mostly the case – expects an adaptation of religion to secular laws.[34] This means that the non-religious citizen has to make an effort to understand and translate the content of a religiously embedded argument in accordance with his or her vital experiences:

> The neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen. This is incompatible with the political universalization of a secularist world view. When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens their right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates. Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole. (2006, pp. 51–2)

As an example of how the state legislation tends to favour the secular worldview, Habermas mentions the 'more or less liberal regulations about abortion' (ibid., p. 49) that have been adopted in most Western countries.[35] However, Habermas argues that the secular position also 'pays its prize' (ibid., p. 50) for living in a neutral state as regards worldviews, which is to recognize the potential validity of the religious arguments. The coexistence of believers and non-believers requires, if this coexistence is not to be taken as a plain irrational fact, a process of communication and mutual acknowledgement. Habermas's ideal of public debate as an inclusive, non-coercive rational communication is evidently represented here.

Joseph Ratzinger's Lecture at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria

Ratzinger's lecture, 'That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State', was not, as could perhaps have been expected, a theological approach to the relationship between religion and state or between faith and reason. It is remarkable that from the outset Ratzinger's lecture is not based on theological grounds but is an interpretation of the contemporary relationship between power and law from a perspective of intercultural dialogue. Ratzinger started out by identifying three factors that he finds representative of the present historical situation. The first one is globalization, that is, the emergence of a world society in which the political, economic and cultural powers are closely interwoven and interdependent. The second factor is 'the development of human possibilities, of the power to make and to destroy, that poses the question of legal and ethical controls on power in a way that goes far beyond anything to which we have yet been accustomed' (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 55). Ratzinger furthermore notes – and this is the third factor he identifies – that 'ethical certainties that had hitherto provided solid foundations have largely disintegrated' (ibid., p. 56). For this reason, since all cultures and nations share in these conditions, it urges to find a universally acceptable ethical basis upon which an intercultural and supra-national order can be built. This situation has to a large extent arisen because only scientific knowledge seems to be valid in the contemporary world. At the same time it is also a fact that science cannot answer the ontological and existential questions upon which an ethics can be built. It is the task of philosophy to carry out a critical analysis of the inferences that may be drawn from scientific results, 'thus keeping open our awareness of the totality and of the broader dimensions of the reality of human existence – for science can never show us more than partial aspects of this existence' (ibid., p. 57). In this way Ratzinger touches the question of reason since it is clear that he considers that scientific rationality does not exhaust human reason in its totality.[36] An integrating intellectual approach is proposed similar to Habermas's notion of a polyvalent reason that expresses itself differently in different discourses.

Addressing the question of the relationship between power and law, Ratzinger considers that it is the task of politics to regulate the former by means of the latter. He observes how the participation of the citizens in the formation of the law and in the just administration of power is the essential reason in favour of democracy as a form of government. In this way all citizens participate in the establishment of right, implying that the law belongs not only to the powerful but to everybody. Ratzinger thus explicitly distances himself from any nostalgia for absolutism and from any antidemocratic attitudes.[37] At the same time, he argues, history has shown how a simple majority rule can also be blind and unjust. For this reason it is necessary that some essential rights are affirmed, that a certain ethical basis of right is defined that cannot be overruled by the majority. Today such a series of normative principles can be found in the idea of human rights, that is, values that are inherent to human nature and thus invulnerable for all who participate in that nature. However, Ratzinger observes that not all cultures acknowledge this idea of universal human rights since it can be regarded as a Western invention that must be contested.[38]

The next step is to consider the challenges that follow from the new forms of power that have emerged during the last 50 years: nuclear arms and the more recent threats from fundamentalist terrorist groups who at some moment may gain access to weapons of mass destruction. As if adhering to the Enlightenment tradition, he asks whether religion is an archaic and dangerous power that leads to fanaticism and destruction: 'Ought we to consider the gradual abolishment of religion, the overcoming of religion, to be necessary progress on the part of mankind, so that it may find the path to freedom and to universal tolerance?' (Ratzinger, 2006, pp. 64–5). As a response to this negative attitude to religion, Ratzinger refers to another form of power that has appeared in recent times, namely advances in the bio-chemical sciences which allow to produce and manipulate human beings. With this power, the temptation arises to consider the human being a mere product and, consequently, to create and destroy individuals as one pleases. This is the concrete counterpart of the tradition of infinite emancipation that regards the subject as self-creating. Since these powers have been produced by human reason, it is possible, in turn, to question whether reason alone is sufficient to protect humanity from itself: 'we must now *doubt the reliability of reason*' (ibid., p. 65; emphasis in original). It is important to underscore that the idea of reason which Ratzinger puts into question is that of scientific rationality when considered as the only valid one.[39] This becomes clear when he argues that the atomic bomb is a creation of reason, just as the production and selection of human beings is a possibility created by scientific rationality. On this basis, he rhetorically answers the previous question with another question: 'Or should perhaps religion and reason restrict each other and remind each other where their limits are, thereby encouraging a positive path?' (ibid., p. 66). In this way, Ratzinger agrees with Habermas about the necessity of a dialogue between religion and secular thought and institutions. In addition, religion can be a central factor in the process towards a consensually accepted global ethics, as is argued later in the lecture.

After this discussion of the current situation as regards the relationship between law and power, regard is taken for other historical periods in order to find situations possibly comparable to ours. He notes that in ancient Greece a period of enlightenment also took place in which a religiously sanctioned law lost its obviousness. The need to find a basis for natural law arose because 'in the face of a positive law that can in reality be injustice, there must be a law that derives from nature, from the very being of man himself. And this law must be discovered, so that it can act as a corrective to the positive law' (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 67).[40] At the beginning of the modern age, he finds a central event in the discovery and conquest of America. As a consequence of the encounter with the Amer-Indian world, a series of Spanish theologians began to reflect upon a notion of right that would precede the Christian concretion of the term and that should regulate the just cohabitation of all peoples. The central figure is here the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria, who developed the already existing notion of *ius gentium*.[41] A second decisive moment appeared at the division of Western Christianity, since that conflict again caused the need to find a minimal legal basis that was not supported by faith but by human nature: 'Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, and others developed the idea of the natural law, which transcends the confessional borders of faith by establishing reason as the instrument whereby law can be posited in common' (ibid., p. 69). Ratzinger remarks that the Catholic Church makes use of the notion of natural right in the dialogue with secular society and with other religions, but this idea is – unfortunately, he asserts – no longer a shared notion because of the concept of nature prevailing after the theory of evolution. A thoroughly naturalistic worldview apparently cannot attribute rationality to nature's order – nature as such cannot be regarded as rational even if it contains rational behaviour.[42] Today, the only element left after the notion of natural right is the idea of human rights, which – as has already been mentioned – is not universally accepted. For this reason, Ratzinger proposes that the doctrine of human rights should be approached from an intercultural position, in dialogue with other religious and cultural traditions. Furthermore, he proposes that the idea of human rights should be complemented – also in a constructive exchange with other religions and cultural traditions – by a notion of human duties and limits:

> And this dialogue would necessarily be intercultural today, both in its structure and in its interpretation. For Christians, this dialogue would speak of the creation and the Creator. In the Indian world, this would correspond to the concept of 'dharma', the inner law that regulates all Being; in the Chinese tradition, it would correspond to the idea of the structures ordained by heaven. (2006, p. 72)

Here Ratzinger evidently argues in opposition to the Enlightenment tradition and its emphasis on emancipation. Freedom is a central notion for the tradition of the Enlightenment, and since this tradition understands the human being as a non-founded foundation – the subject founds itself – then the individual (just as society) can create or construct itself at will. This 'constructivist' attitude as regards humanity can be traced back to Kant, given that the idea of freedom is the primordial principle in his moral philosophy and given that his *categorical imperative* in the end rests on human judgment only (Löwith, 1964, p. 25). In fact many thinkers of the twentieth century have elaborated on the idea of humanity's liberation from itself (as in the celebrated idea of the 'Death of Man' in French thought of the 1960s and 1970s). If the *naturalist* current of modern thought entails the loss of the notion of natural right, the *emancipatory* tendency leads to the dissolution of the notion of humanity. If a notion of human being is to be maintained, then it seems that it must be founded on something other than humanity itself, something which precedes and defines it (thus giving it limits).[43]

Considering the global status of the current worldviews, Ratzinger observes that all the different cultural traditions are in contact and furthermore suffer internal tensions. This is clear as regards the two main Western discourses today, the culture of the Christian faith and that of secular reason, but the same condition can be observed in other cultures as well. Both Western traditions are global cultural factors that regard themselves as universal – but they also must admit that neither of them is universally accepted. It is a fact that secular rationality, even if it may seem unquestionable to our Western habits, also does not appeal to all cultures. Ratzinger refers to an anecdote told by Habermas in his lecture, in which a colleague had asked Habermas whether what needed correction was not Western secularization as a cultural path. By referring to this anecdote, Ratzinger questions if a notion of reason that excludes religion actually can be applied to other cultures. He agrees with Habermas in the idea that the Western concept of reason cannot proof itself since it is rooted in a specific cultural horizon. This also entails that 'the rational or ethical or religious formula that would embrace the whole world and unite all persons does not exist; or, at least, it is unattainable at the present moment' (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 76).

The lecture concludes with two main points. In the first place, both religion and reason are in need of the other's correction and regulation since both may become pathological: 'I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another' (ibid., p. 78). The purification process referred to here is that of avoiding religious fundamentalism as well as the absolutization of secular reason. The second conclusion is to project this idea to the intercultural perspective that is in fact the leading string of the lecture. In order to avoid a Western arrogance with respect to other cultures, it is necessary that any intercultural attempt should be truly dialogical.[44] If the effort to reach a universal ground is to be taken as a sincere intention, then it is essential to listen to and engage with a relation of equals with other cultures and traditions.

> It is important that both great components of the Western culture [Christianity and secular thought] learn to *listen* and to accept a genuine relatedness to these other cultures, too. It is important to include the other cultures in the attempt at a polyphonic relatedness, in which they themselves are receptive to the essential complementarity of reason and faith, so that a universal process of purifications (in the plural!) can proceed. Ultimately, the essential values and norms that are in some way known or sensed by all men will take on a new brightness in such a process, so that that which holds the world together can once again become an effective force in mankind. (Ratzinger, 2006, pp. 79–80; emphasis in original)

Theologically, Ratzinger is here alluding to the idea of a universal human nature due to the creation of humanity in the image of God. This participation in divine reason entails that all religions and cultures are – naturally, so to speak – grounded in God. This is why Ratzinger can argue that 'the essential values and norms [. . .] are in some way known or sensed by all men', because all cultures participate in this universal rationality of divine origin.[45] It is furthermore plausible to interpret the expression 'that which holds the world together' – which also appears in the title of Ratzinger's lecture – as this common rational basis. That is, through an acknowledgement of other religious traditions and cultural horizons it may be possible to arrive at a stronger notion of reason than the one the Western philosophical tradition has reached at the present moment.

Towards a New Complementarity?

As if wanting to lead by example with this event, Ratzinger and Habermas showed a dialogic attitude: personally, by the mere fact of wanting to meet and contrast their positions, but also discursively. In Habermas's thought reason is not autonomous and self-sufficient, it is precisely a *communicative rationality*. Furthermore, in order to achieve a truly human society (in order to avoid the colonization of the lifeworld by the system's level) it is in the interest of the political world to acknowledge and be receptive with respect to religious traditions. Ratzinger – in keeping with the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other faiths and the secular world – showed his openness towards both secular thought and other religions. In both cases, this attitude shows the leaving behind of a totalizing ambition, of a discursive imperialism that aims at achieving hegemony of thought. Both Christianity as well as secular rationalism have aspired to achieve dominance without wanting to engage in dialogue with other cultures or discourses. With respect to Christianity as a religion, this militant attitude is not at its root. A central aspect of the Gospels is the personal encounter. Everyone who meets Jesus is challenged by him – but nobody is forced to follow him.[46] Christianity is a religion of a personal summons, but one which leaves freedom for the individual to follow it. Nobody must be forced to become a Christian. The same was vigorously argued at the time of the Spanish conquest of America by such churchmen as Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de las Casas or Francisco de Vitoria, to name only three. At that moment, however, the European monarchies had become confessional and it was in the interest of the state that all its subjects were of the same faith. A strong historical momentum carried the violent political and religious colonization, thereby showing Europe's double face: justifying the blending of colonization and evangelization but also questioning and criticizing it. Secularism, on its side, has also been marked (and is to a great extent still marked) by a similar will to power. Most of the totalitarian states that appeared in the twentieth century – and which were unequivocally *modern* by their having their origin in secular thought – were anti-religious. Today a considerable number of the Western states should probably be regarded as confessional secularist states that try to marginalize any religious testimony. In this perspective, the dialogical attitude that both thinkers show is purified of the utopian will that aims to eliminate its opponent.[47]

It is also important to note that neither of the two thinkers advocates for a fusion of religion and state. As has been exposed in the above, Habermas considers religion as part of the lifeworld and in contrast to the system's level of state institutions and market dynamics. If religion was integrated into the state apparatus it would lose precisely the corrective force it possesses due to its belonging to the lifeworld.[48] In a parallel way, the Second Vatican Council underscored the necessary separation of church and state.[49] In this sense, the encounter between Ratzinger and Habermas could be regarded as a historical pivot, perhaps announcing a new relationship in which religion and state complement each other. If such a mutual recognition could set in, then the duality religious–secular, this *crisis* which is a feature of European culture, may become a productive and positive complementarity rather than a destructive polarity.

Post Scriptum: A Fable

In the short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940), the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) narrates how the earth gradually becomes transformed by an encyclopaedia that describes a fictive planet called Tlön. Objects mentioned in the encyclopaedia enter reality as part of a plan that aims at making the real world identical with Tlön. The narrator discovers an enormous conspiracy, 'a secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, algebraists, moralists, painters, geometers . . . directed by an obscure man of genius' (Borges, 1964, pp. 7–8). This lodge was founded in the seventeenth century with the intention of creating a country and has lived on from generation to generation. In 1824 Ezra Buckley, an American millionaire and freethinker, changed its plan. He would finance the creation of a planet on the condition that '"The work will make no pact with the impostor Jesus Christ." Buckley did not believe in God, but he wanted to demonstrate to this non-existent God that mortal man was capable of conceiving a world' (ibid., p. 15). The main part of the story is told in 1940, narrating the mysterious appearing of the encyclopaedia and objects from Tlön. The postscript, dated 1947, describes how the world has begun its transformation into Tlön:

> The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world. Enchanted by its rigor, humanity forgets over and again that it is a rigor of chess masters, not of angels. Already the schools have been invaded by the (conjectural) 'primitive language' of Tlön; already the teaching of its harmonious history (filled with moving episodes) has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood; already a fictitious past occupies in our memories the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty – not even that it is false. Numismatology, pharmacology and archaeology have been reformed. I understand that biology and mathematics also await their avatars [. . .] A scattered dynasty of solitary men has changed the face of the world. Their task continues. (Borges, 1964, p. 18)

It is possible to arrive at an interpretation of this apparently enigmatic story through the historical moments it mentions. The lodge is created in the seventeenth century, whereby it could be linked to the emergence of a philosophical paradigm (the arrival of Cartesianism and Spinozism) that will aim at supplanting the Christian worldview. Ezra Buckley enters the project in the nineteenth century, that is, after the French revolution and coinciding with the confrontation of secular political ideologies with religion. The first volume of the encyclopaedia of Tlön appears in 1914, and objects from Tlön begin to invade the earth around 1940, that is, simultaneously with the First and Second World Wars respectively. This period, 1914–40, can historically be understood as the end of the Enlightenment utopian faith in reason and progress. As a substitute, the world is given a fictional planet. From this perspective, then, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' is a fable of the utopia of secular reason and its development in the Western world. In other words, this short story can be read as a mocking commentary on the project of setting subjective secular reason as the only basis for thought and social organization.[50] Since its beginning with Cartesian philosophy of the subject and Spinozian naturalism, modern thought has been seeking to establish itself on a notion of autonomous reason. However, this limitation of subjective reason to itself seems to open the way for irrational comprehensions such as radical scepticism, philosophical idealism or pseudo-religiosity. This also appears to be the insight transmitted by this short story, which can be regarded as a tale of how modernity aims to create a world out of subjective powers alone. It is remarkable that the narrator compares to Communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes the social engineering at work to implement Tlön on earth: 'Ten years ago [in 1937] any symmetry with a semblance of order – dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism – was sufficient to entrance the minds of men. How could one do other than submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet?' (Borges, 1964, p. 17). Borges in this way displays the intuition that has been exposed in the above, that a dialectics of Enlightenment will set in as soon as subjective reason or any other instance is posited as a substitute for religion.

Notes

1. As will be mentioned below, the duality sacred–secular also existed in Christian medieval Europe, but the conflicts surrounding it at that time were not due to diverging worldviews but to rivalry with respect to competences and authority.

2. Another narrative of the development of the modern age – closely related to the one just mentioned – is that of the *secularization thesis*, that is, whether the modern world consists of secularized theological notions. Very roughly, this perspective on modernity debates whether the ideals of the modern epoch are self-sustained or in fact rest upon Judaeo-Christian notions that have been dissociated of their theological content. The latter would seem to imply that modernity is a derived or second-order notion, a hypothesis that Hans Blumenberg has opposed in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966). Georg Jellinek, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Löwith, Reinhard Koselleck, Hans Blumenberg or Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde are some of the contenders in this debate. With respect to the notion of history, Karl Löwith and Reinhard Koselleck have shown how modern historical teleology seems to be a secular duplicate of the Jewish-Christian understanding of human history, of its having an end-goal, an orientation towards redemption. Philosophers such as Condorcet, Hegel, Marx or Comte transpose the Jewish-Christian *eschaton* to a secular idea of a final liberation of humankind from injustice, ignorance and superstition.
3. At the same time it is also possible to delineate a religious, that is, Christian tradition of thought during the modern period. Among the modern intellectuals adhering to a religious worldview, the following can be mentioned: Erasmus of Rotterdam, Pascal, Leibniz, Herder, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Maritain, Mounier, Ricoeur or MacIntyre. If the list was supplemented with the corresponding politicians, artists and writers, it would be much longer.
4. Habermas has, in the article 'The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion' (in Habermas, 2008), sketched an overview of the development of philosophy of religion from Kantian philosophy onwards. Habermas regards Kant as the founder of the paradigm that determines philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a paradigm which he terms postmetaphysical: 'Kant's differentiation between faith and knowledge presupposed the break with the totalizing epistemic claim of metaphysics. This turn towards postmetaphysical thinking devalued a certain ontological conceptual apparatus and a certain structure of explanation; it was supposed to raise philosophy to the level of modern science' (Habermas, 2008, p. 244).
5. Apparently no transcript or recording exists of the debate following the lectures, and for this reason only the published texts are analysed here.
6. The appearing of modern thought can in fact be traced back to William of Ockham's nominalism, given that he initiates the change from realism to mentalism. According to nominalism the categorization of things through language has no correspondence with reality. Names exist only in the mind and cannot be used to grasp the physical world. In this way the subject-centred paradigm makes its first appearance. For a thorough analysis of the emergence of modernity from late medieval thought, see Gillespie, 2008.
7. 'The Cartesian proof is no longer a search for an encounter with God within. It is no longer the way to an experience of everything in God. Rather what I now meet is myself: I achieve a clarity and a fullness of self-presence that was lacking before. But from what I find here reason bids me infer to a cause and transcendent guarantee, without which my now well-understood human powers couldn't be as they are. The road to Deism is already open' (Taylor, 1989, p. 157).
8. 'Therefore, the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom' (Spinoza, 2007, p. 252).
9. 'We should now pass on to our second point and demonstrate that the only knowledge of Himself God requires of men, via the prophets, is knowledge of His divine justice and love, that is, those attributes of God that men may emulate by a sound rationale of life' (Spinoza, 2007, p. 176).
10. 'Disputes and schism have ceaselessly disturbed the church ever since apostolic times, and will surely never cease to trouble it, until religion is finally separated from philosophical theories and reduced to the extremely few, very simple dogmas that Christ taught to his own' (Spinoza, 2007, p. 161).
11. Kant uses the notion of *synthetic a priori judgments* to refer to judgments that are necessary and universal and that can be applied to attain knowledge of reality. Examples of synthetic a priori judgments can be found in mathematics. Nonetheless thought after Kant has tended to adopt his Copernican turn as a subjectivist axiom. Meillassoux has noted that 'ever since the Kantian revolution, it has been incumbent upon "serious" philosophers to think that *the condition for the conceivability of the Copernican decentring wrought by modern science is actually provided by a Ptolemaic re-centring of thought.* While modern science discovered for the first time thought's capacity to accede to *knowledge* of a world indifferent to thought's relation to the world, philosophy reacted to this discovery by discovering the naivety of its own previous "dogmatism", seeing in the "realism" of the pre-Critical metaphysics the paradigm of a decidedly outmoded conceptual naivety' (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 118; emphasis in original).
12. Even if we cannot achieve theoretical knowledge of God, the imperative of morality leads us to acknowledge a 'moral faith' in God and the immortality of the soul. In a similar way, Kant argues that in the experience of the beautiful, we feel nature as created and sense its transcendent origin. This feeling, however, is not a theoretical proof of the existence of God, only a moral intimation that induces us to believe in a divine order.
13. 'Kant's moral philosophy can be understood in general terms as an attempt to reconstruct the categorical ought of divine imperatives in discursive terms. The transcendental philosophy, taken as a whole, has the practical meaning of transposing the transcendent divine standpoint into a functionally equivalent *inner-worldly* perspective and to preserve it in the form of the moral standpoint' (Habermas, 2008, p. 228; emphasis in original).
14. 'There is, however, ground for saying "that the kingdom of God is come unto us", even if only the principle of the gradual transition of church faith to universal rational religion and thus to a (divine) ethical state on earth has taken root universally and somewhere also *publicly*, although the actual establishment of this state still lies an infinite distance away from us' (Kant, 2009, p. 136; emphasis in original).
15. 'Thus a view has come down to us from the Romantics which portrays the artist as one who offers epiphanies where something of great moral or spiritual significance becomes manifest – and what is conveyed by this last disjunction is just the possibility that what is revealed lies beyond and against what we normally understand as morality. The artist is an

exceptional being, open to a rare vision; the poet is a person of exceptional sensibility' (Taylor, 1989, p. 423).

16. 'In essence, however, the battle lines are drawn as follows: sociology is a discipline characterized by cold rationality, which seeks to comprehend the structures and laws of motion of modern industrial society by means of measurement and computation and in doing so only serves to alienate man more effectively from himself and from the world around him; on the opposite side there stands a literature whose intuition can see farther than the analyses of the sociologists and whose ability to address the heart of man is to be preferred to the products of a discipline that misunderstands itself as a natural science of society' (Lepenies, 1988, p. 13).
17. At the same time, it is also worth noting that democratic and antidemocratic tendencies appear both on the side of sociologists as well as on that of literary authors.
18. 'The expulsion of the feelings from the social sciences and other disciplines has taken place in the name of an arrogant rationality which desires to be not only the means to knowledge but at the same time a philosophy of life and a substitute religion. In attempting this, however, rationality attempts too much and promises more than it can perform; and when the self-doubt thus engendered does not suffice for self-healing the feelings do not merely regain their rights – they are enhanced to a cult of irrationality such as finds expression in the totalitarian ideologies' (Lepenies, 1988, p. 14).
19. 'In the discourse of modernity, the accusers raise an objection that has not substantially changed from Hegel and Marx down to Nietzsche and Heidegger, from Bataille and Lacan to Foucault and Derrida. The accusation is aimed against a reason grounded in the principle of subjectivity. And it states that this reason denounces and undermines all unconcealed forms of suppression and exploitation, of degradation and alienation, only to set up in their place the unassailable domination of rationality. Because this regime of a subjectivity puffed up into a false absolute transforms the means of consciousness-raising and emancipation into just so many instruments of objectification and control, it fashions for itself an uncanny immunity in the form of a thoroughly concealed domination' (Habermas, 1987, pp. 55–6).
20. Habermas regards Nietzsche's critique of reason as a historical consequence of three previous stages: 'To begin with, reason was conceived as a reconciling self-knowledge, then as a liberating appropriation, and finally as a compensatory remembrance, so that it could emerge as the equivalent for the unifying power of religion and overcome the diremptions of modernity by means of its own driving forces. Three times this attempt to tailor the concept of reason to the program of an intrinsic dialectic of enlightenment miscarried' (Habermas, 1987, p. 85).
21. This notion is central to Habermasian philosophy and pervades all his mature writings. A brief presentation of this notion can be found in Habermas, 1987, ch. 11: 'An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-centered Reason', pp. 294–326.
22. The question of the notion of reason also traverses Habermas's works. One recent reference is the article, 'Communicative Action and the Detranscendentalized "Use of Reason" ', in Habermas, 2008, pp. 24–76.
23. A synthesis of this author's work can be read in Schilling, 2008.

24. The central plot of the common historical narrative describing the relationship between religion and politics in early modern times is that the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries paved the way for the secular state, thus implying that reason triumphs over religious fanaticism and irrationality. It is possible to claim, however, that the cause–effect relationship in this explanation has been inverted. If the interest of the state in getting rid of religious discursive power is considered, then a different interpretation of this historical evolution appears – in the sense that the secular state appropriated or neutralized religious power only to achieve hegemony also on this area (Cavanaugh, 1995). Even if Schilling does not adhere to this idea, he agrees in rejecting a value-laden opposition between reason and religion as regards this historical development because 'the capacity of religion to foster peace is equally obvious. It was based essentially on the already described dualistic structures of the church–state settlement, which made the sacral and the secular, the ecclesiastical and secular order always distinguishable' (Schilling, 2008, p. 81).
25. This is probably the reason why the Catholic Church still today is associated with absolutism, even if the Second Vatican Council unequivocally endorsed the rights guaranteed by a constitutional state: 'It is entirely in accord with human nature that political and juridical structures be devised which will increasingly and without discrimination provide all citizens with the genuine opportunity of taking a free and active share in establishing the juridical foundations of the political community, in determining the form of government and the functions and purposes of its various institutions, and in the election of the government. All citizens should therefore be mindful of their right and duty to use their free vote to further the common good. The church holds in honour and respect the work of those who devote themselves to the good of the state for the service of their fellows by undertaking the burdens of office' ('Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et spes*', p. 75; in Tanner, 1990, p. 1122).
26. 'At the beginning of the third millennium, the sacralization of politics appears everywhere to be in retreat. Totalitarian religions have been destroyed, rejected, or at very least abandoned. Even in democratic regimes, where the presence of a civil religion was never domineering or burdensome, the sacralization of politics appears to be restricted to a residual and prosaic ceremonial involving government and the governed in homage to fading beliefs and myths that have become a sham and are no longer relevant' (Gentile, 2001, pp. 145–6).
27. According to Mannheim, the aim of his sociology of knowledge is 'to perceive the social structure as a whole, i.e. the web of interacting social forces from which have arisen the various modes of observing and thinking through the existing realities that presented themselves at different times' (Mannheim, 1976, pp. 45–6).
28. And at the same time he distances himself from the antidemocratic strand of modern thought.
29. Habermas defines this notion in the following way: 'Despite a very common misunderstanding, "patriotism linked to the constitution" means that the citizens wholeheartedly accept the principles of the constitution, not only in their abstract substance, but very specifically out of the historical

context of the history of each nation' (2006, p. 33). That is, a simply intellectual acknowledgment is not enough to produce the civic attitude proper to a democratic state. A historical memory of previous political abuses and injustices is also necessary to set the ethical positions of a constitutional patriotism. For a general introduction to this term, see Müller, 2007.

30. In the above-mentioned article, 'The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion', Habermas identifies three ways in which modernity has went off the rails: (1) 'The division of labor between the integrative mechanisms of the market, bureaucracy, and social solidarity is out of kilter and has shifted in favor of economic imperatives that reward forms of social interaction oriented to individual success.' (2) 'In addition, the establishment of new technologies that deeply permeate substrates of the human person that used to be regarded as "natural" promotes a naturalistic self-understanding among experiencing subjects in their interactions with one another.' (3) 'The disruption of normative consciousness also manifests itself in the dwindling sensitivity to social pathologies, indeed, to social deprivation and suffering in general' (Habermas, 2008, pp. 238–9).
31. Habermas operates with a social totality that is divided into two levels, lifeworld and systems. The former is governed by communicative action and practical rationality, while instrumental rationality rules in the systems level. One of Habermas's celebrated characterizations of the present historical moment – in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) – is that of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system level.
32. Habermas defines the term postsecular as the neutrality of the state with respect to the worldviews of the citizens: 'In the postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the "modernization of the public consciousness" involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other's contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate' (2008, pp. 46–7). Cf. also Habermas's lecture on the occasion of the award of the Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association: *Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001).
33. This can also be derived from the reflection Habermas carries out with respect to Schleiermacher's interiorization of religion: 'However, the Culture Protestantism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries makes clear the price that Schleiermacher has to pay for his elegant reconciliation of religion and modernity, faith and knowledge. The integration of the Church into society and the privatization of faith rob the religious relation to transcendence of its disruptive power within the world' (Habermas, 2008, p. 234).
34. It is also possible to argue that religious citizens are not properly acknowledged as citizens if the religious arguments are not considered as valid in the public debate.
35. Another example of how religion is not recognized on equal terms with the secular worldview can be found in the intense debate that took place in France in 2003–04 about *la laïcité* and the presence of religious symbols in state schools and other public institutions. The debate culminated with the implementation of a law at the beginning of 2004 banning conspicuous religious signs in public schools and spaces (in fact the main issue was the use of the veil by Muslim students). Paul Ricoeur and Monique Canto-Sperber participated in the debate with an article that appeared in *Le Monde* on 11 December 2003. In this article, entitled 'Une laïcité d'exclusion est le meilleur ennemi de l'égalité', the authors argue that the Muslim veil should be tolerated in public schools because this would allow the girls an experience of equality with boys – in spite of the veil. The simple ban of the veil, on the contrary, would probably be felt as a rejection of their religious and cultural roots that would be experienced as intolerance and as an excluding imposition. It is clear that the implementation of this law is in consonance with a militant secularist attitude that aims at marginalizing religion to the private sphere instead of trying to engage in a dialogue with it.

36. In the second volume of his work *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict XVI addresses the same question in relation to the advances in genetics: 'At this point, modern man is tempted to say: Creation has become intelligible to us through science. Indeed, Francis S. Collins, for example, who led the Human Genome Project, says with joyful astonishment: "The language of God was revealed." Indeed, in the magnificent mathematics of creation, which today we can read in the human genetic code, we recognize the language of God. But unfortunately not the whole language. The functional truth about man has been discovered. But the truth about man himself – who he is, where he comes from, what he should do, what is right, what is wrong – this unfortunately cannot be read in the same way' (Benedict XVI, 2011b, p. 193).
37. 'And as a sheer matter of fact, the guarantee of a shared collaboration in the elaboration of the law and in the just administration of power is the basic argument that speaks in favor of democracy as the most appropriate form of political order' (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 59).
38. 'Islam has defined its own catalogue of human rights, which differs from the Western catalogue. And if my information is correct, although it is true that today's China is defined by a cultural form, namely Marxism, that arose in the West, it is asking whether "human rights" are merely a typically Western invention – and one that must be looked at critically' (ibid., p. 61).
39. Ratzinger builds upon the Christian idea of the relationship between reason and revelation. By means of natural reason we can achieve insight into the world but it must be supplemented with the divinely revealed truth in order to arrive at a fuller insight into self and world. In the encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998), John Paul II developed this duality in keeping with the contemporary situation. In this document, John Paul II reaffirmed what has been taught by the Catholic Church since the earliest times of its history: 'The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason "mutually support each other"; each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding' (John Paul II, 1998, no. 100). In his address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture on 8 March 2008, Benedict XVI expressed the same idea, that in the encounter between these two faculties, 'faith implies reason and perfections it, and reason, enlightened by faith,

finds the strength to rise to the knowledge of God and spiritual realities' (Benedict XVI, 2008).

40. The notion of natural right was created by Stoicism and adopted by early Christianity. This idea of a law applicable for all humanity is perfectly in harmony with the Christian faith and its understanding of the human being as created in the image of God. In his speech to the German *Bundestag* on 22 September 2011, Benedict XVI again addressed the question of the natural law: 'Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the state and to society, that is to say a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law – and to the harmony of objective and subjective reason, which naturally presupposes that both spheres are rooted in the creative reason of God. Christian theologians thereby aligned themselves with a philosophical and juridical movement that began to take shape in the second century B.C.' (Benedict XVI, 2011a). An eloquent expression of this idea can be found in St Augustine's *Confessions* (Book II, iv.9): 'Theft receives certain punishment by your law, Lord, and by the law written in the hearts of men which not even iniquity itself destroys. For what thief can with equanimity endure being robbed by another thief? He cannot tolerate it even if he is rich and the other is destitute' (Augustine, 1998, pp. 28–9).
41. The notion of *ius gentium* used by Vitoria sets the basis for the subsequent emergence of the idea of human rights just as it gives the foundation for the development of international rights.
42. In the address to the *Bundestag*, Benedict XVI asserted, 'If nature – in the words of Hans Kelsen – is viewed as "an aggregate of objective data linked together in terms of cause and effect", then indeed no ethical indication of any kind can be derived from it. A positivist conception of nature as purely functional, as the natural sciences consider it to be, is incapable of producing any bridge to ethics and law, but once again yields only functional answers. The same also applies to reason, according to the positivist understanding that is widely held to be the only genuinely scientific one' (Benedict XVI, 2011a).
43. Again in the speech to the *Bundestag*, Benedict XVI referred to this idea: 'We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly. Yet I would like to underline a point that seems to me to be neglected, today as in the past: there is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled' (Benedict XVI, 2011a).
44. The Catholic Church has taken a considerable number of initiatives in order to create a global interreligious and intercultural dialogue (interreligious and ecumenical meetings, John Paul II's and Benedict XVI's encounters with religious and political leaders etc.). This is a consequence of the Second Vatican Council. The relationship between the church and other religions became redefined at that decisive church meeting: 'In our age, when the human race is being daily brought closer together and contacts between the various nations are becoming more frequent, the church is giving closer attention to what is its relation to non-christian religions. In its task of promoting unity and charity among people, indeed also among nations, it now turns its attention chiefly to what things human beings have in common and what things tend to bring them together' ('Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate*, p. 1, in Tanner, 1990, p. 968).

45. Early Christianity assimilated the Stoic notion of the *rationes seminales*, which precisely entailed the presence of a common rational basis in all cultures. In recent times, the notion of the *rationes seminales* has been used theologically for the question of the inculturation of Christianity in non-Western cultural traditions.
46. Furthermore, this summon is not restricted to the Jewish people but includes whoever wants to accept it. A few examples are: the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1–26), the commissioning of the eleven (Mark 16:15–18), Peter's exchange with the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10) or Paul's summon as apostle of the Gentiles. In Gal. 3:7–8 St Paul asserts that the universality of Christianity is prefigured in the Old Testament: 'And so, you should understand that everyone who has faith is a child of Abraham. Long ago the Scriptures said that God would accept the Gentiles because of their faith.' In fact the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament has a universal aim, as can be observed in, for example, Isa. 49:6. Cf. also Ps. 67.
47. In the address at Westminster Hall on 17 September 2010, Benedict XVI mentioned this necessary mutual purification in a political context: 'The Catholic tradition maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, prescinding from the content of revelation. According to this understanding, the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles. This "corrective" role of religion vis-à-vis reason is not always welcomed, though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves. And in their turn, these distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion. It is a two-way process. Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century' (Benedict XVI, 2010).
48. Methodologically Habermas also separates religion and philosophy as two different spheres: 'The methodological separation between the two universes of discourse is compatible with the openness of philosophy to possible cognitive contents of religion. This "appropriation" is free from any intention to interfere or to launch a "hostile takeover." As it happens, this at once tolerant and clear demarcation from religious dogmatics reflects the level of consciousness of secular citizens who are aware that they live in postsecular society' (Habermas, 2008, pp. 245–6). Precisely in this way a dialogic notion

of reason is achieved – by acknowledging religion as a partner on equal terms rather than as a more or less sinister *Doppelgänger*.

49. 'The political community and the church are independent of each other and autonomous in their respective spheres of activity. They are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals, but under different titles. And both will be successful in discharging their service for the good of all, the more they both develop a healthy cooperation with each other, according to the circumstances of place and time' ('Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et spes*', p. 76, in Tanner, 1990, p. 1124).
50. Borges's literary production is written within a sceptical horizon, but the target of his irony is generally directed towards faith in human reason rather than towards religion. The narrator's reaction – which can be assumed to reflect Borges's attitude – to the invasion of the earth by a fiction is resigned and disdainful: 'English and French and mere Spanish will disappear from the globe. The world will be Tlön. I pay no attention to all this and go on revising, in the still days at the Adrogue Hotel, an uncertain Quevedian translation (which I do not intend to publish) of Browne's *Urn Burial*' (Borges, 1964, p. 18).

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