THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND RELIGION:
DETERMINATE NEGATION, TRANSLATION, AND THE RESCUE OF CRITICAL
RELIGIOUS POTENTIALS

By

Dustin J. Byrd

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ABSTRACT

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The *Institut für Sozialforschung*, better known as the "Frankfurt School," was born between the catastrophes of World War I and World War II. Rooted in Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and other philosophers, the Critical Theory of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, and others, is generally understood to be solely secular. The core thesis of this dissertation refutes that claim. I argue that not only did the Frankfurt School draw upon their secular sources for their critical analyses, but also the religions of Judaism and Christianity. Unlike their immediate predecessors, especially the 19th century materialists, who argued for the *abstract negation* of religion, the first generation of critical theorists argued for a *determinate negation* of religion, wherein the liberational, emancipatory, and prophetic semantic and semiotic materials of religion would be rescued by way of translation into critical political philosophy. In other words, if religion was to survive secular modernity, it would need to do so via its migration into an alternative form, i.e. critical philosophy. Additionally, I argue that a similar process of determinate negation can be found in Jürgen Habermas' call for members of the Islamic faith to translate the moral-practical elements of their religion in post-metaphysical reasoing, wherein it can escape from its closed semantic universe and enter into democratic deliberations. Yet, I argue against Habermas' temperate call for the Muslim community to translate only the moral-practical elements or their religion. Rather, I argue for a return akin to the first generation of the Frankfurt School's

radicality; Muslims should translate the monotheistic concept of *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) into post-metaphysical reasoning, just as the first generation of critical theorists translated the Jewish theological concept of *bilderverbot*, the "image ban" of the Second Commandment of the Decalogue, into critical philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

*The relegation of religious questions to a distant, precisely
delimited area, that is, religion as a "private matter," is one of the
intellectual roots of contemporary evil.*[1]

~ Max Horkheimer

Since the nineteenth century, scholars of secularization theory have assumed that religion

and various religious ways of life would slowly dissipate as secular modernity continued to

expand beyond the confines of the West, wherein religion and secularity first found their

antagonist relationship (Taylor, 2007). As the post-Cold War world embraced both democracy

and neo-liberal capitalism, it was assumed that religion, a holdover from man's socially insecure

and psychologically immature past, would become increasing passé, unable to defend its

theological, moral and epistemological claims in the light of modern science, autonomous reason

and the instrumental rationality of industrialization and technology (Freud, 1964; Fukuyama,

1992). However, the events of September 11th, 2001, and the subsequent "war on terrorism,"

brought the topic of religion back into the foreground of international discourse, which,

according to Habermas, shook the secular confidence that religion was soon to be extinct

(Habermas, 2009: 64-65). It appeared to many that religion, especially in its fundamentalist

form, had taken a bold – and violent – step to reclaim its presence in the modern world, thus

challenging the reality and dominance of secular neo-liberalism that was seen as being inevitable

since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the wake of the terrorist attack, religion once again

became a lively topic among philosophers, who often viewed Islamic fundamentalism (and all

other forms of religious fundamentalism) as an irrational – and ultimately futile – backlash

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[1] Max Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters*. Ed. and Trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 151.

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against "Enlightened" modernity. Indeed, just three weeks after the 9/11 attack, Habermas used the occasion of winning the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers in Frankfurt to demand that secular society attempt to acquire a new and more penetrating understanding and appreciation of religious convictions via an open and honest discourse with religious communities (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 11). The forced response to a resurgence of religion proved to be troublesome for western Bourgeois nations, as if a forgotten memory was suddenly resurrected to torment the present (Huntington, 1996). The apocalyptic spectacle of 9/11 appeared to reveal that fanatical religion was on the rise, that irrational religious people were preparing to fight against the expansive tentacle-like secularization of the world and the domination of the neo-liberal world order, which was being imposed by powerful nation-states in the West and their international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Habermas in Borradori, 2003; Habermas, 2009: 61-62). For some thinkers on the political-left, the collapse of the Soviet Union – an alternative form of secularity to neo-liberalism – opened up a chasm from which a new kind of resistance was born: a resistance rooted in religion as opposed to secular revolutionary philosophy (Mamdani, 2004; Žižek, 2008, 2016). Thus, religious resistance to the neo-liberal world order exposed the lasting effects of the secular left's failure to defeat capitalism and institute a viable secular alternative to "godless" capitalism and "backwards" religion.

As was witnessed by the "universal" shock of 9/11, which took many on the political left and right by surprise, secularization theory appeared to have fundamentally underestimated the resilience of religion and its power to motivate individuals and groups to struggle for a world outside of the coordinates of the predominant neo-liberal world order. Additionally, the return of militant religion seemed to seal the judgement of Rodney Stark, one of the foremost proponents

of secularization theory in the 1960's. In his 2000 book *Acts of Faith,* co-authored with Roger Finke, he wrote, "after three centuries of utterly failed prophesies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper 'requiescat in pace' [rest in peace]" (Stark and Finke, 2000: 79). In agreement with Peter L. Berger, who also changed his once pro-stance on secularization theory, Stark and Finke realized that religion had not only failed to disappear under the conditions of modernity, but was in fact experiencing rejuvenation in many places, contrary to the basic premises of secularization theory (Berger, 1999). To the astonishment of some, and horror of others, some forms of religion no longer seemed congruent with Marx's (as well as Kant and Hegel's) opium definition – as a sedative by which mankind is reconciled to his fate – but rather reconstituted itself as a powerful stimulant; it became the new and more powerful specter haunting the secular-liberal West. As such, the question then became for secular "enlightened" people, how much does one open up towards religion if at all. That question itself splits the secular community.

Not all of those who embraced the secular zeitgeist misunderstood and underestimated religion. Many within the Frankfurt School, and their critical theory of society, which included within itself a critical theory of religion, better understood the capacity of religion to weather the storm of secular modernity. For the early Frankfurt School, many of whom had religious upbringings, religion was *fluctuat nec mergitur* (tossed but not sunk), at least not yet. From the position of the first generation's dialectical theory of religion, they recognized that religion was battered and bruised by secular modernity, but regardless, stubbornly preserved within itself a potential for resistance to the homogenizing domination of secular capitalist modernity. Thus,

they remained open to religion while criticizing those aspects of religion that appeared barbaric and retrograde.

In light of this openness and understanding towards religion, in the aftermath of 9/11, it was Jürgen Habermas, a second generation Frankfurt School scholar, who in 2002 answered the desperate call for a meaningful conversation emanating from parts of the Muslim world. Taking both their invitation to dialogue seriously, Habermas traveled to Tehran, the capital of Iran, to engage his academic counterparts – many of whom were deeply religious – in a discourse over the nature and future of secular modernity and religion (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2002).[2] With the exception of Jacques Derrida, no other major western philosopher answered this welcoming call for inter-civilizational discourse.[3] As stated above, the foundation for Habermas' theoretical openness towards religion and religious voices was laid down by the first generation of Critical Theorists, especially Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Fromm and Löwenthal, as their personal and philosophical relationship to revealed religion, especially Judaism and Christianity, was *dialectical*, not *positivistic*, as was the case with many other scholars who embraced secularization theory, such as sociologists Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim. This dialectical openness towards religion, I contend, safeguarded many Critical Theorists from the false-triumphalism that Habermas (2009: 63-64) thinks was common among those who *believed* religion was doomed to entirely disappear within the public sphere

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[2] In 2005, Habermas also took the opportunity that arose concerning religion in a "post-secular" age to discuss the dialectical nature of secularization with then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later to be elected Pope Benedict XVI. Although they could not agree with each other on various points, this discussion symbolically demonstrated the willingness of both sides of modernity, the secular and the religious, to, in good faith, come to some kind of over-lapping consensus on a variety of issues plaguing the modern West. It also demonstrated the willingness of both sides to learn from the other. See Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion.* San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2006.

[3] Having been born and raised in a majority Muslim country, Algeria, Jacques Derrida maintained a certain respect for Muslims and Islam, which wouldn't allow him to descend into a simplistic and/or crude understanding of the religion, culture and history. See Mustapha Chérif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida.* Trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

(both in civil society and the state) at the hands of secular modernity, including C. Wright Mills, who in 1959 wrote,

> Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm (Mills, 1959: 32-33).

Although many of the first generation of Critical Theorists seemed to believe in a certain inevitability of religion's demise in the western public sphere, including Habermas, who once wrote, "the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus," they did not necessarily welcome religion's death as an entirely good development, as did Comte, Marx, Lenin and Freud (Habermas in Adams, 2006: 79).[4] Rather, the first generation took a different attitude toward religion, a *dialectical* attitude toward religion – one that Habermas himself recognized but could not follow, partially due to his "unmusicality" in regards to religion. They chose to rescue religion from itself *and* from secular modernity, which threatened to send religion in its entirety into the dustbin of history – emancipatory potentials and all.

Unlike many of their predecessors in the 19th and early 20th century, the Frankfurt School's dialectical theory of religion understood much more clearly the dynamic nature of religion, its dialectical contradictions, and its appeal to those suffering within the iron-cages of secular modernity, which included liberalism, fascism, authoritarian communism, and as a result, they recognized the reasons while religion could not simply be discarded wholesale. Consequently, within their Critical Theory of Society, they developed a critical theory of religion, wherein Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin and Leo Löwenthal

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[4] As we'll see, Habermas later changes his position on religion, where he begins to look to religion as an ally in the rescue of liberal society from its own internal dysfunction. This issue will be taken up in Chapter 6.

in particular, intentionally preserved a number of Judaism and Christianity's most fundamental concepts, allowing them to "migrate," to use Adorno's term, into secular critical philosophy. This method was manifestly different than many of their most important predecessors, including Feuerbach, Marx, Lenin, Freud and Nietzsche, who *abstractly negated* religion – seeing nothing in it explicitly worth preserving. Rather, the first generation of Critical Theorists, including in some cases Herbert Marcuse, followed Hegel's dialectical logic and *determinately negated* religion, thus rescuing, augmenting and fulfilling particular religious semantic and semiotic materials, while allowing the unsalvageable in religion to perish with the passing of history.[5] They were not mere *skeptics* of religion, but rather emancipators of religion's historically suppressed emancipatory potentials. According to the initiator of Critical Theory, Max Horkheimer, some of these religiously acquired concepts formed the *basis* of Critical Theory itself, including the concept of *Bilderverbot* – Judaism's ban on constructing images of God (Horkheimer, 2007: 361). Likewise, according to Leo Löwenthal, certain theological and social aspects of Judaism and the Jewish experience, including its struggle against all forms of idolatry, were "co-determinate" with secular philosophical concepts within Critical Theory, which they learned from Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (Löwenthal, 1987: 112). Theodor W. Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectics,* forwarded the notion that historical materialism converted into secular form Judaism's theological image ban, "by not allowing Utopia to be positively

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[5] Hegel defines *determinate negation* in his Science of Logic as such, "All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to strive to gain this quite simple insight – is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results; which strictly speaking is a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediacy, not a result. Because the result, the negations, is a specific negation it has a content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed – and has to complete itself in a purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced." (G. W. F. Hegel; *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 54). We will return to the issue *determinate negation* in Chapter 4.

pictured" (Adorno, 1999: 207). In agreement with those who often claim that Historical Materialism has a theological basis, Adorno himself, in 1934, described much of his own work as "inverse theology" when discussing the theological content within Benjamin's essay of Kafka (Adorno and Benjamin, 2001: 66-67; Erdozain, 2016: 221-261). In addition, Adorno, in his article *Reason and Revelation,* claimed that "nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed, every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular, the profane" (Adorno, 1998: 136; Ott, 2014: 45-47). Lastly, Benjamin made apocalyptic and messianic themes an integral part of his "transliteration" of religion into secular philosophy, deploying them against positivist historians and the ideologues of progressivism (Benjamin, 1969: 253-264). These, and many other instances, demonstrate that early within Critical Theory, certain forms of liberational and emancipatory religion were not dismissed as irrational, obscurantist, or "backwards," but rather were welcomed influences within its broad philosophically ecumenical expanse.

Because of the Frankfurt School's Hegelian sublation of religion and theology into Critical Theory, it allowed them to gain insights into the dialectical nature of revealed religion that many of their predecessors failed to grasp adequately. I argue that from the vantage point of Critical Theory, their immediate predecessors' analysis of religion was *insufficiently dialectical*, and in some cases simply *non-dialectical*, and thus in need of correction. Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Löwenthal's dialectical assessment of religion allowed them to understand religion, especially Abrahamic religion, not simply as false-ideology, an epiphenomenon of an infantile psyche, as the morality of a mindless herd, or as a *gestalt des geistes*, but rather as an abiding source of liberational and emancipatory change – a source of resistance to the world-as-it-is – which was increasingly being defined monolithically by capitalism. Therefore, my central

claim in this study is that the first generation of Critical Theorists took the semantic and semiotic material of religion seriously, in a philosophical sense, even if they could no longer ascribe to any form of institutional religion in a devotional sense, and in doing so, "rescued" religion by allowing its emancipatory, non-conformist and critical semantics and semiotics to "migrate" into their philosophy.

However, despite the insistence of the first generation of the critical theorists, this interpretation of Critical Theory, wherein religion and religious elements play a determining role, is not universally shared. For many, especially those in the non-Jewish second generation and those who followed, who have become "religiously unmusical," to use Habermas' language, Critical Theory is a wholly secular affair – wherein religion nor theology plays a significant part. I will demonstrate in this work that this "wholly secular" view of Critical Theory is not only untenable, but also factually wrong on the basis of the first generations' own writings on religion. Throughout the work, I will bring forth evidence to demonstrate that not only was religion a *philosophical concern* of the first generation, but also that they understood it as an abiding *source of critical thought and praxis* in a world saturated with neo-liberal capitalism, authoritarianism, consumerism, irrationality, and on its way towards being totally administered. Consequently, I claim that if we count Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as pillars upon which Critical Theory stands, we must also consider Moses, the prophets of Judaism, and in some cases certain aspects of Jesus of Nazareth and Christianity, albeit through secularized language.

While this may be a controversial claim for some critics, the body of literature that demonstrates the Frankfurt School's abiding relationship to religion is steadily growing. Scholars such as Slavoj Žižek, Christopher Craig Brittain, Eduardo Mendieta, Robert Hullot-Kentor,

Michael Löwy, Roland Boer, Michael Reder, Judith Butler and even Jürgen Habermas himself, continue to highlight the theological elements found within much of the first generations' critical political and social philosophy. Other scholars, such as Rudolf J. Siebert and Michael R. Ott, have developed a Critical Theory of Religion, or Dialectical Religiology, which is rooted in the Frankfurt School but goes well beyond the confines of their philosophical work. Despite this increasing recognition of the religious elements within early Critical Theory, there remains a lack of *comprehensive* studies concerning the *foundational* role of religion and/or theology within the first generation's work. The present work is meant to address that lack by clearly demonstrating, (1) the Frankfurt School's abiding connection to Judaism, especially its commitment to the Jewish mission of *Tikkun Olam,* which leads to, (2) their rejection of their predecessors' *abstract negation* of religion in preference for a *determinate negation*, which allows religious elements to survive the negation of religion, and migrate from the depth of the sacred to the profane, thus finding a home within a philosophy that is more appropriate and epistemologically sound for the conditions of secular modernity, and (3) I argue that those semantic and semiotic elements rescued from religion are additionally *sublated* – or *transliterated* in the case of Benjamin – into secular concepts that play *determining* roles – not just periphery roles – in their social and political thought.

In addition to these claims, I argue that not only is there a co-determining religious and/or theological basis for much of the first generation's dialectical Critical Theory, but also that their *determinate negation* of religion – and its subsequent translation into publically accessible reasoning – may also be beneficial to the social and political antagonisms that currently inhibit the post-secular conditions in the West today, especially in regards to religious Muslim citizens of secular western countries, especially in Western Europe. I argue that European Muslims

today, who struggle with the imperative to live both as Muslim and as European, may find a helpful model within the Frankfurt School's determinate negation and translation of Jewish and other religious notions into secular philosophy. Although, as the reader will see, I remain critical of Habermas' overly simplistic answer to the problem of the Muslim community's alienated existence in Europe; his "translation proviso," by which European Muslims are to translate the *moral-practical* rationality of Islam into reasoning accessible to all citizens. Nevertheless, I will build upon his argument in an attempt to address the deficiencies I see in his understanding of religion, Islam and the problems Muslims have living within the existential dissonance of the post-secular society. If the first generation of Critical Theorist's dialectical philosophy of religion can be valuable today, it will be in resolving the tension caused by the current antagonism between religion and secularity within the post-secular societies of the West.

Structure of the Text

As stated above, this work intends to demonstrate the religious component that serves as a "co-determinative" (to use Löwenthal's term) basis for the Frankfurt School's critical theory of society. As such, I attempt to demonstrate that from its very inception, Critical Theory, as first developed by assimilated, yet intellectually non-conformist Jews in the first half of the 20th century in Germany, dialectically preserved, augmented and fulfilled certain aspects of religion within its secular philosophy. In order to set the foundations for this claim, in chapters 1 and 2, I review the philosophies of religion produced by the Frankfurt School's and most important immediate predecessors, i.e. Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche, all of whom, in the prevailing materialistic and scientific spirit of the 19th

century, *abstractly negated* religion – which was already a departure from their German Idealist predecessors, who, similar to the first generation of the Frankfurt School, often preserved theological elements within their philosophies.[6] Although many scholars have argued that even 19th century materialists, as well as Freud and Nietzsche, also preserved certain religious elements within their work, the thinkers themselves often attested to the pressing need for the historical religions to permanently vacate the life and world of enlightened mankind (Erdozain, 2016). For Feuerbach, God was but a psychological projection of man's own making – the more that man projected the good in himself onto this fictive being, the less he became; For Marx, bourgeois religion, which legitimated the dominance of the exploitative status quo, stood in the way of the revolutionary emancipation of the working class, and therefore had to be overcome; for Lenin, religion not only diminished revolutionary furor among the exploited classes, but also provided a convenient ideology through which the ruling class could assuage their guilt and continue their rule without the burden of guilt on their conscience; for Freud, religion was the result of man's inability to escape his evolutionary infancy – mankind was stuck in its self-created need for a father-figure by which it could submit; and for Nietzsche, religion, especially Christianity, worshipped a God and embraced a moral code fit only for slaves – it was a self-destructive ideology that foreclosed upon a heroic way of life and ensured the tyranny of the herd. In all of these writers, religion was essentially a persistent stain in need of an effective eraser, for if man was to realize true freedom, i.e. freedom for all, religion had to be *abstractly negated* as soon as possible.

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[6] According to Horkheimer, the "progressive aspects of religion… found a new form in German Idealism," the development of which as the "official philosophy" of Germany was only stopped by "triumphant liberalism." However, those progressive aspects of religion "continued only in the proletarian opposition." However, among the ruling classes, "religion became the uninterrupted affirmation of social forms" (Horkheimer, 1993: 285).

The essential purpose of chapter 3 is to lay the groundwork for the main argument in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 3, I argue that the Jewish identity of the first generation of the Frankfurt School continued to have an indelible influence on their philosophical work. This becomes especially clear in light of the Judaism's social-moral idea of *Tikkun Olam,* or "repairing the world," which I argue animates not only leftist Jewish thought in the 19th and 20th century in general, but also plays a tacit but powerful role in the overall trajectory of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory. In other words, I attempt to show that such essentialized forms of Judaism – as *contra mundum* – continued to motivate the first generation of Critical Theorists despite their assimilation into German society and their explicit embrace of secular philosophy. While they may have abandoned a traditional religious life, they nevertheless preserved within their philosophy the essential mission of Judaism – to *heal the world*, which is first predicated on a critique of the *world-as-it-is* (*weltlauf*) in relations to the *world-as-it-should-be*. A secondary purpose of chapter 3 is to make clear the distinction between religion and theology, as they are often used interchangeably within the writings of the first generation. While in my judgement they appear to be more open to theology, due to its transcendent quality, they nevertheless also take religion – as a social-historical phenomenon – seriously when appropriate.

Chapter 4 is the first section of what is essentially a two-chapter dialectical argument, the Frankfurt School's *determinate negation* (*aufheben*) of religion – which includes (1) the *negation* of historical and positive religion and (2) the *preservation* of the emancipatory and liberational aspects of religion, thus delivering that which is rescued to (3) their post-religious Critical Theory. By excavating the disparate works of both Adorno and Horkheimer, this chapter seeks to establish the Frankfurt School's critical *negation* of religion. When examining where and how the prophetic, emancipatory and liberational aspects of Abrahamic religion betrayed themselves,

and dialectically turned into their opposites – becoming oppressive, violent and authoritarian – we make identifiable those aspects of religion that the Frankfurt School chose to consign to the dustbin of history. While many of their critiques of religion echo their predecessors, I demonstrate that they are not in the process of *abstractly negating* religion, discarding *all* aspects of religion and theology, but rather are following a much more nuanced, and thus Hegelian, approach – only those aspects of religion and theology that lend themselves to mankind's further enslavement, oppression and degradation are negated. In addition, I attempt to ward off confusion as to what they are really doing by highlighting an important motivation for their dialectical critique of religion: there can be no anachronistic and epistemologically unsound "return to religion" for the Frankfurt School; rather the only option that is left open, if the liberational, emancipatory and revolutionary aspects of religion and theology are to be salvaged, is to preserve and fulfill such potentials by allowing them to "migrate" into secular philosophy (Adorno, 1998: 136). In the modern West, there can be no wholesale retreat into the premodern – only the modernization of those salvageable elements can rescue them from being lost in the dark abyss of modernity. In other words, that which is preserved of religion must be secularized so that it may survive not only religion's collapse, but modernity itself. While this rescue of religion allowed the early Critical Theorists access into the closed-semantic universe of religious believers, especially Jews and Christians, thus delivering to them insights as why religion remained within the coordinates of an increasingly secular western society, it nevertheless did not allow them to interact ecumenically with religious communities as if they were another religious community themselves. Regardless of how open to religion they were, Critical Theory remained a secular endeavor and thus outside the realm of religious ecumenism.

In chapter 5 we come to the most controversial claim concerning the Frankfurt School's critical theory of religion – its *intentional* preservation of certain semantic and semiotic material, which, as I've already stated, they allowed to migrate from the depth of the mythos (sacred story), scripture and theology to their secular critical and dialectical philosophy. With the help of Giorgio Agamben's etymological analysis of "sacred" and "profane," I first focus on what it means to *profanate* the sacred – to translate the sacred into the profane, or to determinately negate the sacred into the profane – to allow the "migration" of revealed religion into philosophy rooted in autonomous reason (Adorno, 1998: 136).

Next, in order to demonstrate the theological element that resides as a basis of the work of the first generation of Critical Theorists, I focus on three foundational thinkers in the first generation, i.e. Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin, who are, from my perspective, the most musical in terms of religion and theology. For Adorno, I argue that he actively translates the Jewish 2nd Commandment of the Hebraic Decalogue against making images (idols) of the divine into a determining factor within Critical Theory, wherein he expands its inherent negativity further into his theory of utopia, through which the original negative theological concept takes on a role in political-social philosophy – a role that is *far beyond its original theological intent* (Adorno, 1999). For Horkheimer, I argue that his notion of the *longing for the totally Other*, which serves as his definition of religion, follows closely Adorno's thoughts on the *Bilderverbot,* but also attempts to rescue the "impulse that unites all men," the desire to transcend the-world-as-it-is, the status quo, the horror and terror of nature and history that have dominated and determined the life of mankind. This *longing* for Horkheimer is the absolute essence of religion; a religious essence that even secular individuals can embrace and actualize. Thus, in this understanding of secular philosophy, *faith* becomes an essential idea

14

(Horkheimer, 1978: 239). Through his longing for other than what is the case, Horkheimer knew that the God of theology could no longer be believed in within the conditions of modernity, but nevertheless somehow remained faithful to the *apophatic* God that remained after the God of *cataphatic* theology was dead. His "atheism" thus preserves his theological impulse. Lastly I turn my attention to the enigmatic theological writings of Walter Benjamin. Here I argue *against* the common misconception that he *sublated* religion into secular philosophy. Against many specialists of Benjamin's philosophy, I believe this is a fundamental misreading of how he utilizes theological and religious motifs in this philosophy of history and his political Messianism. I argue that Benjamin *transliterates*, not translates, religion, wherein he allows religion to speak from its own perspective, from its own concepts and resources, *alongside* secular philosophy – not *through* secular philosophy, as does Adorno and Horkheimer. As such, when Benjamin speaks of the Messiah, the apocalypse, etc., he is allowing religion to speak from the standpoint of its own resources – as itself – side-by-side with secular philosophy – thus he does not attempt to *sublate* the theological *into* the philosophical, but rather makes allies out of philosophy and theology in the struggle for human emancipation.

If a dialectical critique involves not only negation and preservation, but also fulfilment and augmentation, the new synthesis, then such development occurs in chapter 6 of this work, where the issue of translating religion into a secular idiom meets the contemporary condition. In the first half of the chapter, I explore the nature of Habermas' concept of *post-secular society* and the change of consciousness that has brought about the realization of religion's continued influence on what is otherwise understood to be the secular conditions of modernity, which has now been forcibly exported to much of the world. As Habermas has written, this realization most powerfully came into view with the September 11th, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington

D.C., and the subsequent "war on terrorism," wherein the binary narrative of the struggle was constructed as being between the religious Muslim world and the secular enlightened West; religion versus reason; barbarity versus civilization (Habermas, 2009: 59-77). However, amidst the contemporary European post-secular society, which can be understood as a secular society within a secular *zeitgeist* within which religion stubbornly remains an integral part of the citizenry's lifeworld, there are millions of religiously devout Muslims, who struggle to find a balance between the equal imperatives of living as dutiful citizens of secular democracies while faithfully maintaining their religious identity through the public and private actualization of its demands and tenets. When such a balance cannot be discovered, I claim that it has often led to social alienation, contempt for secular European culture and a turn towards violent fundamentalism – as a totalizing interpretation of reality and an orientation of action – and terrorism, as an embrace of the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation) as both theory and praxis.

In the second half of chapter 6, I confront (1) Habermas' attempts to address the issue of Islam in Europe by modifying John Rawls' idea of a "translation proviso," wherein Muslims, similar to the Frankfurt School, would translate certain religious semantics and semiotics into publically accessible reasoning, through which they would enter into the public life and discourse of the nation. While being sympathetic to this argument, I argue against this claim by reminding Habermas that there is a great danger in asking religiously devout Muslims to engage in such an act, none more important than the Qur'ān's eschatological threat of eternal damnation for fouling a "perfected" religion with man's imperfect innovations. (2) I argue that while Habermas forwards the first generation of Critical Theorists' praxis of determinately negating religious semantics and semiotics by translating them into a secular idiom for the purpose of discourse within a secular society, he nevertheless abandons the *prophetic-revolutionary* content

16

that was rescued from Judaism by Horkheimer, Adorno et al. In their sublation, they did not merely isolate certain *moral-practical* elements from Judaism to translate, as Habermas suggests Muslims do, but rather they preserved Judaism's ultimate negativity, its most recalcitrant and propulsive *theological* force, its *Bilderverbot* (image ban)*,* within their non-conformist philosophy. In my estimation, to limit Islam to its moral-practical element is to *functionalize* Islam, to make Islam into a mere *integrative force* within the status quo, wherein its theological negativity, akin to Judaism' image ban, is the true source of Islam's revolutionary social potential within modernity. From this vantage point, I argue that something similar to Horkheimer and Adorno's preservation of the *Bilderverbot* should be done by Muslims with the Islamic concept of *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) if, (a) Muslims are to contribute to the search for a more-reconciled future society in Europe, and (b) if Muslims are to avoid religious extremism – which is essentially a *reactionary* – not *revolutionary* – form of protest against the domination of the given. This would be much closer to the method and spirit of Horkheimer and Adorno's sublation of Jewish semantics and semiotics into Critical Theory than what Habermas is currently proposing.

In addition to this issue, I argue that Habermas' "translation proviso" fails to take seriously, or even really consider, what I call the "tri-text," the *subtext, pretext* and *context* of any such translation of religion into publically accessible reasoning. The *subtext* deals with European society's tendency to engage in *identity thought* – the historical reduction of Islam and Muslims into a single monolithic threatening image, as it often did with Jews in the not-so-distant past. With the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, I argue there is a pressing need to fundamentally deconstruct such a prevailing negative image in the West. The *pretext* represents the long history of inner and intra-civilizational catastrophes which partially determines contemporary relations

17

between Muslims and Westerners. The memory of this fourteen-hundred-year old conflict also impinges on the ability of Muslims and Westerners to come to some kind of reconciliation. As such, it cannot be ignored, as the historical wounds must be recognized. Lastly, the *context*, or the contemporary grievances that the Muslim community has against the West and vice versa, must also be thoroughly disclosed via a *grievance-bearing discourse*. Only then can Muslims and non-Muslims in the European post-secular society begin to come to know one another in such a way that it lays the foundation for Muslims to translate religious and Qurʾānic language into secular language, as Habermas invites Muslims to do. Without such a painful yet honest reckoning with the past, as well as the present state of affairs, a nation detached from its pre-political foundations, that is not only multi-confessional but also multi-religious, cannot adequately muster the good-will to forge a future together. Thus, the problems identified by the "tri-text" must be considered if reconciliation within the post-secular society is to occur in the way Habermas hopes.

Although the final chapter diverges from the previous chapter in the sense that it does not take the Frankfurt School's philosophy of religion as its primary subject, it however continues to develop such critical philosophy of religion within a new context, with a religion other than Judaism and Christianity, and it addresses a contemporary problem that has caused the loss of lives of many in both Europe and the Muslim world. In advancing theory beyond the first generation, and beyond the work of Habermas, I've attempted to show the continuing relevance of thinking about religion through philosophy, especially Critical Theory, which, as has been shown, takes seriously the claims of religion and theology, as religion and theology continue to be serious issues within the contemporary post-secular society.

Chapter 1: The Predecessors

It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is in service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form. Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.[1]

~ Karl Marx

The first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers developed much of their philosophy during times of mass misery, tragedy, and suffering. Amidst the barbarism of modernity, which included two world wars, the rise of fascism and totalitarian communism, genocide, the potential for nuclear annihilation and the development of the consumer society, they looked to philosophers, psychologists, historians, and sociologists for answers as to why historical materialism seemed to have failed and what social dynamics led to such outbreaks of human-created catastrophe. From the philosophical perspective of this study, it will be demonstrated that they also looked to religion and theology for answers to these and many other vexing issues. However, despite their reexamination of religion, they did not retreat back into it as a way of defending themselves from the meaninglessness of contemporary slaughter; there was no wishful return to an age of innocence before the ravages of the dialectic of Enlightenment. Rather, I claim that they set in abeyance the perspective of the conventional religious believer, and chose to engage religion through the philosophies of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche, all of whom represented the enlightened, scientific and

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[1] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right:* Introduction" in The Marx-Engels Reader. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), 54.

sometimes *atheistic* spirit that animated the 19th and early 20th century.[2] The first generation of Critical Theorists studied their predecessors in a critical fashion, not presupposing their critiques of religion. Although most of these thinkers would take an anti-religion stance, especially those on the political left such as Feuerbach and Marx, the first generation of Frankfurt School scholars – especially Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer – nevertheless refused to follow them into an *abstract negation* of religion but instead explored the deepest recesses of its being in order ascertain how its humanistic potentials can play a role in the liberation of mankind and where it contributes to his enslavement. In other words, where their predecessor saw the necessity for religion to be discarded, the Critical Theorists attempted to identify the dialectical core of religion, so as to rescue that which could be salvaged from the depth of its very core, i.e. those non-conforming impulses that propelled religion, at times in history, into being a force for human emancipation. Thus, their relationship to these prior philosophies of religion can best be viewed from the perspective of *determinate negation,* as opposed to *abstract negation*. Here I claim that the Frankfurt School both preserved the critiques of their predecessors while negating aspects of them that seem to be too absolute, too simplistic, or too anachronistic.

In order to demonstrate the different direction in which the early Frankfurt School takes from their immediate predecessors, it is helpful to briefly review the critiques of religion that each philosopher articulated. I will begin this section with the Left-Hegelians, i.e. Feuerbach, Marx and Lenin. Although these critiques will begin with an anthropological analysis of religion and end in a political critique, the trajectory of the thought is consistent and represents a fundamental development within leftist materialist thought. In the following chapter I will

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[2] Certainly Immanuel Kant's, G.W.F. Hegel's and Arthur Schopenhauer's contribution to their understanding of religion cannot be underestimated. However, it is well beyond the scope of this work to trace the genealogy of every influence. For now, I am most interested in their immediate predecessors as opposed to those who came before them even though their influence cannot be denied.

continue with two additional predecessors; I will turn to the psychological critique of religion as expressed by Freud and the historical-philosophical critique proposed by Nietzsche. Although the first generation of Critical Theorists will accept none of them in their totality, all of these philosophies contribute fundamentally to the Frankfurt School's critical philosophy of religion.

Ludwig Feuerbach's Anthropological Critique

Besides Marx, Ludwig Feuerbach was the most influential of the Young-Hegelians. His anthropological critique of religion, expressed in his "projection-thesis," which was first articulated in his book *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des Christenthums*), influenced Karl Marx so deeply that he seemed to have assumed Feuerbach had hammered the last nail in Christianity's (and religion's) coffin. Rooted in Georg. W. F. Hegel's philosophy of religion, but so far from it that Hegel would not have endorsed it, Feuerbach's psychological and materialist thesis can be summarized as such: the idea of God is essentially a creation of mankind's subjectivity, man's mental projections. In other words, the Hebrew Bible has the chronology backwards; God is made in the image of man and not the other way around (Genesis 1:27).[3] However, a fundamental question for Feuerbach is *why* does man make God and worship him?

Feuerbach theorizes that man, as a being of nature, has certain inherent needs beyond his material necessities. The needs that are the result of man having a consciousness, which cannot be fulfilled by nature alone, are often fulfilled through man's alienation of himself in the form of

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[3] According to Frederick Beiser, Hegel could not have accepted Feuerbach's denial of a transcendent divinity precisely because Hegel thought religion still had a role in reconciling the self and the world by demonstrating the imminent presence of the Divine within nature and history. If the transcendent God of Christianity was to be rejected, so too would Hegel's imminent God (Beiser, 2005: 137). Ironically, Charles Taylor claims that Hegel himself may have a case in claiming to be the first "Death of God" theologian. Through the development of Feuerbach and other Left-Hegelian thought, the attempt to "de-theologize" Christianity had its roots in Hegel's work, as he had already weakened the particulars of the Christian God transfiguring them into *Geist* (spirit) (Taylor, 1975: 495).

Divine beings. The conjuring of gods, myths, rituals, i.e. those things that brought meaning and purpose, plus provided man with an interpretation of reality and an orientation of action, were often beyond the realm of simple nature to provide, and thus the mind of man created what he needed to fill this void. In other words, the subjective anthropological needs of men were addressed by his individual (and often times collective) projections. Seemingly, man creates the most satisfactory existential answers to his anthropological needs. According to Feuerbach,

> Religion, at least the Christian, is the relation of man to himself, or more correctly to his own nature (i.e., his subjective nature); but a relation to it, viewed as a nature apart of his own. The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective – i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature (Feuerbach, 1989: 14).

As the product of self-alienation, these divine beings created by man's projection come to rule over man himself, as he projects onto them power, majesty, and goodness, thus emptying himself of these qualities. He unknowingly – yet often consciously – devalues his own worth by draining his being of all admirable qualities as he transfers such qualities to the divine, and consequently submits to its power, as he is convinced of its omnipotence.[4] In other words, while the fictive being became great, he became a wretch. Feuerbach writes that,

> in proportion as the divine subject is in reality human, the greater is the apparent difference between God and man; that is, the more, by reflection on religion, by theology, is the identity of the divine and human denied, and the human, considered as such, is depreciated. The reason of this is, that as what is positive in the conception of the divine being can only be human, the conception of man, as an object of consciousness, can only be negative. To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing. But he desires to be nothing in himself, because what he takes from himself is not lost to him, since it is preserved in God. Man has his being in God; why then should he have it in himself? (Feuerbach, 1989: 26).

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[4] Marx would later concur with his fellow Young-Hegelians on this point, claiming that the same phenomenon occurs in the labor process under the conditions of capitalism. See the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx & Engels, 1978: 72, 74).

Despite the fact that he is the *fons et origo* of such an omnipotent being and that the divine is simply the end product of anthropomorphism and the personification of humanity's *good* qualities, the individual is left feeling insignificant, powerless and dependent, unable to make sense of the world without guidance from above. Because of the God he creates, which comes to dominate his existence, he remains in a "childlike condition," unable to live autonomously – always in need of the guiding grace of the divine. As he increasingly longs to have a "personal" or "mystical" relationship with the divine, he unwittingly is furthering himself from himself. From this perspective man loses his autonomy and ability to direct his own life. "Man does not stand above this his necessary conception" Feuerbach states, but rather "it animates, determines, governs him" (Feuerbach, 1989: 20). For Feuerbach, the projection of man's greatest accomplishment onto a fictive being impoverishes his own existence to the point where he is an existential pauper (Feuerbach, 1989: 26). His emptying of himself of all "divine" qualities is a form of self-deprecation that he does at his own peril.[5] But Feuerbach is not satisfied with such a self-defeating anthropology. By unmasking the debilitating mental processes of mankind, Feuerbach wishes to undue man's self-crippling production of divinity.

Read carefully, Feuerbach's alienation and projection thesis can be seen as a form of reverse anthropomorphism – or *theomorphism*; instead of assigning human-like characteristics to God – who is supposed to be beyond all human-like characteristics in the Abrahamic traditions – Feuerbach reassigns those god-like "divine" characteristics back upon man. Where once it was thought that God was the sole author of mankind's destiny, through Feuerbach's exposing the anthropomorphism behind the theological veil, he liberated mankind from such heavenly fate

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[5] Feuerbach makes the argument that such good qualities of man are in fact "divine." If they were not divine, then the projection of those qualities onto a fictive being would not make them divine. In other words, if those qualities create a god, then those qualities are divine themselves. He says "The fact is not that a quality is divine because God has it, but that God has it because it is in itself divine; because without it God would be a defective being" (Feuerbach, 1989: 21).

and has consequently delivered to him the conditions for the possibility of a more abundant subjectivity. Like Prometheus, who stole fire from the Gods, Feuerbach attempted to steel back the human qualities that had been misappropriated by man's theological alienation. Through the knowledge of man's anthropological projections, the realization of which proved to be an important part of the Enlightenment's demythologization process, Feuerbach attempted to once again make mankind the "master" of his own fate.

In his theo-historical critique of religion, Feuerbach's analysis sheds light on a dynamic within religion that has often been criticized by humanist thinkers: that religious institutions and doctrines often attempt to create a feeling of deficiency within the individual's subjectivity and then proceed to claim that religion is the only way to overcome that deficiency. In this sense, religion creates a damaged subjectivity through its imposition of theological and moral categories and then in turn provides the comfort and consolation that is needed to survive in the light of that theologically induced sense of guilt, sense of inadequacy, sinfulness and terror. For example, Christianity's doctrine of original sin can be cited as being especially pernicious from the humanistic view of man's true nature. According to the Hebrew Bible, Adam and Eve were created with "original righteousness" (*Justitia Originalis*), which was lost due to their sin of disobedience; they ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil. Christian theologians, especially with the second Greco-Roman paradigm of Christianity, such Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine, saw the "fall of man," as having an import upon all subsequent generations: their natures were permanently corrupted by Adam's sin (Genesis 3:3-21). The scriptural foundation for this doctrine can be found not only in the Hebrew Bible (Psalm 51:5), but also in the letters of Apostle Paul (Romans 5:12-21).[6] In this letter to an early

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[6] In can also be found in 1st Corinthians 15:22.

Roman church, Paul elaborates on the corruption of mankind's nature that occurred due to Adam's disobedience. He states,

> Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned... Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come (Romans 5:12-14).

This section of Paul's letter establishes the depravity of humanity based on the sin of Adam – the mythological forefather. Although any particular individual may not be held personally responsible for any major violation of morality, their "nature" is nevertheless "sinful" as it has been corrupted via the removal of God's grace post-Fall. This retraction of grace subjects mankind to his natural condition: corruption (φθορά), i.e. "bodily decay," and death (θάνατος). However, man, according to many Christian denominations, retains his *free will* to engage in or reject sinful activities and thoughts. But this in no way overcomes or redeems him from the sinful nature he inherited from his forefathers. In order to accomplish that, Christianity, as Feuerbach pointed out, provides the answer: the acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Messiah (anointed redeemer) of mankind is the only way to transcend or conquer the sinful nature of man's being. After establishing mankind's corrupt nature, Paul's letter goes on to provide the cure for the spiritual sickness and deformity of man: grace.[7] He states,

> Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:18-21).

By first establishing the idea that mankind is flawed by nature, and then reinforcing that belief by providing the only cure for such a distorted and wounded subjectivity, religion captivates man

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[7] "Grace" can be defined as an "unmerited divine gift" or "divine assistance in regards to sanctification."

within its logic, and, it is assumed, some within institutional religion benefit from such captivity while the rest suffer because of it. Man does not live in relation to his God in isolation; there are more often than not institutional religious authorities that govern the formulation by which God is conceived and thought of. This too poses a problem for man's ability to live autonomously. It is reasonable to argue that through psychological manipulation, as Feuerbach has articulated, man not only becomes dependent upon his own projections, but he also becomes dependent on the managers of those projections, i.e. priests, rabbis, imams, and other authorities of organized religion.[8] Man becomes a psychological cripple of his own making, and in his attempt to overcome the crippled-ness he consequently subjects himself to the power of other human beings who promise salvation from his deficiencies and sinfulness. In this sense the individual is doubly enslaved, first to God – the product of his own projections, and second to those who control the "orthodox" articulations of such collective projections, i.e. the religious institutions. Therefore, the Enlightenment's demand on the individual is thus also twofold; first he must abandon any such claims that man's fundamental nature is flawed due to the actions of others, i.e. original sin, and second, that he must take authority over his own thoughts and thus liberate himself from the inherited irrational worldviews and their accompanying moral systems.

Rooted in the thought of the young Hegelians, Feuerbach optimistically believed that if the difference between "God and man, with which religion begins" can be shown to be the difference between "man with his own nature," mankind may have a chance to break out of his

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[8] Erich Fromm in his essay Prophets and Priests developed this idea further. He states, "the prophets live their ideas. The priests administer them to the people who are attached to the idea. The idea has lost its vitality. It has become a formula. The priests declare that it is very important how the idea is formulated; naturally the formulation becomes always important after the experience is dead; how else could one control people by controlling their thoughts, unless there is the "correct" formulation? The priests use the idea to organize men, to control them through controlling the proper expression of the idea, and when they have anesthetized man enough they declare that man is not capable of being awake and of directing his own life, and that they, the priests, act out of duty, or even compassion, when they fulfill the function of directing men who, if left to themselves, are afraid of freedom" (Fromm, 1981: 43-44).

chains of psychological slavery that keep him subservient to a God that doesn't exist outside of his own mind (Feuerbach, 1989: 33). Believing in the optimistic claims of the Enlightenment, that rational and humanistic knowledge of reality is liberational, and progress was inevitable, Feuerbach believed that irrational obscurantism of religion was an enemy of man's emancipation for it kept him in the dark concerning his own inherent worth, powers, and nobility. If man creates God in his own image, and devalues himself in the process, then God must become devalued in order for man to recover that which is rightfully his. He must empty God of all the attributes that once make him perfected – the sum of all admirable qualities – and thus restore to himself his own humanity. Thus the dethroning of God and the *abstract negation* of religion through the realization of man's alienation from himself is the precondition for mankind's full emancipation and actualization of his species-being.

Karl Marx's Political-Economic Critique of Religion

It would not be an exaggeration to say that religion has been one of the most powerful social forces in the history of mankind. From its first iterations, according to Jürgen Habermas, it had "disenchanted magic, overcame myth, sublimated sacrifice, and disclosed the secret" of being (Habermas, 2003: 113).[9] Religion has shaped the defining characteristics of given civilizations; the greatest of architectural achievements have been built in its name; it has motivated and sparked hundreds of the most bloody conflicts and wars; it has inspired poets, saints, mystics, and prophets to create man's most enduring works of art, literature, sacred texts,

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[9] Habermas writes of religion as a propulsive force while discussing profane reason's acknowledgement of religion's ability to disclose and advance human intellectual and moral capacities. He writes, "it [profane reason] knows that the profanation of the sacred begins with those world religions" which have already determinately negated magic, myth, and sacrifice (Habermas, 2003: 113).

music, rituals, and law; and it has guided and articulated mankind's moral compass ever since man began to think abstractly about "right" and "wrong," as opposed to mere efficiency of techné. So, in a word, religion is "dialectical," – encompassing both good and bad. Yet for Marx, the problem of religion is not how to rescue the good, but rather he focused his attention on the broader problem of religion as *ideology*, or the false consciousness that masked hidden motivations and camouflaged social contradictions, the inversion of subject and object. So in the much larger struggle against the prevailing ideologies that shackle man to his alienated life, how might one go about de-masking religion and dethroning the gods that became so entrenched within human history?

Seeing that religion, in this case Christianity, had already been fragmented by the Protestant Reformation, the advent of the Bourgeoisie and the development of capitalism, Marx believed that the last great attack began with Kant and Hegel and their subsequent followers, the Left-Hegelians. Feuerbach especially had de-anthropomorphized the Gods – demoting them from the heavens to simple processes of man's mind. Science, even as developed in the mid-19th century, undercut the authority of the church by questioning its dogmatic claims about the material world and by its exposing religion's epistemological deficiencies. In the everyday experience of the masses, the wretched conditions created by slavery, feudalism, and capitalism demonstrated that the world was godless and god – if in existence – was worldless. Unlike the claims of Christianity with its *paracletus* (παράκλητος), who is present and active within the lives of the believers at all times, history seemed to show no presence of the divine; God empirically and unjustly remains *deus obsconditus* or at best *deus otiosus*.[10] *Theodicy*, the impenetrable question of God's justice in the world (or lack-thereof), reveals God's supposed indifference to the suffering of mankind, as human suffering continues unabated without the

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[10] *Deus Obsconditus* - "absent God"; *Deus Otiosus* - "idle God."

interference of divine mercy.[11] However, Marx does not show such indifference. Where God and his followers, particularly the Christians, have failed to create a world which actualizes justice, equality, and freedom, Marx and the communists take up the task; they are its inheritors, albeit materialistically. They will not wait for the Messiah to reconcile and pacify the world by creating an earthly "Kingdom of Heaven," rather they will create a world the Messiah may endorse if he so chooses to enter into human history (Kee, 1999: 131-133). Either way, the "eschatological reservation" (*eschatologischer Vorbehalt*) of Apostle Paul is the not the same for Marx. For Marx, the precondition for the bringing about a *worldly* classless society is first the "criticism of heaven," which must then be reconfigured towards the "criticism of earth," i.e. "the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 54). The most effective tool of this revolution is not science, but rather philosophy. For Marx, it must "serve history" by "unmask[ing] human self-alienation in secular form" as it "has been unmasked in its sacred form" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 54).

Building on the work of both G.W.F. Hegel and his fellow Left-Hegelian Feuerbach, Karl Marx's materialist critique of religion took a decidedly political and economic direction. Accepting Feuerbach's anthropological claim that man alienates himself in the form of God, Marx redirects Feuerbach's materialist reform of the Hegelian dialectic, now directing the *Umkehrungsmethode* (inversion method) that was previously directed towards religion into issues of political economy (Gregor, 1965: 66-80; Goldstein, 2006: 20).[12] For Marx, the

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[11] Theodicy, according to Habermas, engenders respect even from profane reason. He writes, "*profane*, but *nondefeatist* reason, by contrast, has too much respect for the glowing embers, rekindled time, and again by the issue of theodicy, to offend religion (Habermas, 2003: 113).

[12] In Marx and Engel's, *The Holy Family,* they give homage to Feuerbach's anthropological reduction of religion and God, i.e. his turn to materialist explanation of religion. They write "but who, then, revealed the mystery of the 'system'? *Feuerbach*. Who annihilated the dialectics of concepts, the war of the gods that was known to the philosophers alone? *Feuerbach*. Who substituted for the old lumber and for 'infinite self-consciousness' if not, indeed, *'the significance of man'* – as thought man had another significance than that of being man! - at any rate '*Man*'? *Feuerbach*, and only *Feuerbach*" (Marx and Engels, 1975: 93). However, Marx did not just inherit

realization of man's anthropological alienation of himself into the heavens is insufficient to liberate him from earthly bondage and oppression; he must direct that materialist critique towards the social, political and economic realms. In other words, Marx wants to go beyond the anthropological critique of Feuerbach – his *interpretation* [interpretiert] *of the world* – and wants to critique the material reality of religion and its role in class relations, in order to *change* [zu verändern] *the world*. He contends that a simple unmasking of man's alienation in the form of religion is not enough, for it doesn't point in the direction of the overthrowing of the material conditions that serve as the enabling force for man's anthropological projections.

Although Marx's critical analysis of religion is often simplified to his axiom that religion is the "opiate of the masses," his thoughts on religion are extremely complex, informative, and sophisticated (Marx and Engels, 1978: 54). Beginning with his mystical "divine spark" thesis in the first of his two Abitur essays, written while still a teenager, to his mature work in which his thoughts on religion had essentially ossified, Marx paints a complicated picture of religion that once was a force for liberation but had become a stifling impediment to mankind's modern emancipation and realization.[13]

Because it is beyond the scope of this work to address all of Marx's thoughts on religion, I will limit my analysis to what I believe are the most representative aspects of his thinking for

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Feuerbach's critique of religion, but he wished to transcend (*aufheben*) it. Marx would critique Feuerbach's resolution of the "religious essence into human essence" and his belief that the criticism of religion was finished. For Marx, the criticism of religion was just the starting point and not the goal in-and-of-itself. See Andrew McKinnon's "Opium as Dialectic of Religion" in Warren S. Goldstein's *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 11-29.

[13] In 1835, Marx writes in his abitur examination "When we consider the history of the individual, or the nature of man, we see admittedly always a spark of the Divinity in his chest, an enthusiasm for the good, a striving for knowledge, a longing for the truth. Alone, the sparks of the Eternal are suffocated by the flame of desire, passion, and greed; the enthusiasm for virtue is stunned, and stilled, anesthetized, and overpowered by the tempting voice of sin. It is mocked and sneered at, as soon as life has let us feel its whole power. This striving for knowledge is repressed by a low striving for earthly goods. The longing for the truth is extinguished through the sweetly flattering power of the lie. And so man stands there, the only being in nature, who does not fulfill its purpose; the only member in the universe of creation, who is not worthy of the God, who created it." As quoted in Rudolf J. Siebert's "The Future of Religion: Toward the City of Being" in Michael R. Ott's (Ed.) *The Dialectics of the Religious and the Secular: Studies on the Future of Religion.* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 14-15.

the purposes of this study. Unlike many other Marxists, who believe Marx's mature work is the most important in understanding his overall historical-materialist philosophy, most of his writings on religion occur before the writing of *Das Kapital* (1867). Because of this, I will focus most of my analysis on his earlier "humanistic-philosophical" writings as they provide the key material for his overall criticism of religion.

In Marx's letter to "R." (September, 1843), dubbed *For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,* he argues that "we have to concern ourselves just as much with the other side, the theoretical existence of man, in other words to make religion, science, etc., the objects of our criticism" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 13). For Marx, philosophy had become "worldly" and although it was now taking its rightful place in the "stress of the battle," he believed it could not establish any "dogmatic flag," but had a critical function as the grand inquisitor of all things (Marx & Engels, 1978: 13). In other words, philosophy, according to Marx, had a *negative* role in society; it is the means by which we "find the new world only through criticism of the old" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 13). Arguing that religion and politics are the starting-point for this process, as well as the most effective method of influencing German contemporaries – because these are the two subjects that arouse interest – Marx would later argue that the only way to destroy the old distinctions between religions, especially between Christianity and Judaism (between the Christian and the Jew), was to "abolish religion" altogether and make the state neutral in the affairs of religion, as had been done in the "free states of North America" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 28-30). Religious affiliations, even at the level of cultural identity, i.e. non-practicing believers who culturally identify themselves with a given religion, are impediments toward *universal emancipation* and belongs to the "old world" which Marx was attempting to negate. In his essay *On the Jewish Question* (1843)*,* Marx believed the ancient antagonism

between the Christian and the Jew, which had festered in mistrust, hatred, and religiously inspired violence for millennia, could only be remedied through the total abolition of religion; in other words, the dissolution of the religions that distinguish between Christian and Jew. He wrote,

> The most stubborn form of the opposition between Jew and Christian is the religious opposition. How is an opposition resolved? By making it impossible. And how is religious opposition made impossible? By abolishing religion. As soon as Jew and Christian come to see in their respective religions nothing more than stages in the development of the human mind – snake skins which have been cast off by history, and man as the snake who clothed himself in them – they will no longer find themselves in religious opposition, but in a purely critical, scientific and human relationship. Science will then constitute their unity. But scientific oppositions are resolved by science itself (Marx & Engels, 1978: 28).

There are a couple of important points that should be highlighted in this passage. First, Marx is attempting to identify that which artificially and unnecessarily divides people; in this case religion is the culprit that creates separations that hinder both the emancipation of the state from religion and the emancipation of mankind – universally – from negative social forces, especially class hierarchies. Consequently, Marx does not see the historical (religious) divisions between the Christian and the Jew as being somehow natural or scientific but rather the result of outdated thinking, pre-scientific, irrational, and ultimately the product of antagonistic modes of production. This, he believes, can be overcome through the understanding that religion is – and this is where he gives us his first definition of religion – "nothing more than stages in the development of the human mind."[14] In other words, when Christians and Jews ascend to the level of modern scientific and/or dialectical thought, they can no longer hold onto the belief that religious affiliation is anything more than an unnecessary social construct that manifests itself in a variety of social structures which hinder universal human emancipation. In light of Marx's class theory – by which the true object of solidarity is one's class within society – nation and

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[14] Sigmund Freud will come to a very similar conclusion.

culture, just like religion, are also artificial constructs that divide mankind and hinder his "universal emancipation," as they camouflage the deepest and most entrenched antagonism: class conflict. Echoing Feuerbach, Marx claims that religion is nothing but the "snake skin" that man mistakenly clothed himself in; it is not a scientific reality, but a metaphysical and/or social construct of his own making, under which he has placed himself. However, scientific and dialectical thought, which demonstrates that religion belongs to an earlier period in human development, becomes the common language of both the "Christian" and the "Jew" who can no longer accept those titles in light of modern epistemology, science and/or philosophy (Marx & Engels, 1978: 28). By removing religion as the source of artificial friction, modernity, as exemplified by the Enlightenment's reason, secularity, and science, liberates both the Jew and the Christian from their historical antagonism.

However, Marx is not satisfied to send theology into the dustbin of history, he must move his critical analysis toward the issues of the state and its relationship with religion. Throughout most of European history, the state has been intertwined with the church, both as a force of social statics and legitimation. This has been especially true for the Roman Catholic Church and later Lutheran and Calvinist Protestantism in Northern Europe. The religious association of the state determined the relationship of the state to individuals and groups. In the "Christian State," Jews were either second-class citizens or citizenship was out rightly denied. Jews were always in a precarious position within states that claimed to embody the Christian religion, especially since the Jews were considered "God-killers" since Jesus of Nazareth was *officially* deified in the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. Since Christians gained influence under the Emperor Constantine in 313 CE, when the Edict of Milan made Christianity legal within the Roman Empire, and later when Emperor Theodosius I in 391 CE made Nicenean Christianity the "official" religion of the

Roman Empire, Jews, Pagans, and heretics (all non-Nicenean versions of Christianity) lived under the threat of violence and death.[15] For the most part, pre-Christian paganism and the most dominant forms of heresy had been eradicated, but the Jews, who represented the stubborn "religion of the father," remained defiantly in conflict with the "religion of the son."[16] Although they were already fixtures in the old Roman Empire, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Jewish Temple in 70 CE, Jews became an ever-increasing presence in Europe – or as it was called until the modern period "Christendom."[17] As *racial* categories were not developed until the modern period with the advent of biological sciences, the form of anti-Semitism that was practiced in much of Europe was predominately religious in nature: it was religious anti-Judaism, not scientific anti-Semitism. As such, religious differences, especially over the status of Jesus of Nazareth and his second-coming (as the Messiah), remained the biggest point of opposition between Christians and Jews, which for Marx, was an unnecessary impediment to universal emancipation.

Marx's analysis concerning the neutral stance of the state towards religion can be situated within the broader Enlightenment movement that emancipated the Jews from their legally

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[15] See A. James Reimer, "Constantine: From Religious Pluralism to Christian Hegemony" in *The Future of Religion: Toward a Reconciled Society.* Ed. Michael R. Ott. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007.

[16] See chapter XVIII of *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno et al. They write, "Christianity as the religion of the "Son" contains an implicit antagonism against the religion of the "Father" and its surviving witnesses, the Jews. This antagonism, continuous since St. Paul, is enhanced by the fact that the Jews, by clinging to their own religious culture, rejected the religion of the Son and by the fact that the New Testament puts upon them the blame for Christ's death. It has been pointed out repeatedly by great theologians, from Tertullian and Augustine to Kierkegaard, that the acceptance of Christianity by the Christians themselves contains a problematic and ambiguous element, engendered by the paradoxical nature of the doctrine of God become man, the Infinite finite. Unless this element is consciously put into the center of the religious conception, it tends to promote hostility against the outgroup. … the "weak" Christians resent bitterly the openly negative attitude of the Jews toward the religion of the Son, since they feel within themselves traces of this negative attitude based upon the paradoxical, irrational nature of their creed – an attitude which they do not dare to admit and which they must therefore put under a heavy taboo in others (Adorno et al, 1950: 728). Additionally, the hatred of the Jews takes on a more corporal aspect; for Christians, as long as the Jews refused to accept Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and *Filius Dei* (Son of God), Jesus' second coming would not occur, thus Christians had to continue to suffer within the miserable fallen world. Thus the Jews were directly responsible for the suffering of generations of Christians.

[17] "Christendom," or the "dominion of Christ" extended to much of North Africa until the Muslims conquered it and converted the population to Islam in the 7th through 9th centuries.

imposed, and sometimes self-imposed, ghettoization. The abstraction of church influence from the Bourgeois states – the "separation of church and state" – gave way to the concept of the *citizen* free of the pre-political foundation of religion as a precondition for citizenship. Thus Jews could become full citizens within a state that no longer classify them by their religion.[18] Rooted in the Bourgeois Enlightenment, which revolted against the church's legitimation of the rule of the aristocracy, Marx sees this move as a step towards both the universal emancipation of mankind and the emancipation of the state. He writes that,

> The political emancipation of the Jew or the Christian – of the religious man in general – is the emancipation of the state from Judaism, Christianity, and religion in general. The state emancipates itself from religion in its own particular way, in the mode which corresponds to its nature, by emancipating itself from the state religion; that is to say, by giving recognition to no religious and affirming itself purely and simply as a state. To be politically emancipated from religion is not to be finally and completely emancipated from religion, because political emancipation is not the final and absolute form of human emancipation (Marx & Engels, 1978: 32).

For Marx, the Enlightenment's turn towards *universality* of citizenship based on the status of simply being human as opposed to the *particularity* of religious affiliation – which would then determine an individual's rights, duties, and obligation differently depending on religious creed – is an aspect of the Bourgeois Enlightenment that must be preserved and overcome in the Marxian society to come. Just as in Bourgeois' thoughts on religion, Marx argues religion becomes a matter of civil society. Being banned from the "sphere of public law," it exerts itself between individuals in their private lives (Marx & Engels, 1978: 35). He states that

> religion is no longer the spirit of the state... it has become the spirit of civil society, of the sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. It is no longer the essence of community, but the essence of differentiation. It has become what it was at the beginning, an expression of the fact that man is separated from the community, from himself and from other men (Marx & Engels, 1978: 35).

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[18] However, even if the state becomes neutral in the matters of religious affiliation, this in no way guarantees that the culture or society will follow suit. Anti-Semitism simply becomes "privatized," a matter of civil society and personal preference.

Marx draws an important insight in this passage; from the Bourgeois Enlightenment onward, religion no longer served as the pre-political foundation for the community, nor a collective social adhesive; that was replaced by the state – which is now the "spirit" that represents the collectivity of citizenship. Religion has been pushed into the realm of the private life – civil society – where the individual "acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 34). For Marx, it is the "atheistic state, the democratic state" which "relegates religion among the other elements of civil society," as the "Christian state" cannot be truly realized (Marx & Engels, 1978: 36-38). Being a student of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right,* Marx knew that by pushing religion out of its privileged place in the state, where it has a monopoly over the spiritual lives of its citizens, it will now have to compete with other religions, philosophies, as well as secular thought, for the minds of those same citizens. By privatizing religion, and thus making it an affair of civil society, or even an affair of the market, the Enlightenment diminished religion's *political* prowess by reducing it to its mere particularity; it becomes one among many within a pluralistic society and it has been robbed of its ability to *demand* adherence and/or obedience. Although "religious liberty" – not liberation from religion – may result in the flourishing of religion in the private sphere, the forcible extraction of religion from the state depletes it of its power to demand and expect compliance, as there is no force of law to enforce such compliance. Furthermore, if the arena of civil society is where individuals go to realize their particularity through contestation with all other particularities, as Hegel posits, and religion becomes another opponent in the social "war of all against all" within civil society, it evaporates its claim to absolute truth: it must defend itself against all other forms of religious and non-religious thought as it no longer has the coercive support of the state (which wields the

36

threat of violence).[19] The pluralism of civil society, which is the reality of multiple truth-possibilities, is a form of bourgeois violence against religion's tendency toward truth-monopolization; it is *divide et impera.* This political emancipation therefore "leaves religion in existence," but it no longer occupies a "privileged" space (Marx & Engels, 1978: 39). Yet, even if by emancipating the state from religion and placing the later within the sphere of civil society - "expelling it from the sphere of public law to that of private law" – Marx does not believe this is yet human emancipation, but merely a form of *political* emancipation (Marx & Engels, 1978: 35). Human emancipation takes a different view of religion.

Religion, as Marx believes, is rooted in human alienation, it must be overcome if the true emancipatory potential of humanity should be realized. "Human emancipation," Marx states, "will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being;* and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 46). Religion, and the alienation it stems from and reinforces, stands as an impediment to this kind of emancipation and actualization of man as man.

Just as the Bourgeoisie and their revolution wished to annihilate the capacity of religion to legitimize the aristocracy, so too does Marx wish to annihilate the possibility of the Bourgeoisie – or Bruno Bauer's idea of a "Christian State" – to functionalizing religion in order to legitimate its rule (Marx & Engels, 1978: 37-38). Marx thus argues for the *total abolition* of religion as a means to further human emancipation beyond the simply political. The potential of

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[19] G. W. F. Hegel. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right.* Ed. Allen W. Wood. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 220-226.

religion to ally itself with those with the "biggest battalions" remains an every present threat within bourgeois society.[20] Although as a class they are not guided by "revealed religion," but rather through "reason" and economic self-interests, the Bourgeoisie historically recognized the potential of religion as a potent social force for social statics, i.e. the maintenance of the status quo. In other words, religion can be put in the service of *social statics*. This critique becomes especially poignant in Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.*

In Marx's most famous piece on religion, he begins his essay reminding his reader of Feuerbach's devastating critique of religion. He writes,

> For Germany, the criticism of religion has been largely completed; and the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism. The profane existence of error is compromised once its celestrial *oratio pro aris et focis* has been refuted. Man, who has found in the fantastic reality of heaven, where he sought a supernatural being, only his own reflection, will no longer be tempted to find only the semblance of himself – a non-human being – where he seeks and must seek his true reality. The basis of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again (Marx & Engels, 1978: 53).[21]

Marx seems to assume Feuerbach's critique as being the last word on religion; his anthropological demythologization of religion returns man back to himself and in doing so he has overcome his theological alienation. Yet for Marx, that is an incomplete emancipation. He is most interested in the political-economic aspect of religion and how it has become an obstacle on the road to man's self-realization. For him, man is not simply an "abstract being" who lives outside the reality of his material existence; he "is the human world, the state, [and] society" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 53). As such, modern man is the culmination of human existence, human experiences, and the existential terror of temporality; the reality of life has caused man to create religion as a way of coping with trials and tribulation associated being a being-in-existence.

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[20] Voltaire: "*On dit que Dieu est toujours pour les gros bataillons*." (It is said that God is always on the side of the biggest battalions).

[21] "*Oratio Pro Aris et Focis*" - "Speech for alters and hearths" (For God and country).

Because of this, Marx believes that to struggle against religion is to struggle against the conditions that produce the need for religion. In his most famous statement on religion, Marx writes,

> Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of a soulless condition. It is the opium of the people [*das Opium des Volkes*] (Marx & Engels, 1978: 54).

What Marx is attempting to establish in this passage is twofold. First, real human suffering occurs in this world and that that suffering has origins both in nature and history, especially social organization (history as class antagonism). In other words, some suffering is caused by unnecessary conditions and social forces created by history while other are inherent challenges associated with being existent and simultaneously a thinking-thing (a creature with consciousness), i.e. sickness, aging, death, etc. Secondly, religion comes about *sui generis* because of real human suffering. It is not simply an artificial construct of the ruling classes, which is imposed upon the masses, but rather the finite and suffering masses, as Feuerbach discovered, create such fantasies in order to anesthetize their anxieties and fears about living; it is an existential painkiller. The dialectical nature of religion is that it is the product of suffering while simultaneously it is the grand inquisition against the origins of such suffering. It is not per se, in Marx's critique, the *origin* of suffering; rather it is epiphenomenal. If we can say that one of the essential concerns, or "secret motivations," of Marxism is the problem of human suffering, especially under the conditions of "capitalist class antagonisms," and the desire to alleviate such suffering through the creation of an earthly society beyond exploitation, beyond alienation, beyond domination, and beyond the realm of necessity, then we can understand why Marx, while condemning religion as an epiphenomenon, does not equally condemn those who truly believe in religion, but rather wishes to liberate those believers from their oppressive

39

conditions, which in turn liberates them from their religious illusions (Ott, 2009: 173). Because the world is heartless, or "totally dark" to use Horkheimer's phrase, and is continuing to get worse under the dehumanizing conditions of capitalism, which produced the *sheer misery and material squalor* that Engels documented in his own work, Marx comprehends why many people believe the anesthetizing claims of religion (Engels, 1892). Religion was consolation – or as Andrew McKinnon argues, it was understood to be *medicine* – in the face of sickening conditions (Goldstein, 2006: 14-16). Either way, Marx was skeptical of consoling religion: to be consoled by religion is to compromise with – or even capitulate to – that same oppressive and "heartless world," i.e. the unnecessary and unjust conditions that produce the very need for consolation. In this sense, religion has become an untrue ideology with a social function: it forestalls any radical change in the unfavorable and misery-inducing social conditions that produce the need for conciliatory religion. In light of his analysis, Marx speaks of religion as an "opiate": a narcotic that "dulls" the consciousness and makes the pain of existence bearable. In order to get a better understanding of Marx's philosophical use of the term "opiate," we have to return briefly to Immanuel Kant who is the original source of this claim.

In a rather insightful note in his book *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,* Kant introduces the concept of "opiate religion" as a tool for dulling the consciousness of the individual as opposed to being "sharpened" when confronted with what needs to be done. He writes,

> The aim of those who have a clergyman summoned to them at the end of life is normally to find in him a *comforter*, not on account of their *physical* sufferings brought on by the last illness or even by the natural fear in the face of death (for on this score death itself, which puts an end to life, can be the comforter) but because of the *moral* sufferings, the reproaches of their conscience. At such time, however, conscience ought rather to be *stirred up* or *sharpened*, in order that whatever good yet to be, or whatever consequences of past evil still left to be undone (repaired for), will not be neglected, in accordance with the warning, "Agree with thine

adversary" (with him who has a legal right against you) "quickly, while thou art in the way with him" (i.e. so long as you still live), "lest he deliver thee to the judge" (after death), etc. But to administer opium to conscience instead, as it were, is to be guilty of a crime against the human being himself and against those who survive him, and is totally contrary to the purpose for which such support given to conscience at life's end can be held necessary (Kant, 2010: 93).

While Marx sees the political-economic dangers of opiate religion, Kant is more concerned for the moral failings of individuals while facing death. Nevertheless, the concept of "opiate religion" remains the same between both philosophers. Notice that Kant uses the idea to denote a form of religion that "dulls" the conscience. In doing so, this conciliatory form of religion reconciles the individual to the world *as-it-is,* including Kant's moral deficiencies and Marx's political economic injustices. In Kant's example, the *world-as-it-is* is a world with moral issues left unresolved. The individual should have made right those "past evil[s] still left... undone"; he should have mended the fences with the "adversaries"; and he should do "whatever good" that has "yet to be done." In other words, the form of religion that was necessary according to Kant, was the kind that propels the individual to *change* the world and make it *morally* reconciled through that change – if only at the level of the individual. However, what the "clergyman" does is administer a religion that makes the individual accept the *world-as-it-is* with all its moral unresolvedness. For Kant, religion that opiates the individual when it should sharpen his conscience is a "crime against the human being himself and against those who survive him," as it leaves the world in an antagonistic state when such antagonisms could have been resolved had the proper kind of religion encouraged the individual to rectify his moral failures. The essential flaw of opiate religion is that it arrests the individual from transforming that which enslaves him in the present conditions. Despite Kant's claim that there are two forms of religion, one that "dulls" and one that "sharpens" the consciousness, Marx's analysis doesn't favor one form of religion over the other. Just as Marx and Engels critique all forms of ideology (false

consciousness) for having a similar reconciling/resigning effect, all forms of religion must be abolished in order for mankind to realize himself. Marx clearly does not accept the idea that there is a good form of religion, one that would motivate the individual to transform his environment, but rather sees all religion through the prism of the opiate.[22] In this sense, Kant puts forward a more dialectical analysis of religion than Marx, who remains religiously monotone.[23]

Again, following Feuerbach's thesis concerning man's self-alienation in religion, Marx attempts to unveils the illusionary happiness that religion provides in its opiate state, thus creating the possibility of revealing the nature of true human happiness – the un-alienated and fulfilled life. He states, "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness." He continues, "the call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, the embryonic criticism of this vale of tears of which religion is the halo" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 54). Man in his self-alienation denies his true reality – his true *species-being* – and therefore clothes himself within religious garb as to avoid the painful nakedness of such reality. However, Marx here demands that the ugliness of the nakedness be interrogated, that the horror and terror of reality be confronted in order for true happiness to be a real possibility for mankind. As long as man disguises himself behind the *persona* of religion, he excludes the possibility of his own true fulfillment, his own true realization and his own true happiness. Therefore, the precondition

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[22] Engels however wrote positively of the faith of Thomas Müntzer in his book *The Peasant War in Germany*. This short book was first published in the *Neue-Rheinische Zeitung Revue* that was edited by Karl Marx. It was meant to highlight the continuity of class struggle in Europe in light of the revolutionary moment in 1848-1849. See Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach.* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 114-118. Also see Rudolf J. Siebert 's "The Future of Religion: Toward the City of Being" in Michael R. Ott's (Ed) *The Dialectics of the Religious and the Secular: Studies on the Future of Religion.* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 30-32.

[23] In addition to Kant's use of the term "opiate" when speaking about religion, Georg. W. F. Hegel's 1827 Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion views Hinduism as the opiate religion of fantasy.

for the emancipation of humanity is first the emancipation of the individual from the illusions of religion, for to be "disillusioned" with religion is to see reality; to see the life-denying conditions produced by capitalist social organization. In doing so, man will "regain his reason" and "revolve about himself as his own true sun" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 54). Once the veil of religion is lifted, man can finally begin to embrace himself as his own true goal.[24] In doing so, he will realize what really oppresses him: capitalist exploitation, domination and class conflict.

Towards the end of Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, he introduces the agent of radical change – the entity by which history will be fulfilled. Although sounding strikingly theological and/or eschatological, it is in fact very earthly. The proletariat, or the working class, determinately negates the Messiah as the agent of social change in Marx's thought, or as Habermas wrote in discussing Horkheimer's theory of religion, "the spirit of the Gospel was now to reach worldly fulfillment through the march of history" as opposed to Divine and/or Messianic intervention (Habermas, 2002: 98).

Without ever explicitly admitting so, in many ways, Marx's philosophy retains certain liberational tendencies and impulses that were originally expressed via religious semantic and semiotic material. His philosophy had learned from theology, and a glowing ember of his early theological writing remained afire in his secular political-philosophy. The longing to negate the world-as-it-is and bring about a reconciled or "redeemed" society can be witnessed in his secular philosophy and revolutionary praxis. Gone are the theological promises of the *parousia* (παρουσία - "second coming" or "presence") of the Messiah – he has become irrelevant in the life of contemporary man with his empiricism, rationalism and other enlightened forms of epistemology. The revolutionary class, the Proletariat, is the modern bearer of the promise for a

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[24]   Religion is certainly only one source of alienation in the life of man. As he argued in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, man has to still overcome the political-economic force of capitalism to realize himself.

43

future utopian society. Consequently, the shadow of theology remains visible in Marx's thought when looking at how he describes the proletariat as the "universal" "redeemer" of mankind.

> A class must be formed which has radical chains, a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general. There must be formed a sphere of society which claims no traditional status but only a human status, a sphere which is not opposed to particular consequences but is totally opposed to the assumptions of the German political system; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, without, therefore, emancipating all these other spheres, which is, in short, a total loss of humanity and which can only redeem itself by a *total redemption of humanity.* This dissolution of society, as a particular class, is the proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1978: 64).[25]

From the perspective of Jewish, Christian and Islamic theology, the only entity that can "totally" redeem humanity is the Messiah, for it is only he that can reach back into history and resurrect the dead (Benjamin, 1978: 312; Scholem, 1971). "Total redemption of humanity" inherently includes all of those who have come before: the *dead* of history.[26] But what does this form of religious redemption mean and is it the same for Marx?

In traditional Christian thought, redemption has to do with the deliverance from sin, suffering and death – that these very human experiences will be no more and that the individual will be reconciled with the divine, i.e. they will have *apocatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις), or "*restitutio in pristinum statum*" (restoration of original condition). Even the dead will be returned to the Adamic state of union with the divine.[27] Clearly this cannot be identical for Marx's *materialist* philosophy, in which the dead are not resurrected, but remain dead – lost to history. Marx's redemption is secular; it is redemption *within* history and not the ending *of* history

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[25] My emphasis.

[26] This will become an important theme for Walter Benjamin's philosophy of religion. See his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.* pg. 253-264.

[27] Although this is a complex field of study within the various Abrahamic faiths, the Jewish tradition generally sees "redemption" as being the overcoming of *galut* (גלות – "exile"), both spiritual and physical (from Israel).

through the eschatological entrance of the divine. Marx's redemption is an anthropological redemption; it is the end-point of the class struggle that has existed throughout mankind's bloody history; it is the actualization of man's species-being in a society that is constructed in congruence with that species-being.[28] Just as the Messiah in traditional Judeo-Christian thought "emancipates" through its breaking into history, so too the proletariat "emancipates all" through its own realization (Marx & Engels, 1978: 64-65).[29] For the proletariat to redeem humanity is for the proletariat to realize itself by bringing about the conditions for its own abolition. Such realization is a society in which the category of "proletariat" no longer exists precisely because there are no classes against which it can define itself as the "proletariat." Therefore, the classless society can be read as a secular translation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Christianity, albeit rooted in material possibilities – which includes it's realization *before* death – and not theological hopes.[30]

As the agent of social change is not the Messiah for Marx, but rather the proletariat, so too this agent of social change must wield different weapons. Gone are the armies of angels that accompany the Messiah's fulfillment of human history, and in its place comes a very earthly philosophy. Marx states that "as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the

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[28] From the *Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 473).

[29] It emancipates both the proletariat from its exploitation and oppression and the ruling class from its chains that burden it as exploiters and oppressors.

[30] It is interesting to note that Jesus of Nazareth's vision of the Kingdom of Heaven is also classless precisely because the ruling class is barred from its entrance. Similar to Marx's class struggle, where the Proletariat, which represents the "liberating class par excellence," opposes the class that "concentrates in itself all the evils of society," so too does Christian eschatology embody the same dynamics (Marx & Engels, 1978: 63). Those who were the ruling class are excluded from eternal life in the Gospels, just as Marx makes their existence impossible in communism. In the Gospels, it is the poor, the broken, the sick, the hungry, the suffering, and the socially marginalized who will inherit the kingdom (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). The same can be said about Marx's communism. The inherent class antagonism within Jesus' teaching is clear in the Gospel of Luke. In it, Jesus states "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh... But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation [already in this life]. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6:20-25). In other words, those who are excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven are also those who "concentrate in itself all the evils of society" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 63).

proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 65). Prayer, fasting, ritual, etc. are no longer the tools by which the victims of history and class domination enter into the struggle against oppression, but through historical materialism – or dialectical materialism – the exploited and oppressed fight against their oppressors. As such, philosophy becomes the midwife of emancipation: "philosophy can only be realized by the abolition of the proletariat, and the proletariat can only be abolished by the realization of philosophy" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 65). As Marx notes in his *Theses on Feuerbach,* in theses I and IV, this emancipation gets itself done not simply by de-masking religion for what it is – self-alienation – as Feuerbach limited himself to, but rather such a critique must be directed through "revolutionary" means against the very earthly conditions that determine man's need for such alienation (Marx & Engels, 1978: 143, 144). Revolutionary praxis against the gatekeepers of emancipation, the ruling class, is the only way to fully liberate mankind from his chains. Since man's longing for freedom no longer expresses itself in religious language, but rather in secular garb, it must now engage in a conflict against the "cleavages and self-contradictions" within secular society that resist his emancipation (Marx & Engels, 1978: 144).[31]

Religion, from the perspective of Marx, can no longer help in this emancipation, but that realization did not stop him from allowing the liberational potential of religion to migrate into secular historical-materialist philosophy. Although the *content*, i.e. the actors, methods, and weapons have changed, the *longing* for liberation from the drudgeries, horrors and terrors of human existence remains the same. The longing for liberation is so often found in various religious traditions, which impelled millions of people for thousands of years to create a society

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[31] Horkheimer wrote a similar statement about the transference of revolutionary praxis from the religious to the secular. He stated, "Good will, solidarity with wretchedness, and the struggle for a better world have now thrown off their religious garb. The attitude of today's martyrs is no longer patience but action; their goal is no longer their own immortality in the afterlife but the happiness of men who come after them and for whom they know how to die" (Horkheimer, 2002: 130). We will return to this theme later in this study.

that could be endorsed by the divine – a *utopia* per se – can still be found deeply embedded within Marx's secular philosophy, despite the fact that he would have not seen his dialectical materialist philosophy in those terms. As it once motivated the religious, it now motivates the secular (Horkheimer, 2002: 130). In reality, Marx's philosophy determinately negates (*bestimmte negation*) religion while it simultaneously calls for its *abstract* negation; the "wisdom of the world" replaces the "wisdom of the other-world," but not as thoroughly as Marx thought, as the "image of perfect justice" both animates the praxis of the revolutionary Marxists as well as many members of religious communities who maintain the idea of a more just and reconciled world (Boer, 2012: 53-67; Horkheimer, 2002: 129-131).

Lenin's Spiritual Home-Brew

Lenin's influence on the "first generation" of the Frankfurt School is less concrete, but his modifications to Marxist theory were extremely influential on the political-left during the formulation of the early Critical Theory. The early history of the Institute for Social Research had a substantial relationship with more "orthodox" Marxists in Moscow, especially with the work of Felix Weil and Carl Grünberg (Jay, 1996: 12-13; Wiggershaus, 1994: 24, 32).[32] Even though they didn't concur with all his interpretations of Marx and Engels, nor could they accept the subordination of theory to political party (as Lukács did), Horkheimer and Adorno both read, studied, and critiqued Lenin's most important works, especially his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* of 1908, which explored the connection between historical materialism and

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[32] See *Erfolgreiche Kooperation: Das Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung und das Moskauer Marx-Engels-Institut (1924-1928): Korrespondenz von Felix Weil, Carl Grünberg u.a. mit David Borisovič Rjazanov, Ernst Czóbel u.a. Aus dem Russischen Staatlichen Archiv für Sozial-und Politikgeschichte Moskau.* Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2000.

epistemology (Abromeit, 2013: 150-156; Claussen, 2008: 230-234).[33] In the 1950's, Adorno was especially taken with certain aspects of Lenin's philosophy, believing that his development beyond Marx was a corrective to Marx's overlooking of man's subjectivity and his naïve assumptions that mankind is "basically the same in all essentials and will remain so" (Claussen, 2008: 233). Indeed, Horkheimer at one time suggested to Adorno that they should rewrite Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in "strictly Leninist" terms, with Adorno replying, "I always wanted to try to produce a theory that would be faithful to Marx, Engels and Lenin, while not lagging behind the achievements of the most advanced culture (Claussen, 2008: 233).[34] Part of this project was to rectify the "re-barbarization" that the Soviet Union represented; they would do so by developing a "theory that remained faithful to Marx, Engels and Lenin" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2011: 103). However, what is most important for this study is how Lenin developed Marx's theory of religion and how that theory shaped the dominant form of leftist thought during the first half of the 20th century. In attempting to identify where Lenin goes beyond Marx's analysis of religion, if at all, we will be able to determine where the Frankfurt School, especially Horkheimer, Adorno, and Benjamin, stand in relation to Lenin's critique of religion.

Although he was determined to abolish the Orthodox Church in Russia, as it legitimated the rule of the Czar and the aristocracy and thus contributed to the permanence of the class structure, Lenin's interest in religion as a whole was a secondary concern; his writings on the subject could hardly constitute a single volume. According to Roland Boer, Lenin's critique of

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[33] See Max Horkheimer, "On Lenin's Materialism and Empiriocriticism" in *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. II, Nachgelessene Schriften: 1914-1931.* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 171-188.

[34] According to Adorno's biographer, Detlev Claussen, Adorno "confirmed the importance of Lenin" due to one of his "key idea[s]," that "all knowledge was socially mediated" (Claussen, 2008: 233). He cites Adorno saying, "Marx was too harmless; he probably imagined quite naïvely that human beings are basically the same in all essentials and will remain so. It would be a good idea, therefore, to deprive them of their second nature. He was not concerned with their subjectivity; he probably didn't look into that too closely. The idea that human beings are the products of society down to their innermost core is an idea that he would have rejected as a milieu theory. Lenin was the first person to assert this" (Adorno in Claussen, 2008: 233).

religion remains within the "conventional paradigm" as first expressed by the Young-Hegelians (Boer, 2013: 13). From their writings, both Marx and Lenin assumed that the illusory nature of religion had already been made manifest by the advent of modern science, Feuerbach's projection thesis, and other critiques of religion that demonstrated that religion belonged to an earlier period of human development – a lapsed *'Gestalt des Geistes'* (Habermas, 2009: 73). They shared the belief that religion must first be annihilated in order for man's emancipation to be realized. Because religious epistemology could not be trusted, as divine "revelation" was nothing but a by-product of a self-alienated mind, science was the appropriate medium through which the world could be properly understood. From Feuerbach, Lenin learned of the "illusory" nature of religion and from Marx he learned of religion's *social function* – its ability to placate humanity in the face of the horror and terror of nature and history (Bociurkiw, 1967: 108).[35] Having learned such, Lenin's primary concern with religion was how to combat its influence in Russia, how to divorce political power from the Orthodox Church, and eventually how to eradicate religion as a social force from within Soviet society.

In his 1905 article *Socialism and Religion,* Lenin produces his own extended rendition of Marx's "opiate for the masses" thesis. He states,

> Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression, which everywhere weighs heavily upon the popular masses, crushed by their perpetual work for others, by want and loneliness. The importance of the exploited classes in their struggle with the exploiters inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better hereafter, just as the impotence of the savage in his battle with nature gives rise to the belief in gods, devils, miracles, and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth and take comfort in the hope of being rewarded in heaven. But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practice charity while on earth, and thus religion offers them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and sells them at a moderate price tickets to heavenly bliss. Religion is *opium for the people* [опиум народа – *opium naroda*]. Religion is a sort of *spiritual home-brew*

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[35] See Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "Lenin and Religion" in *Lenin: The Man, The Theorist, The Leader.* Ed. Leonard Schapiro and Peter Reddaway. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967), 108.

[род духовной сивухи – *rod dukhovnoi sivukha*] in which the slaves of capital drown the image of man and their demand for a life more or less worthy of human beings (Lenin, as quoted in Bociurkiw, 1967: 108-109).

In this passage Lenin lays out two distinct critiques of religion. First, religion reconciles the victims of history to their fate by a) teaching them to be "submissive and patient" and b) to "take comfort in the *hope* of being rewarded in heaven." As we have already demonstrated, this critique was developed by Marx in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.* In this case, Lenin explicitly identifies an important concept that remains only tacit in Marx: hope. *Hope,* which we can define as the unabated desire to negate what is the case, i.e. the misery and brutality of life – is essentially inactivity. It is passive and commands no change. It is an attitude of the mind to *hope* for change but it is not a form of praxis that will bring about such transformation. The crime of religion that Lenin is pointing out is essentially the same as Marx; religion defuses the individual's potential for revolutionary change by placating his anxieties, fears, and sufferings by offering him compensation for his earthly misery in a heavenly bliss after death. Until the time of each individual's demise, they are subject to the brutality of history, and therefore are in need of consolation, numbness, and a remedy by which they can cope with such brutality. Speaking to a Russian audience, Lenin likens this to Russia's "home-brew," *sivukha,* in which man – in all his alienation and misery – can drown his "demand for a life more or less worthy of human beings" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 109).[36] Aware that such a demand cannot be fulfilled under the "slave" conditions of capitalism, he retreats into a self-induced

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[36] On the point of *rod dukhovnoi sivouka* (spiritual booze), I disagree with Roland Boer's assessment that the opium like qualities can be seen at all positively as medicine. Even if opiates were used for their medicinal qualities in Europe, Lenin's critique, following Marx, is explicitly about the nature of opiate to reconcile individuals to the conditions that enslave them. We cannot take medicine as the proper meaning of the metaphor because if the logic of the metaphor stands, medicine makes the individual content and well-adjusted (healing) to a system that demands, at least for the working-class, that he become discontent and maladjusted. Both Marx and Lenin would rather have the working-class not drink from the poison of opiate religion. Despite the brilliance of his study, I think Roland has read too much into the metaphor. See Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion and Theology.* 14-17.

catatonic-state in which the burdens of slavery are made bearable if only in a fleeting way, never thinking that such conditions are created by history and as such can be undone by history. In this way, the role of the opiate is not only to make sure that the victims do not revolt, but that the idea of revolt never enters their thoughts. Opium, or *sivukha*, clouds the ability of those who consume it from seeing their revolutionary potentials. As such, the existing conditions of their reality appear to them to be *reified*, thought to be the natural state of things, and as such no answers outside of that "natural state" can be permitted or even fathomed. The opiate is the last resort of the man who cannot escape what he has come to believe to be his naturally determined fate. But that fate is excruciatingly painful, unfulfilling, and saturates his life with oppressive misery. Being so, a retreat into the opiate is the only way for man to console himself about his diminished and distorted life.

Where Lenin develops Marx's analysis further is in his second critique of religion. From Marx's opiate thesis we become aware of how religion affects the working-class, the poor, and the prey of society. Lenin however offers us a glimpse into what it does for the other side of society: the predators. Let us recall the previous quote: "those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practice charity while on earth, and thus religion offers them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and sells them at a moderate price tickets to heavenly bliss" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 108-109). Immediately following this statement, he repeats Marx's famous phrase, "religion is opium for the people" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 109). This second sentence may seem to be a simple reinforcement of the first critique of religion that Lenin begins with. However, I believe it is meant to reinforce the immediately preceding sentence about the *exploiters* and not the exploited. Why? Lenin seems to hint that charity has a liberating effect on "those who live by the labour of others," thus it has a

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twofold function. First, it offers a "cheap" justification of their "existence as exploiters," i.e. the practice of "charity" becomes the ideology by which they religiously justify their private expropriation of collective surplus value. They are able to see themselves not as exploiters but as beneficent philanthropists. In this sense, charity becomes the ideology that mystifies the reality of exploitation. In its own way, charity (as subsidy) justifies the existence of the ruling class because without the "kindness" of the ruling class the working class could not live. In addition to that, and in comparison to the immense amount of profits they make through their exploitation, their charitable giving is miniscule, which brings us to the second point. This form of – shall we say – "Bourgeois charity" (or in the case of Russia "Aristocratic Charity") exculpates the sin of exploitation, thus Lenin's remark that it "sell[s] them... a moderate price ticket to heavenly bliss" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 108-109). With the practice of charity, the ruling class, especially in Russia, who still identified with the Orthodox paradigm of Christianity when Lenin was writing this article, can live with a good conscience about their undue wealth and social status. In other words, their Aristocratic charity eases their salvation anxiety – through the practice of charitable giving they are able to brush aside the condemnation of wealth found most explicitly in their own sacred texts. This is precisely why Lenin's phrase "religion is opium for the people" is meant to describe not only the victims of history, but also the charitable ruling class. In effect, charity cleanses the "sin" of exploitation, and it does so at a bargain price. Despite the fact that they "live off the labour of others," and the Bible clearly dictates that "those who don't work don't eat" – they unjustly eat the fruits of the labour of others, and their Orthodox faith dulls their consciousness to the misery they produce in doing so, while at the same time justifies and sanctifies them doing so.[37]

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[37] Paul's Epistle: II Thessalonians, 3:10. "Those who don't work don't eat." See Kant's "religion that dulls" critique (Kant, 2010: 93).

According to Bociukiw, Lenin maintained the belief that the state functionalized religion for its own benefit. So too did the religious establishment find benefit through its relationship with the state. "Autocracy," Lenin states, "cannot do without its twin agents: a 'hangman' and a 'priest': the first to suppress popular resistance by force, the second to 'sweeten' and embellish the lot of the oppressed by empty promises of a heavenly kingdom" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 111). The "sanctity of the established order" is maintained through the religious establishment's control over the fate of people's souls. In return for their functionalization of religion as an integrative pattern-maintenance system – the ideological support that stabilizes the status quo – the state grants the church preferential status within Czardom (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 111; Siebert, 2010: 273). In order to break the symbiotic relationship of the church and state, religion must be discredited, broken, and abolished, both in the minds of the masses and in the political realm. Then, like in Marx's analysis, the criticism of heaven can turn to the revolutionary criticism of earth: the political establishment, i.e. the Aristocracy (and later Bourgeois liberals) of Russia.

As stated before, Lenin's final critique of religion is that it must be overcome in all its facets. As he wrote in his 1908 article, "all contemporary religions and churches, all and every kind of religious organizations are always viewed by Marxism as organs of bourgeois reaction serving [the cause of] the defense of exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class" (Lenin in Bociurkiw, 1967: 109). In this sense, the combination of Christianity and socialism, as it was articulated by the revolutionary Orthodox priest Georgy Gapon in 1905, is inadequate to the task of liberating mankind.[38] Atheism, the combination of dogmatic metaphysical claims about the non-existence of God, allied with modern science, is the only adequate form socialism

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[38] The Orthodox priest Georgy Apollonovich Gapon led a working-class revolt against the Czar of Russia in 1905, which ended in "Bloody Sunday." He was later assassinated as an agent provocateur in 1906.

can take. Religion has no future in Lenin's communistic philosophy. Neither will it have a meaningful future in the public life of the Soviet Union – it will remain restricted to the private sphere and the realm of the subjective (Froese, 2008). However, just like Marx, Lenin's analysis of religion suffers from a lack of dialectical understanding. His monolithic and ahistorical idea of religion, that it is and always has been an agent of social statics, lack a critical understanding of religion's negativity, which directs man to transcend the imminent, both in his spirit and in his material existence. The suppression of religion within the Soviet Union, especially in the name of man's liberation from capitalism, is a complicated affair. Despite their best efforts, both ideologically and through the fulfillment of man's material needs, religion within the Soviet Union never totally disappeared as Lenin and other Marxists had fought for (Froese, 2008: 165-199). The curious nature of this social experiment in secularity was a cause for rethinking Marx's basic premise: that religion would evaporate if the conditions that created the need for religion, i.e. man's exploitation of man, his self-alienation, and his material deprivation, were alleviated. For the Frankfurt School, the recalcitrance of religion in the modern period – its unwillingness to vacate history – had to be investigated beyond the wishful philosophy of Marx and Lenin.

Chapter 2: The Predecessors II

All great things go to ruin by reason of themselves, by reason of an act of self-dissolution… in thus wise did Christianity go to ruin as a dogma, through its own morality; in thus wise must Christianity go again to ruin today as a morality – we are standing on the threshold of this event.[1]

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

Freud's Psychoanalysis as Criticism of Religion

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical critiques of religion are many and varied. From believing it to be an impenetrable impediment to man's mental development to seeing the rigors of monotheism as the *fons et origo* of the Jewish intellectualism, Freud's analysis of religion takes us in various and oftentimes conflicting areas. In order to subdue Freud's voluminous critique of religion, I've chosen to concentrate his complex concoction of ideas down to its essentials: it is both a repository of insights about the nature of the human psyche and a hindrance to mankind's future. Freud's writings about religion, especially *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), can all be read as attempts to apply his psychoanalytic theories to the subject of religion. Psychoanalytic theories, from the perspective of Freud, could shed new light on the history and development of religion as well as its social force. He believed the best medium to understand the religious *seelentätigkeit* ("activities of the soul") was through the insights of psychoanalysis, but his works on religion would prove to be less clinical and more prosaic and imaginative in fashion. Nevertheless, it provided an abundance of insight for the

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Trans. Horace B. Samuel. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 123.

early members of the Frankfurt School, especially for Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse and Fromm, all of which would return to Freud in their own analysis of religion.

In Freud's book *Future of an Illusion*, he imagines a dystopic vision of a society that is unencumbered by traditional moral and ethical considerations. This society is one that submits itself to the aspirations of the unrestrained human psyche with all its instincts, desires, and drives. Without externally imposed restraints, this society would be, according to Freud, none other than Hobbe's *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all); mankind would live within a "state of nature" that knows only each individual's inherent strengths and weaknesses as their only legitimate limit and would be driven exclusively by the self-interest (Freud, 1964: 20; Hobbes, 1958: 106-107). Either because Freud assumes his reader is familiar with the Hobbes' basic argument, or that the thought experiment of thinking about life without the rule of law is nearly self-evident, he does not fully articulate this ahistorical state-of-being in his book. In order to get a better picture of what Freud assumes, we should briefly turn to Hobbes, as he was the first author to fully articulate the complex nature of human life without any meaningful restraints beyond natural limitations.

To demonstrate the necessity of a social contract and the rule of an absolute sovereign, Hobbes conjures up a scenario in which mankind steps behind what Freud identified simply as "civilization." He asks us to image a society without commonly agreed upon laws, norms, and authorities. Hobbes states that "without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man" (Hobbes, 1958: 106-107). Such a state of being would be therefore governed under the *lex naturalis,* or "law of nature," which is defined by the lack of "external impediments" to the wishes and desires of the individual (Hobbes, 1958: 109). Hobbes claims that the "right of

nature," or the *jus naturale,* is the "liberty each man has to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature – that is to say, of his own life – and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto" (Hobbes, 1958: 109). It is essentially "might makes right." This being the case, justice and injustice do not exist except through the judgment of nature itself, for "where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no justice," and where there is no external law, i.e. shared law outside of natural law, "every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body" (Hobbes, 1958: 108, 110). Therefore, absolute freedom is absolute war for Hobbes, which normalizes chaos, insecurity, and random violence. In taking this claim seriously, Freud attempts to examine religions' role in the taming of mankind's natural state-of-being. By doing so he will attempt to reveal religions' role in the process of civilizing mankind, i.e. the ending of the tyranny of nature over man, but also the disastrous price the individual has to pay for this diminishment of natural liberty.

In his writings, Freud seems to take for granted Hobbes' theory of the social contract, that the history of man demonstrates his willingness to submit to *authority*, whether that be an absolute sovereign, a cultural norm, religion, etc., in order to provide the safety and security he needs to fulfill his own self-interest outside of the *totalen krieg* of nature. In his book *The Future of an Illusion,* Freud defines "civilization" as "all those respect in which human life has raised itself above its animal status and differs from the life of beasts" (Freud, 1964: 2). In addition, he writes that civilization "includes... all the knowledge and capacity that men have acquired in order to control the forces of nature and extracts its wealth for the satisfaction of human needs, and, on the other hand, *all the regulations necessary in order to adjust the relationship of men to*

one another and especially the distribution of the available wealth" (Freud, 1964: 2-3).[2] He later

states that "the principle task of civilization, its actual *raison d'être*, is to defend us against

nature" – which includes man's untamed sexuality – and that if civilization were to be

abandoned all that would be left is the "state of nature," and "that would be far harder to bear"

(Freud, 1964: 20).[3] While Hobbes points to the social contract as a way of taming the chaos and

anomie of nature, Freud turns his attention to religion's role within that contract, giving us a

picture of religion that at once makes civilization possible, but simultaneously places a heavy

burden on the psyche of man. Religion, as part of the broader civilization, not only

demythologizes nature, but also restricts the activities born from unencumbered and

biologically/psychologically rooted self-interest and/or self-preservation – his natural state-of-

being – by imposing on the believer certain beliefs and moral codes that dissuade the individual

from engaging in certain soul-imperiling activities. For example, he reminds us of the

"prohibition... issued by God" against murder and its part in civilizing man's violent tendencies.

He writes,

> When civilization laid down the commandment that a man shall not kill the
> neighbour whom he hates or who is in his way or whose property he covets, this
> was clearly done in the interest of man's communal existence, which would not

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[2] Emphasis added.

[3] Freud is not just speaking of life without modern culture and technology which would provide for a defense against nature, but is also discussing the natural inclination of mankind towards violence in the name of sheer self-interest and self-preservation, which would be released if not for "civilizational" norms that are impinged upon mankind's natural inclinations and capacities. He states, "we have spoken of the hostility to civilization which is produced by the pressure that civilization exercises, the renunciations of instincts which it demands. If one imagines its prohibitions lifted – if, then, one may take any woman one pleases as a sexual object, if one may without hesitation kill one's rival for her love or anyone else who stands in one's way, if, too, one can carry off any of the other man's belongings without asking leave – how splendid, what a string of satisfactions one's life would be! True, one soon comes across the first difficulty: everyone else has exactly the same wishes as I have and will treat me with no more consideration than I treat him. And so in reality only one person could be made unrestrictedly happy by such a removal of the restrictions of civilization, and he would be a tyrant, a dictator, who had seized all the means to power. And even he would have every reason to wish that the others would observe at least one cultural commandment: 'thou shalt not kill'" (Freud, 1964:19-20). With this in mind, Freud is very aware of the chaotic and violent nature of Hobbes' "state of nature" and what human life would be if not for the controlling force of civilization, which, if Hobbes is correct concerning the social contract, is an aspect within the civilizing process, just as religion once was (for Freud).

otherwise be practicable. For the murderer would draw down on himself the vengeance of the murdered man's kinsmen and the secret envy of others, who within themselves feel as much inclined as he does for such acts of violence. Thus he would not enjoy his revenge or his robbery for long, but would have every prospect of soon being killed himself. Even if he protected himself against his single foes by extraordinary strength and caution, he would be bound to succumb to a combination of weaker men. If a combination of their sort did not take place, the murdering would continue endlessly and the final outcome would be that men would exterminate one another... Insecurity of life, which is an equal danger for everyone, now unites men into a society which prohibits the individual from killing and reserves to itself the right to communal killing of anyone who violates the prohibition. Here, then, we have justice and punishment (Freud, 1964: 66).

Despite him recognition that such a religious prohibition aids in the civilizing of mankind's natural inclinations, he nevertheless believes the theological legitimation of such a prohibition should be cancelled and the human origins of such prohibitions should be admitted (Freud, 1964: 67).

From the perspective of western religions, eschatological fear saturates the super-ego, which becomes dominant within the religious consciousness.[4] The believer fears he/she will not receive salvation but will be punished in an afterlife by a judgmental "exalted father" God, and because of this he/she will refrain from partaking in sinful activities, like murder, despite the fact that they desire to do so (Freud, 1962: 21). However, by engaging in such suppression of what can be viewed as activities rooted in human nature, religion – again, as a part of civilization – inevitably suppresses the natural happiness of the believer through its preordained strictures – their free and subjective quest for happiness is deformed by a religious schema which they resentfully submit to (Freud, 1962: 31-32). For the religious believer, the enjoyment of this world is sacrificed for the hope of the compensatory next world. Under the restraining conditions of civilization, with all of its *heteronomy*, the individual is no longer free to express via word or

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[4] We must remember that for Freud, the super-ego is the agent of authority, discipline, and civilizational norms. The prohibitive dictates of religion are therefore located within the *super-ego* that struggle against the *id* of instinct, desire, and drive, and is regulated by and/or resolved in the *ego.*

deed the natural instincts, desires, and drives he/she has, even if he/she still retains the natural potential to do so. He or she has acquired a *habitus* (second nature or individual personality structure) from the civilization in which they are born and raised, and such civilization imprints upon the psyche the norms and expectations of the society at large.[5] While ultimately accepting these limitations on the freedom of mankind, the individual tacitly realizes that the enemy, civilization itself, is also a necessity for their own survival and flourishing. Therefore, civilization represses human instincts and desires but does so to ensures the very possibility of human life beyond nature.

If we understand Freud to believe that civilization is necessary for man to live outside of simple nature, and that religion is, or has been, an integral part of civilization, what then is the role of religion in such a civilization? What then for Freud is religion?

Similar to Feuerbach, Freud sees religion as being rooted in *subjective* psychological experience, "out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father" (Feuerbach, 1989: 1-12; Freud, 1964: 71). Subjectivity gives birth to the gods via psychological projections, including the personification of the individual's super-ego into a divine "exalted father" being in heaven, which, because of his Oedipal complex, he both hates and worships. Freud likens man's attachment to religion to a child passing through a neurotic stage of life (Freud, 1964: 70). After exclaiming religion to be mankind's "universal obsessional neurosis," he writes,

> it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of growth, and that we find ourselves at this very juncture in the middle of that phase of development. Our behaviour should therefore be modelled on that of a sensible teacher who does not oppose an impending new development but seeks to ease its path and mitigate the violence of its irruption (Freud, 1964: 71).

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[5] Although the term "habitus" has precedence in Greek philosophy, especially in Aristotle, it is mort associated with the German sociologist Norbert Elias and his 1939 book *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (The Civilizing Process).

Beyond the libidinous aspects behind the origins of God and religion, Freud recalls a certain "feeling" expressed to him by a friend and Protestant theologian, a feeling likened to the "sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were 'oceanic'" – which can be described as a feeling of "insignificance and impotence in the face of the universe" (Freud, 1962: 11; Freud, 1964: 52).[6] Yet this feeling is not yet religion, but can be understood as the subjective genesis of religious ideas, thoughts, and practices. To be "deeply religious" is to experience this sensation and to anchor one's life within a system of thought and praxis that have grown out of such a sensation. However, Freud believed that this sensation is possible to experience without succumbing to the illusion of religion, i.e. the "next step." Religion, in this sense, is mankind's feeble attempt to systematize and rationalize an understanding of this sensation (Freud, 1964: 52). He states that "the man who goes no further, but humbly acquiesces in the small part which human beings play in the great world – such a man is, on the contrary, irreligious in the truest sense of the word" (Freud, 1964: 52). In its essence, religion is the *illusion* or "wish fulfillment" that this "oceanic" sensation signifies a reality outside of the already given. To think in those terms is to become religious; to admit to the sensation but deny the "other-reality" is to remain both simply human and rational.

That being said, religion – the systematic thought derived from the oceanic feeling – is an infantile social-control mechanism that imposes its claims upon the individual believers; thus making them repressed and mentally malnourished. He states that

> religion restricts this play of choice and adaptation, since it imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner – which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcibly fixing them in a state of

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[6] Although Freud doubts whether this feeling is universal, or even verifiable via science, he does say that "from my own experience I could not convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling. But this gives me no right to deny that it does in fact occur in other people."

psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more (Freud, 1962: 31-32).

It should be restated that Freud is not opposed to all forms of social control that can be found within civilization – as we stated before, he believes civilization to be an absolute necessity – but rather that religion accomplishes its control by forcing its adherents to repress basic human instincts in the name of moral and ethical, and sometimes theological, imperatives that are irrational, or even neurotic, in origin. Such repressive worldviews and moral codes often cause excessive guilt in the believer. Freud claims that the individual's instinctual drives propel them to engage in activities that religion, via the individual's superego, condemns as immoral, repellent, and soul-threatening. Thus the tension produced by the conflict between biology/psychology and the cultural norms advocated by religion, is the fertile soil for the creation of neuroses. Furthermore, Freud believed that religion presents an illusionary world, a "distorting … picture of the real world" that the individual is impelled or coerced to irrationally conform to, as opposed to reality. Beings so, he understood his "appointed task" as being one of "reconciling men to civilization" (Freud, 1964: 73).[7] The task of reconciliation, through the sublimation of libidinal or aggressive energy, can result in positive things, especially art and science, which he claims to be the "two highest achievements of man," but it can also result in the absurdity of religious beliefs and the neurotic behavior associated with religious ritual (Freud, 1962: 22). Religion, per se, is thus historically part of the necessary condition – as it helped man transcend his "animal status" – but is also the aspect of civilization that must be negated if society is to evolve beyond its historical infancy. Freud states,

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[7] Freud defines a belief as an "illusion" when a "wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation" As such, he "disregard[s] its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification" (Freud, 1964: 49). For Freud, an "error" in thought is not the same as an "illusion" as it is not motivated out of a wish fulfillment but rather is the product of wrong or faulty information and/or thinking.

> Our knowledge of the historical worth of certain religious doctrines increases our respect for them, but does not invalidate our proposal that they should cease to be put forward as the reasons for the precepts of civilization. On the contrary! Those historical residues have helped us to view religious teachings, as it were, as neurotic relics, and we must now argue that the time has probably come, as it does in an analytic treatment, for replacing the effects of repression [religion] by the results of the rational operation of the intellect (Freud, 1964: 72).

From this passage we can understand Freud's dual imperative, that first, civilization must continue because the natural state of man, his propensity for selfishness, greed, violence, and aggression has not abated and therefore continually calls for its own regulation; and second, religion's role in that civilization has come to an end, for it is no longer helpful as a civilizing force. Reason and science have superseded religion and revelation in the modern world.

In Freud's prognosis of religion's future, he understands that to exculpate religion from the European civilization would leave an inevitable existential void – a state of moral and metaphysical anchorlessness in which mankind's psychological needs – that were once fulfilled by the all-encompassing nature of religion – would still need to be adequately addressed. He states that

> if you want to expel religion from our European civilization, you can only do it by means of another system of doctrines; and such a system would from the outset take over all the psychological characteristics of religion – the same sanctity, rigidity and intolerance, the same prohibition of thought – for its own defense (Freud, 1964: 84).

Freud does not venture into a discussion as to what kind of "doctrine" should replace religion but only assumes such a worldview or *zeitgeist* would be rooted in science and reason and would thus dispel the illusionary nature of religion, while at the same time providing for those human needs that religion once fulfilled. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment religion has been replaced by other forms of secular but comprehensive religious-like doctrines, i.e. nationalism, communism, fascism, and capitalism to name a few. Freud does not foreshadow how these

diverse tentacles of the secular Enlightenment could and would transform back into a religious-like myth and/or illusions, and how it would push mankind into barbarity that the religious man of history could hardly have imagined. Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialect of Enlightenment* would later attempt to respond to the deficiencies in Freud's analysis of the Enlightenment and man's capacity for enlightened self-governance and "progress." They will show that the Enlightenment itself will become a new form of totalizing myth, one that shares many characteristics with the religion that Freud wished to negate. At least until 1930, when writing his *Civilization and its Discontents,* Freud remained unaware of the true danger within the dialectic of the Enlightenment, believing that the abandonment of religion inevitably leads to the "education to reality" – a reality that forces individuals to "admit to themselves the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe," in which "they can no longer be the centre of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence" (Freud, 1964: 81). It is my assertion that he did not fully appreciate the depth of meaninglessness and purposelessness that this loss of religion would create in Europe, and how it would motivate millions to find existential comfort and security in the arms of destructive ideologies. The collapse of religion and the religious worldviews that once gave meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals did not necessary result in man's mental health and subjective happiness, but often left him feeling hollow, rudderless, or as Nietzsche thought, full of the passive nihilism of Schopenhauer (the *will to nothingness*) (Nietzsche, 2006c: 10-15). This pessimistic nothingness led many to search for new heavenly fathers through which to order their universes. However, after his experiences with the development of fascism and anti-Semitism in Austria, which resulted in his later exile to Britain, he wasn't as optimistic about man's capacity for progress and autonomous reason as before (Gay, 1988: 588-651).[8] It became more clear to

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[8] By the end of 1930 Freud began to see the growing trend towards Nazism within Austria. He wrote to his nephew

Freud that as man abandoned the father-figure "god in the sky," he was simultaneously replacing that god with an earthly father-god: the dictators and their totalizing heteronomic and hegemonic regimes. Like the gods of religion before them, these dictators and comprehensive doctrinal systems also provided for man's psychological needs – his need for recognition, acceptance, worldview, security, orientation of actions and interpretation of reality. However, these ideologies did not lead mankind into a near-utopian existence that Freud thought would be the inevitable outcome through the secularization of the lifeworld, as he once stated,

> by withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, they will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone (Freud, 1964: 82).

Rather, I assert, the outcome of the demythologization and disenchantment of the world led to new levels of barbarity and civilizational destruction which he was fortunate enough not to witness; Freud died on September 23, 1939 just days after the outbreak of World War II (Gay, 1989: 651).

Although chronologically Nietzsche should be before Freud, I have placed his analysis of religion after that of Freud for a very specific reason. While Freud seems optimistic about the world post-religion, Nietzsche, in a much more penetrating and comprehensive way, expressed the "crisis" in western society that will come post-death of God, i.e. after its traditional worldview and moral anchor (Christianity) is lifted, or "neutralized" in Adorno's language (Adorno et al, 1950: 729). Although Nietzsche sees the possibility of true subjective freedom after the death of God, he nevertheless demonstrates the societal and civilizational costs associated with such a crisis of faith – a crisis that the Frankfurt School will have to contend with in the 20th century and that I claim is still with us today in the post-secular society.

Samuel that in Austria the "general conditions are especially dreary" (Gay, 1989: 589).

Nietzsche's critique of religion, especially Christianity, has never been known for its timidity. Believing Christianity to be the religion of slaves, that its morality is a reflection of the impotence of the masses, he became the most poignant herald of the most profound modern crisis: the crisis of faith amidst a society growing ever more secular. In the late 19th century, Nietzsche, more than any other philosopher, was able to identify the ramifications of meaninglessness and nihilism brought about by the secularizing trend within the dialectic of the Enlightenment. Although he could no longer adhere to the faith of his father, who was a provincial parson in the town of Röcken in Saxony, he nevertheless made religion one of the central objects of investigation in his philosophy, if only to destroy it with a "philosophical hammer," so that a "new gospel" – one that overcomes both traditional religion and nihilism – may be born in Europe (Hovey, 2008: 88).

There are a few central theses in Nietzsche's work that I argue influenced the early Frankfurt School's philosophy of religion. First, I will examine his "God is Dead" thesis, for what it's really saying about religion and second, I will interrogate his idea that Christianity was born from the weak and the slaves, the *herd,* and the idea that its morality inherently reflects their weakness. Additionally, I will attempt to determine whether or not "religion" as an epiphenomenon is universally condemned or is Nietzsche's critique exclusively targeted at Christianity. It is often said that the Frankfurt School is a Neo-Marxist and Neo-Freudian school of thought, and this claim may be valid. However, I contend that the first generation was also greatly influenced not only by Freud but also by Nietzsche's thoughts on religion, especially

concerning the looming crisis of faith within European society (Horkheimer, 1978: 32-33). However, they – especially Horkheimer and Adorno – simultaneously remained deeply critical of certain aspects of his answer to that crisis, especially his proposed *Übermenschen* society (Abromeit, 2013: 46-48, 281-282; Horkheimer, 1978: 32-33).[9]

In Nietzsche's work of 1882, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science), he tells the fictional story of a "madman" who comes to the marketplace strangely announcing that he is in search of God. "I seek God! I seek God!" he exclaims, only be to mocked by those in the market. They sneeringly taunt him saying "Why! Is he lost?... has he strayed away like a child?... or does he keep himself hidden?... Is he afraid of us?... has he taken a sea voyage?... has he emigrated" (Nietzsche, 2008: 103)? "Where has God gone?" he shouts at them (Nietzsche, 2008: 103). But before those assembled in the marketplace can answer that very poignant question, the madman launches into a self-condemnatory tirade, already knowing the answer.

> I mean to tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all sun? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all

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[9] In Horkheimer's *Dawn and Decline*, he harshly critiques Nietzsche as the "philosopher of the ruling class." He states, "Nietzsche derides Christianity because its ideals derived from impotence. By calling them virtues, the weak deliberately misinterpret love of mankind, justice, mildness because they cannot avenge themselves or, more precisely, because they were too cowardly to do so. He despises the mass, yet wants to preserve it as such. He wants to preserve weakness, cowardice, obedience, so that he may have room for the breeding of his utopian aristocrats. There must be those who sew togas for these men so that they don't walk about like beggars, for if they could not live off the sweat of the mass, they themselves would have to operate the machines, and there no one intones Dionysian dithyrambs. Actually, Nietzsche is extremely pleased that the mass should exist. Nowhere does he appear as the real enemy of a system based on exploitation and misery. According to him, it is therefore both just and useful that men's gifts atrophy under wretched conditions, however strongly he may advocate their development in the 'superman.' Nietzsche's aims are not those of the proletariat. But the proletariat might note that the morality which recommends that it be conciliatory is mere deception, according to the philosopher of the ruling class. He himself inculcates in the masses that it is only fear that keeps them from destroying the system. If the masses understand this, even Nietzsche can contribute to the process which turns the slave rebellion in morals into proletarian practice" (Horkheimer, 1978: 32-33). Yet in a letter to Anna Steuerwald-Landmann of Nuremberg, dated April 28, 1969, Horkheimer wrote positively about Nietzsche, saying that, "Nietzsche is much closer to me. Naturally, he has been misunderstood. When I returned to Germany for the first time in 1948 and gave some lectures I needed one of his books. In the bookstore I was told: 'We don't sell Nietzsche. He was responsible for National Socialism.' I replied: 'He is one of the few great philosophers who would have been sent to a concentration camp'" (Horkheimer, 2007: 353).

directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not heart the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? For even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife – who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event – and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto (Nietzsche, 2008: 103)!

In shock, all who were in the madman's presence remained silent, amazed by his tenacity to say which was abundantly clear but which they seemed to have never publicly uttered. "God is dead," how could that be? "And we have killed him," how is that possible? For the madman, the very people that killed God were seemingly unaware of their crime, and yet had already transformed God's churches into "tombs and monuments" (Nietzsche, 2008, 104). Stopping by various churches to sing his *requiem aeternum deo,* a perversion of the mass for the earthly dead, now a mass for the heavenly dead, he retreated back to his home among the mountains, where heretical hammering of philosophy – living amidst "ice and high mountains" – gets done (Nietzsche, 2009: 4).[10]

What does Nietzsche mean by "God is Dead"? Surely he's not making the simple theological claim that the divine – that which is by definition incapable of expiring – has somehow expired. The dogmatic atheism of Nietzsche wouldn't entertain the idea that a divine once existed but subsequently found itself subject to temporality and at a given moment in

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[10] Nietzsche writes in his book *Ecce Homo* "philosophy, as I have understood and lived it so far, is choosing to live in ice and high mountains – seeking out everything alien and questionable in existence, everything that has hitherto been excluded by morality."

history ceased to be.[11] No, Nietzsche's claim must be more enigmatic than that. In my view, in order to properly answer this question, we must avoid simply engaging in a critical analysis of the *words* of the prophetic madman, but we have to look first at the historical context of his story, then move to a hermeneutical analysis of the subtext: who exactly killed God, i.e. who is the "you and I" Nietzsche mentions; why was God killed; and how did it come about? Lastly, we have to answer why the death of God is so important for history in Nietzsche's view? Together the answers to these questions will shed some light onto why the madman's claims are so inexpiable and therefore so important to understand in light of the modern condition. Furthermore, it will help us identify the claims of Nietzsche within the Frankfurt School's own work on religion.

Nietzsche lived in a transition period. It was a time of increasing secularity, when natural science was rapidly replacing religion as a comprehensive worldview, where epistemology shifted away from sacred scripture and towards Darwin, astronomy, anthropology, and other forms of natural science (Safranski, 2002: 307). Religion as a complete way-of-being in the world was severely fractured as the core tenets of religion, especially Christianity, seemed no longer reasonable nor viable; where industrial capitalism was beginning to replace traditional economics; where the values of capitalism – greed, competition, avarice, and acquisitiveness – were overshadowing the traditional moral claims of Christianity; and where subjectivity was being reduced to the homogenizing fads and flavors of mass culture. In other words, Nietzsche was living in a time of extreme change; a situation where Europe was moving out of its religious

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[11] The philosopher Julian Young does not regard Nietzsche as an "atheist" per se, only in regards to the *Christian* conception of God. He argues that Nietzsche should be understood as a "religious reformer" as opposed to an "enemy of religion" (Young, 2007: 2). I however hold the opinion that Nietzsche never expressed any "faith" or "belief" in any supernatural deity or deities, whether pagan or Abrahamic, nor did he live within any established patterns that could be identified with any particular religion, although he did offer much praise for Islam, albeit through Orientalist eyes (Almond, 2007: 7-21). In other words, religion or a belief in a divine being[s] was not a part of Nietzsche's worldview or orientation of action. Therefore, I find it acceptable to label Nietzsche an "atheist."

feudal past and more securely into secular modernity (Fritzsche, 2007: 1-39; Kaufmann, 1974: 157-177; Taylor, 2007: 369-376). This was a time where society was thoroughly in the process of losing God, and to lose God meant to fall into "universal madness" (Kaufmann, 1974: 97). The drift towards this new *zeitgeist* had its opponents, but the religious "revival" movements in Europe (and in America) in the first half of the 19th century failed to stem the tide of the growing secularity. The Bourgeois Enlightenment, with its optimistic ideals, many of which found their genesis in religion's idea of human perfectibility, but had henceforth been divorced from their theological legitimation, replaced the words of the Bible with the revolutionary works of Newton, Locke, Bayle, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Robespierre. Additionally, the conflict between the previous dominant Aristotelian framework of both philosophy and theology was increasingly coming into conflict with the "Cartesian reformers," and what was being overturned were "all forms of authority and tradition, even Scripture and Man's essentially theological view of the universe itself (Israel, 2008: 64-65). According to Jonathan I. Israel,

> It was neither science, then, nor new geographical discoveries, nor even philosophy, as such, but rather the formidable difficulty of reconciling old and new in theological terms, and finally, by the 1740s, the apparent collapse of all efforts to forge a new general synthesis of theology, philosophy, politics, and science, which destabilized religious belief and values, causing the wholly unprecedented crisis of faith driving the secularization of the modern West (Israel, 2008: 65).

Nietzsche, from his philosophical vantage points on the high mountains, witnessed the seismic dissonance that grew with the continuing collapse of man's traditional worldview. He became "keenly aware," as Walter Kaufmann has argued, that the "death of God threatened human life with a complete loss of all significance" (Kaufmann, 1974: 101).[12] Such loss of significance could only appear to many as a slide into nihilism (Hovey, 2008: 87-91). As such, he clearly saw

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[12] Kaufmann argues that the problems associated with the "devaluation of all values" that comes from the death of God – the problem of which he named "nihilism" – was central to Nietzsche's philosophy. In fact, Kaufmann argues that issue of escaping nihilism is Nietzsche's "greatest and most persistent problem" (Kaufmann, 1974: 101).

the systemic crisis of faith that had long since been brewing in Bourgeois Europe. In agreement with Kaufmann and others, I would argue that Nietzsche's story may have a hint of autobiography; we hear the voice of Nietzsche in the "madman" who had "come too early," heralding the coming crisis that had already taken root but the ramifications of which were not yet fully recognized by those busying themselves in the mundane nature of the marketplace that was quickly colonizing the lifeworld (Kaufmann, 1974: 97; Nietzsche, 2008: 104). Yet, is Nietzsche's madman already an atheist (like Nietzsche himself), or is he also suffering from the process of losing his faith? Is Nietzsche's "death of God" thesis a form of *deicide* (intentional murder of the divine), or is the "death of God" really about the death of religion and the religious worldview that once animated Europe? In other words, was not "the real danger," as Hovey writes, "when the authority of life's values depends on the objectivity that can no longer be sustained" because history has already dispensed with its epistemic basis (Hovey, 2008: 88). If so, is not his claim more historical and sociological than theological?

If we can accept the idea that Nietzsche as an atheist already presupposes the non-existence of God, and is therefore making "an attempt at a diagnosis of contemporary civilization [and] not a metaphysical speculation about ultimate reality," as Kaufmann claims, then we must ask *who* Nietzsche believes actually killed God; the term "God" meaning "religion" and its believability, its viability, its veracity, and its role as a social force in European society (Kaufmann, 1974: 100).[13]

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[13] There is a deeper metaphor here when Nietzsche uses the word "God." If by definition "God" is an entity that is incapable of dying, and now "God is dead," does that not emphasize the atheist position: if God is dead, then God, by definition, never existed. For what God can die except a god that was not God? In other words, to say this "God" can die is equivalent to saying such an entity is not God, for only that which was created is temporal and subject to death. Therefore, the Christian "God," which Nietzsche claims to have died, is not God at all: its death is the very proof of its fraudulent claim. However, despite this theological argument, I do not believe Nietzsche means for his statement "God is dead" to be a matter of the noumenal, but is rather an argument of history, science, and epistemology.

As stated earlier, Nietzsche leaves us a few clues in the subtext of this passage. First he deliberately writes the inclusive pronoun "*we,*" driving home the point that "*you and I*" have killed God. The standard reading of this phrase tends to universalize the pronoun, making the reader of Nietzsche, whoever they may be, anachronistically included within the "you and I." However, this reading neglects the setting of Nietzsche's story. Nietzsche specifically places his "madman", i.e. the one who can see history clearly and therefore appears to be insane to his audience, in the *marketplace*, i.e. modern civil society. Notice that the madman is speaking directly to the businessmen and to those who are absorbed in their mundane transactions, i.e. the buying and selling of goods for profit. If the marketplace has a more significant meaning than just a convenient setting for Nietzsche's story, then we can legitimately argue that the madman appears to be mad amidst the prevailing conditions of the marketplace and the society that makes the marketplace the center of its being: bourgeois society.[14] The marketplace doesn't trouble itself with ontological issues associated with the existence of God, nor with the morality that revealed religion instills in its adherents; the capitalist component of it does not limit its essential nature – the *extraction of surplus value* according to Marx – because revealed religion opposes it on moral grounds. With this in mind, bourgeois society – or the society that is structured by the governing Liberal-Bourgeois ideology – should be read as Nietzsche's "we." What bourgeois society already knows, and as such that which motivates its laughter in the face of the madman who appears to them to have just realized it, is that, as Horkheimer once pronounced, "without God one will try in vain to preserve absolute meaning" and that "the death of God is also the death of eternal truth" (Horkheimer, 1974: 47, 48). In this post-death-of-God-world, ultimate meaning and existential truth are now no more than simple matters of subjectivity, easily

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[14] For the purposes of this argument, I characterize "bourgeois society" as a combination of political liberalism, capitalism and materialist metaphysics (positivism), i.e. post-religious worldview.

discarded or exchanged for others (Adorno et al, 1950: 729-732; Adorno, 2005a: 136-137). Because the Enlightenment's demythologization of the world through its secular positivistic sciences and rationalization, religion has been de-legitimated, God has been dethroned, and the ethos of the bourgeoisie – including capitalism – no longer stands morally condemned, but is given free rein in civil society. In this sense, religion's absence has created the conditions by which bourgeois values play a determinate role in constructing the society at large. Although Nietzsche approved of such an emptying of society from Christian values, a society in which the standard of morality is no longer the saint, the prophet, nor the priest or pope, he nevertheless didn't place the liberal bourgeois as the new exemplar for society at large. Nietzsche found their worldview limiting, small and pathetic, let alone because of their refusal to honestly abandon the pretense of "Christian" values that they no longer believed in. However much Nietzsche would have wanted the great poets, musicians, and artists to become the new forerunners of society, the replacing of religion with bourgeois society brought about a different sort of elite: the bourgeois businessman. With all his selfishness and greed, he becomes the new standard of being, which no more impressed Nietzsche then did the religious exemplars that preceded them.

But the question for us is not whether this has happened, for surely it has, but how it happened? How did bourgeois society, and especially liberal capitalism, replace religion as the dominant comprehensive worldview of this time, as Walter Benjamin once argued it did (Benjamin, 2004: 288-291)? What has happened to religion that allowed the values of the marketplace to replace its own? And how has the "appearance" of religion remained, especially within the political sphere, while the "substance" or "essence" of religion has been drained from ethical considerations?

Beginning with the Enlightenment, the progress of science and technology increasingly challenged traditional religion and metaphysics as well as the values, principles, and ideals that are rooted within those same religious and metaphysical systems, theologies, and catechisms. Consequently, it promotes a more anthropological understanding of the world (Habermas, 2009: 60). Beginning with Nicolaus Copernicus, religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church, fought multiple "rearguard" struggles against science, but lost them all, thus depleting the church's credibility in the eyes of many followers (Repcheck, 2007). As science has reduced all existence to its material basis, the by-product of which is the evaporation of otherworldly sacredness from the world, the world becomes increasingly "disenchanted" (*Entzauberung*), and "religiously unmusical." Morally, the disenchanted world increasingly becomes deaf to the concerns for the weak masses, those whom Christianity privileges and Nietzsche despised. As a result, the scientifically enlightened mind can no longer reconcile itself with the dictates of religion, nor can religious institutions lead it; the epistemological foundations of which appear to be unfounded. Theology, as opposed to being a systematic and rigorous philosophy of the reality of God, presents itself as obsolete intellectual obscurantism, and religious morality, as opposed to being a comprehensive code by which an individual lives in accordance to divine wishes and wisdom, appears as backward limitations on subjective freedom. Secular humanism, a philosophical worldview that takes root as revealed religion dissipates, ejected the Divine from the center of man's life and replaced him with man himself as "ultimate concern." Just as Feuerbach reduced God to the projective imagination of humanity, so too do the natural sciences return man to himself, canceling the self-alienation he experienced in religion. Without God, absolute moral claims are relativized and man is free to be morally good and/or to "sin" without fear of divine reward or retribution. Nietzsche did not fear condemnation by religious authorities

because of his *Lebensphilosophy* or his philosophy of the *Übermensch* because the social "capital" and authority religion once had in society had already evaporated with the advancement of modern bourgeois society. The "fear of the lord," which was once thought to be the foundation for all true wisdom, no longer motivates mankind (Psalm 111:10; Hegel, 1977: 117-118).[15] As such, he is free from the deforming constraints of religion and metaphysics. Being both politically free to engage in what was once morally questionable activities, as well as eschatologically free from worry about the "damning" nature of those same morally questionable activities, bourgeois capitalism, and all of its anti-Christian values, is able to thrive within the ethical vacuousness of bourgeois freedom and/or arbitrariness. Because of the Enlightenment, man is becoming free of religion, but that often leaves him vulnerable, alone, and frightened of the godless world and under the domination of bourgeois society. Nevertheless, looking into the abyss, modern man often saw a nihilistic future without religion, which they embraced (Hovey, 2008: 87).

Like Zarathustra, who is a prophet who can see the future, not because he is given a special ability by the Divine, but, like Ahura Mazda, because he can read history as it unfolds before him, it appears to me that the "I" in Nietzsche's "you and I" should be read as the religion itself. The hypocrisy and mendacity of religious institutions, i.e. the church, as well as the hypocritical nature of the bourgeois believer, drains legitimacy from religion faster than any attack from outside of religion. Religion's seeming inability to morally transform those who publicly embody it, i.e. to make its believers morally and ethically *distinguishable* from the

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[15] In his short essay "Capitalism as Religion," Benjamin argues Nietzsche's superman as being not only the first to recognize capitalism as a religion but also to attempt to fulfill it. He states, "capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction. It is the expansion of despair, until despair becomes a religious state of the world in the hope that this will lead to salvation. God's transcendence is at an end. But he is not dead; he has been incorporated into human existence. This passage of the planet "Human" through the house of despair in the absolute loneliness of his trajectory is the ethos that Nietzsche defined. This man is the superman, the first to recognize the religion of capitalism and begin to bring it to fulfillment" (Benjamin, 2004: 289).

world-as-it-is, depletes its claim to have a higher purpose for mankind or that it is the channel through which God's work gets done on earth. Thus, religion is obsolete, as it is unable to attain its own modest goals. It recognizes its failure but continues with the charade as if ignorant of its own nakedness. Just like the audience who sees the king without his clothes, religion too blissfully stands naked before those who quietly mock it.

But we can also deduce from Nietzsche's verbiage that it's not only the "zeitgeist" of the bourgeois society that *just happens to* "kill God," but also the *intentional* functionalization of religion as ideology, i.e. that which legitimates a world in opposition to the values expressed by prophetic Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[16] As such, "Christianity denies the Church" (Nietzsche, 2006: 27). A world in which Cesare Borgia – an "ideogram for the conception of unsublimated animal passion" – could have been the Pope, as his father Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) was, is a world in which religious moral values are praised and cited as being normative, while in reality they serve as the camouflage for naked power (Kaufmann, 1974: 225).[17] In other words, Christianity is no longer taken seriously; the reality that they once upheld has been reduced to mere ideology – or the masking of certain class, profane or material interests. It has become a social system by which people are "managed," instead of guided, and as such it reflects within itself the structure of power that uses it to legitimate itself. Outside of a

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[16] However, before modernity ideologized Christian morality for its own purposes, Nietzsche believes that Christianity itself was the ideology of the weak masses who transvalued all that was naturally good into "evil" and all their decadent qualities into moral goods (Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ,* 15). He writes, "the very word 'Christianity' is a misunderstanding, truth to tell, there never was more than one Christian, and he died on the Cross. The 'gospel' died on the cross. That which thenceforward was called 'gospel' was the reverse of that 'gospel' that Christ had lived: it was 'evil tidings,' a *dysangel*" (Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ,* 39). In other words, the memory and thought of Jesus of Nazareth was standardized, codified, and perverted into a system that legitimated the incompetent masses. Instead of overcoming their own limitations, and thus living for themselves, they appropriated the biography of Jesus as their own way-of-being.

[17] Ironically, one should bear in mind that Nietzsche praised the idea of Cesare Borgia – who represented "life" against priestly and ascetic Christianity – becoming the Pope of Rome, as it would have meant the end of Christianity "at its headquarters." Instead, the monk Luther, with his "vindictive instincts of an abortive priest" imbued Christianity with a revivalist spirit that ruined the decay of Christianity from within. Because of Protestantism, the "Germans will be to blame" for Christianity's survival (Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ,* 73-74).

few non-conformist exemplars, Christianity has been emptied of its ability to oppose the world-as-it-is, but rather stands as a relic of a past age that many desperately cling to in order that they may not fall into existential despair through the untethering of the "absolutes" it provides. In other words, in the name of another world, it hypocritically embraces the structures and social schemas of this world. But for the believer, it is better to be self-diluted by an expired religion and accept its false-ideological claims than to liberate one's self and be subject to the anxiety and existential suffering of life post-religion.

For Nietzsche, the religious man in the modern period is a dishonest man; he publicly displays his confidence in religious ideas but secretly betrays that confidence in the silence of his own home. He already knows that which he cannot openly confess: God is dead, religion is obsolete, and the tide that remains – Christian morality – is swiftly receding into the vacuous sea of history. So, as Nietzsche so brutally points out, the "believer" betrays every last Christian ideal while simultaneously proclaiming his faith in Jesus of Nazareth. In *The Anti-Christ,* Nietzsche acerbically writes,

> with gloomy caution I pass through whole millennia of this mad-house world, and whether it be called "Christianity," "Christian Faith," or "Christian Church," I take care not to hold mankind responsible for its mental disorders. But my feeling suddenly changes, and vents itself the moment I enter the modern age, our age. Our age knows... That which formerly was merely morbid, is now positively indecent. It is indecent nowadays to be a Christian. And it is here that my loathing begins. I look about me: not a word of what was formerly known as "truth" has remained standing; we can no longer endure to hear a priest even pronounce the word "truth." Even he who makes but the most modest claims upon truth, must know at present, that a theologian, a priest, or a pope, not only errs but actually lies, with every word that he utters, and that he is no longer able to lie from "innocence," from "ignorance." Even the priest knows quite as well as everybody else does that there is no longer any "God," and "sinner" or any "Savior," and that "free will," and "a moral order of the universe" are lies... All the concepts of the Church have been revealed in their true colors – that is to say, as the most vicious frauds on earth, calculated to depreciate nature and all nature values (Nietzsche, 2006a: 38).

Nietzsche calls out the "amusing mendacity" and hypocrisy of those who still call themselves Christian in the modern world; this mendacity being what Karl Löwith calls the church's "secular metamorphoses" (Löwith, 1964: 370). Again, Nietzsche scornfully writes,

> Whither has the last shred of decency, of self-respect gone, if nowadays even our statesmen – a body of men who are otherwise so unembarrassed, and such thorough anti-Christians in deed – still declare themselves Christians and still flock to communion?... Fancy a prince at the head of his legions, magnificent at the expression of the egoism and self-exaltation of his people, but shameless enough to acknowledge himself a Christian!... What then does Christianity deny? What does it call "world"? "The world" to Christianity means that a man is a soldier, a judge, a patriot, that he defends himself, that he values his honor, that he desires his own advantage, that he is proud... The conduct of every moment, every instinct, every valuation that leads to a deed, is at present anti-Christian: what an abortion of falsehood modern man must be, in order to be able without a blush still to call himself a Christian (Nietzsche, 2006a: 38-39).

The reality of the Enlightenment's deflation of the essence of religion, while at the same time its inability to dispense with the "appearance" of religion, which Nietzsche perceived so clearly, will produce a new set of challenges that the Frankfurt School will later interrogate.

Nietzsche does not weep for Christianity. His "God is dead" thesis indicates the coming of a world without the comforting solace of religion and metaphysics. Although he recognizes the problem that arises with the expiration of absolute meaning, absolute moral claims, and absolute truth, he does not succumb to the temptation of nihilistic despair like Schopenhauer, but rather posits a new form of morality that would reestablish a worldview that was once dominant before the moral slave revolt of Christianity (Hovey, 2008: 87; Nietzsche, 2006b: xxi). According to Craig Hovey, Nietzsche "was not advocating nihilism, but declaring the way that it can and must be avoided" through the coming of the *Übermensch* (Hovey, 2008: 87).[18] A new morality is needed for the new post-Christianity time.

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[18] Nietzsche describes this coming of the Übermensch as an almost messianic anti-Messiah. He writes, "this man of the future, who in this wise will redeem us from the old ideal, as he will from that ideal's necessary corollary of great nausea, will to nothingness, and Nihilism; this tocsin of noon and of the great verdict, which renders the will

In preparing to overturn Christian morality, so that the "antichrist and anti-nihilist" may come, he asks in the beginning of his book *On the Genealogy of Morals,* these most pertinent questions:

> Under what conditions did Man invest for himself those judgments of values, "Good" and "Evil"? And what intrinsic value do they possess in themselves? Have they up to the present hindered or advanced human well-being? Are they a symptom of the distress, impoverishment, and degeneration of Human Life? Or, conversely, is it in them that is manifested the fullness, the strength, and the will of Life, its courage, its self-confidence, its future (Nietzsche, 2006b: xix)?

Seeing a historical crime perpetrated against the Greco-Roman world by Christian "slaves," Nietzsche wishes to *transvalue* the values of Christianity – to de-pervertize that which Christianity originally perverted, and restore nobility and heroism back to its *natural* condition (Žižek, 2003). In other words, through understanding the genealogy of morals, its *fons et origo*, he wants to restore the natural state of man's morality back to what it was before it was deformed by slave morality, which was later systematized into Christianity. For Nietzsche, what is now called "good" is only considered as such because of the principle of *utility* – it is "good" for the herd, or what he also describes as the "plebian man" (Nietzsche, 2006b: 2-3, 5). That which is considered "evil" in slave morality, is only considered as such because it benefits the "aristocratic man," whom the "slaves" harbor resentment toward (Nietzsche, 2006b: 2-3, 5, 12-15). But because the slaves are numerous and the aristocrats are few, the masses are able to impose their morality upon their masters. Through doing so the interests of the slaves become synonymous with that which is morally good, and their "will to power," which animates their resentment towards their former masters, is actualized (Young, 2007: 147). Christianity, and any other form of altruistic collectivism, is the triumph of slave morality over their former masters, as it "hobbles the healthy" in the interest of the "sick and oppressed" (Young, 2007: 147).

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again free, who gives back to the world its goal and to man his hope, this Antichrist and Anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of Nothingness – he must one day come" (Nietzsche, 2006b: 65).

The historic crime against the aristocratic man has to be exposed and overturned, and Nietzsche sees himself as being the individual who's most qualified for the task. In the foreword of his book *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche spells out his work of "toppling idols." He writes,

> I do not set up any new idols; let the old ones learn what it means to have legs of clay. *Toppling idols* (my word for 'ideals') – that is more my kind of handiwork. Reality has been robbed of its value, its sense, its truthfulness insofar as an ideal world was *faked up...* The 'real world' and the 'apparent world' – in plain words: the *fake* world and reality... The *lie* of the ideal has till now been the curse on reality; on its account humanity itself has become fake and false right down to its deepest instincts – to the point of worshipping values *opposite* to the only ones which would guarantee it a flourishing, a future, the exalted *right* to a future (Nietzsche, 2009: 3).

Seeing his work as the unveiling of the "psychology of Christianity" (Nietzsche, 2009: 79), he quotes his own *Zarathustra* saying, "and whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil: verily, he must first be an annihilator and shatter values. Thus does the highest evil belong to the highest good..." (Nietzsche, 2009: 89). Through his exposure of the Christianity's *decadent* nature, Nietzsche attempted to invert the conventional herd-inspired hierarchical system of morals and return goodness to the "noble," the "aristocratic," i.e. the "masters" (Nietzsche, 2006b: 11). "To enable a sanctuary to be set up," he states, "a sanctuary has got to be destroyed: that is the law" (Nietzsche, 2006b: 64).

However, before the *transvaluation* of all values can occur, man must first go through a transition period of pessimism, as all that structured his understanding of meaning, that gifted "purpose" to life, and that provided existential and eschatological security, will be brought into question and ultimately abandoned. Pessimism therefore is the precondition for nihilism, but nihilism is only the embrace of the meaningless. Nietzsche wishes to transcend that meaninglessness with the *Übermensch* (Hovey, 2008: 69-91; Nietzsche, 2006c: 7).

But what specifically in Christianity is being destroyed through metaphysical pessimism? In other words, what does Christianity represent, encourage, and embody that makes it so damnable in Nietzsche's mind, that it must be abstractly negated in order for man to realize his emancipatory potential? I would argue that Nietzsche's attack on Christianity is not entirely theological, but rather is the result of Christian theology. Christian morality is the primary subject of his critique. For Nietzsche, Christian morality is 1) rooted in hatred for this world, 2) fundamentally against life and vitality as it praises obedience and submissiveness, 3) is a perversion of nature and therefore is morality fit only for slaves as it does not adhere to man's inherent nobility, 4) it is full of contempt or *ressentiment* towards those who overcome their limitations, 5) it altruistically binds the individual to the mediocrity of the masses, and 6) it limits man's capacity to overcome adversity by giving him a fictitious escape mechanism (Kaufmann, 1974: 337-390; de Botton, 2000: 231-238). However, as shown in the *Gay Science,* Nietzsche believes modernity is quickly destroying the "slave" religion created around the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. This clearing away of a bad religion rooted in slavish weakness paves the way for nihilism, which serves as the precondition for a philosophy of Nietzschian "overcoming." He states,

> The highest values in the service of which man ought to live, more particularly when they oppressed and constrained him most – these social values, owing to their tone-strengthening tendencies, were built over men's heads as though they were the will of God, or "reality," or the actual world, or even a hope of a world to come. Now that the lowly origin of these values has become known, the whole universe seems to have been transvalued and to have lost its significance – but this is only an intermediate state (Nietzsche, 2006c: 6).

If an individual can be emancipated from the morality of the herd – a morality that chains him to "fate," which diminishes his capacity to transcend his limitations – than he can acquire upon himself the task of living. No longer will he accept the depreciation of life that is ingrained

within the life-denying (ascetic) "other-worldliness" of Christianity, but can turn his energy and resources to this-life, to the construction of a life-affirming way-of-being. As such, Nietzsche's philosophy essentially embodies the optimism of the Enlightenment; that through reason, or in Nietzsche's particular case the "will," man can determine his own destiny (Nietzsche, 2006c: 9). Religion, especially Christianity, had been an impediment to Europe's development since its slave morality had overcome the natural and noble ethos of the Roman Empire. He believes that "we shall have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years," because now we have entered into a state of being where we "shall not know in what direction we are traveling" (Nietzsche, 2006c: 15). However, according to Nietzsche's *lebensphilosophie*, now that religion has given way to nihilism, a *tabula rasa* stands before mankind inviting him to seize his autonomy and paint his own canvas. As such, human beings are free to install themselves as masters – to liberate themselves from their mythological fear (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 1), to transcend and become *übermenschen* or to embrace the mediocrity of *untermenschen*. However, *only a few* will be able to climb the mountain of cold and ice and seize their own life. As Julian Young described it, these few are the only ones that will be a "battle ground for the struggle between Christian morality and the morality of antiquity that preceded it" (Young, 2007: 148). They, for Nietzsche, are the true *Übermenschen*. The rest will remain within the safety and security of the herd, regardless of what kind of collectivist thought they are drawn to.

Summation

Similar to Feuerbach, Marx, Lenin, and Freud, Nietzsche believes that if modernity is to be defined by the autonomy of mankind – by the individual's building of the world in which he

wants to live – religion, especially religion fit only for slaves – must be removed as an impediment to that development. Feuerbach believed that the conception of God was proof that man was self-alienated; Marx believed religion offered an illusionary refuge from the realities of life which depleted mankind's potential for self-emancipation via the revolutionary proletariat; Lenin believed that religion offered not only the masses a conciliatory and compensatory illusions that made alienated and oppressive life bearable, but also alleviated the guilt created by the bourgeois' bad conscience; Freud believed that religion was rooted in psychological neuroses and was the product of an earlier time period and represented man's inability to rationally "grown up"; and Nietzsche believed that history itself was digging the grave of religion and that it was ushering in a period in which mankind had to choose between embracing and overcoming the realities of life or remaining sheltered within the anonymous herd.

All in all, these theorists, who all had immense influence on the Frankfurt School's philosophy of society as well as their philosophy of religion, all believed that religion must be negated for the sake of man's future. As such, all of these thinkers represent powerful Enlightenment attacks on the religious world of Europe. Although the Frankfurt School shared in their task of furthering the essential goals of the Enlightenment, they would take a very different stance towards religion. As can be seen repeatedly in their writings on religious themes, they thought religion remained a dialectical phenomenon, one that could not simply be *abstractly negated*, but rather must be *determinately negated* – thus preserving the liberational and revolutionary aspects while abandoning that which makes it oppressive and counterrevolutionary, or inhibiting man's fragile balance between solidarity and autonomy. Being skeptical of the ideology of "progress" that was an intrinsic part of the Enlightenment narrative, being witness to the barbaric slaughter to World War I, World War II, anti-Semitism,

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and the systematic production of corpses in Auschwitz, they could not believe that the rejection of religion in its totality inevitably brought about a net good. They were not that optimistic about secular modernity. Instead, the Frankfurt School took a different approach towards religion: what these foundational thinkers argued to be impediments to human development and flourishing, aspects of which they would translate into revolutionary secular thought, thus enlisting religious concepts and theological notions into the service of revolutionary philosophy. From ideologies that enslave mankind to his projections, his ruling class, his bad conscience, his neuroses, and his herd-like weaknesses, they would allow certain semantic and semiotic material in religion to be rescued, reexamined, and fulfilled through the migration from the depth of religion into liberational philosophy.

Chapter 3: Relationship to Judaism and the Distinction between Religion and Theology

> *To reason, devotion to the adored creature appears as idol worship.*
> *The demise of idolatry follows necessarily from the ban on*
> *mythology pronounced by Jewish monotheism and enforced against*
> *the changing objects of adoration in the history of thought by that*
> *monotheism's secularized form, enlightenment.*[1]

~ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

In this section I attempt to establish two claims that I think are important for understanding the Frankfurt School's critical theory of religion. First, I claim that the Jewish background of the first generation of Critical Theorists is important to their work, as I think they preserve something vital of it within their socio-political and economic critique of liberal society. As some Critical Theorists would readily admit, while other remained reticent, their religious heritage didn't simply disappear with their lack of explicit religiosity, but a certain critical *geist* originating from the Jewish experience as "other" continued throughout their critical work. Secondly, since I will later be claiming that specific religious and theological concepts will migrate from the depth of the Judeo-Christian tradition into Critical Theory, I attempt to demonstrate how the first generation of Critical Theorists, especially Adorno and Horkheimer, *determinately negate* religion as opposed to *abstractly negate* religion, by elucidating their conceptualizations of *negative* and *positive* religion. These explicit differentiations, which testify for the idea that religion, especially the three Abrahamic faiths, dialectically holds within itself both emancipatory potentials as well as for the potential for social domination, is one of the most important factors that distinguish their analysis of religion from the predecessors discussed in

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[1] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments.* Ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 89.

chapter one and two. This section ultimately prepares us for the central claim of this work: that the Critical Theory is rooted in the 2nd commandment of the Mosaic Decalogue: *thou shall not make any graven images,* and thus Critical Theory as first developed by Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm and Benjamin contains within it certain co-determinate religious aspects that had been translated and secularized into their critical philosophy.

Preservation of Jewishness

According to Detlev Claussen, Theodor Adorno often insisted that being Jewish had little to do with his academic work. Just as he denied it for the German-Jewish writer Heinrich Heine, so too did he deny that it was his Jewish heritage that gave trajectory to his artistic and academic work (Clausen, 2008: 20-29). Being an assimilated Jew from a mixed marriage, his father being Jewish (although converted to Protestantism) and his mother being Catholic, he attempted to see his work in universal terms, unencumbered by the particularities of tribe and creed until he was schematically forced back into his religious and ethnic affiliation by the totalizing "identity thought" of the Nazis (Adorno, 1999: 362; Clausen, 2008: 24; Jacobs, 2015: 54-60; Wiggerhaus, 1994: 4). Furthermore, his early preoccupation with his mother's Corsican origins *may* suggest a personal insecurity with his Jewish ancestry (Clausen 2008: 27-28). It seems reasonable to suspect that the period in which the early members of the Frankfurt School lived in Germany and the United States – during the Weimar Republic, the early period of Nazi rule, and the beginning of the Cold War – certainly contributed to their thoughts on their Jewish heritage.[2] According to Martin Jay, "the members of the Institut were anxious to deny any significance at all to their

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[2] This is certainly more the case for the last two periods as opposed to the first.

ethnic roots." Jay commented that the "intensity" of the denial was striking to him (Jay, 1996: 32).[3]

Although the social and political context of the early Frankfurt School is very important, Adorno's uneasiness about the "Jewish" element of his work may simply be understood as being pragmatic within the often-hostile context in which he lived. The Frankfurt School often camouflaged their Marxism, which was frequently associated with Judaism both in Europe and America, by describing what they were doing as "Critical Theory," as opposed to "Marxism," etc.[4] Being both Jewish and Marxist was stigmatizing in liberal America just as it was in anti-Semitic Europe before and during the Third Reich. American democracy didn't limit the national suspicion of Jews and Marxists, who were often accused of being the fifth column in American society, evidenced in the large number of Jews who were accused of "un-American activities" during the Second Red Scare (1947-1957), led by Senator Joe McCarthy. In fact, once established in New York, Friedrich Pollock even asked Adorno to drop "Wiesengrund" from his name, as "there were too many Jewish-sounding names on the Institut's roster," and he did not want to garner undue attention to this immigrant group of left-wing Jewish intellectuals fleeing Europe (Jay, 1996: 34).[5] Nevertheless, various scholars claim that the apparent dissimulation

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[3] Martin Jay also writes that Felix Weil maintained that Jewishness did not play a determining factor when he invited individual scholars to join his Institute for Social Research, but rather due to pervasive assimilation, anti-Semitism had retreated into a "social club issue" with little popular support (Jay, 1996: 32). He also cites Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* (1944) as belittling the degree to which anti-Semitism was an issue in during the Weimar Republic. However, the ease of which the Nazi's anti-Semitic ideology was widely accepted in Germany post-Weimar contradicts such a minimizing claim about the nature of anti-Semitism in German society. It may be the case that Weil and Neumann was self-delusional (Jay, 1996: 32) or were simply incapable of seeing the coming explosion of anti-Semitism that would arise out of the political-economic discontent that followed the German defeat in World War I and the subsequent Versailles Treaty. Either way, the Jewishness of the Critical Theory scholars was less of an issue before the ascendance of the National Socialist Party, who saw the "Café Marx," as the Frankfurt School was dubbed, as a problem for the future of Germany.

[4] The issue of what can be defined as "orthodox Marxism" is a vexing problem and one that will not be resolved in this work. For the sake of clarity, I will use this phrase to denote only certain "dogmatic" strains of Marxism that are closely aligned with the Soviet Union, i.e. those of the Marxist-Leninist trajectory.

[5] In his discussion of the early Frankfurt School member's divisions with their parents over the issue of Judaism, Martin Jay comments that, "one might argue that the strong ethical tone of Critical Theory was a product of the

concerning the Jewish backgrounds and influence of Judaism on most of the Frankfurt School members did not arrest them from deploying Jewish theological concepts in his work.[6] In the case of Adorno, Robert Hullot-Kentor has argued that "theology is always moving right under the surface of all Adorno's writings" and it "penetrates every word" (Hullot-Kentor in Adorno, 1989: xi). Christopher Craig Brittain claims that, "Adorno's interest in theology is not a marginal aspect of his writing," but rather "lies at the very core of the moral impulse that motivates his work" (Brittain, 2010: 170). In a slightly less forceful manner, Lorenz Jäger argues that since "Adorno had discovered his own philosophy by interpreting Christianity as part of a process of Hegelian sublation," his philosophy included a trace of theology that "repeatedly demanded reflection" (Jäger, 2004: 70). Similarly, according to Rudolf J. Siebert, Adorno believed that specific "theological content must emigrate out of religious consciousness and into the continually expanding secular consciousness" if religion and theology were to survive at all in the modern period, and Adorno himself was prepared to do such work (Siebert, 1983-1984: 110).[7] On a broader level, Eduardo Mendieta argues that "the point" of the first generation's "approach to the question of religion" was to "rescue from theology and religion that which is in danger of being extinguished and desecrated by their [theology and religion] attempt to render positive that which can only be ciphered negatively" (Habermas, 2002: 5). As we will later see,

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incorporation of the values likely to be espouses in a close-knit Jewish home" (Jay, 1996: 35). It seems apparent that although they accepted the *universality* of Marxist revolutionary theory, they nevertheless seemed to retain certain moral elements originating in their *particular* religious background, i.e. Judaism.

[6] Martin Jay erroneously argues that Fromm and Löwenthal were the only Frankfurt School members to have "evinced any real interest in Jewish theological issues" (Jay, 1996: 33). As I will argue, Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin will also be concerned with theological issues and the concepts that are at the core of those issues will often animate important parts of their philosophy.

[7] It should also be pointed out that Adorno's interest in religion/theology was already apparent when he wrote his *Habilitationsschrift* on the theologian Kierkegaard and his aesthetics. He completed this work in 1931 under the supervision of the socialist and protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who was then the chair of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt and a friend of Horkheimer (Brittain, 2010: 33; Ott, 2001: 41-42). Being a "philosopher of religion" who had written "numerous books" on a variety of religious and theological ideas, Adorno abandoned his previous project on Freud and instead wrote on Kierkegaard, who, according to Stefan Müller-Doohm, "was no stranger to him" (2009: 109).

the theological component of Adorno's work, as well as Horkheimer and Benjamin, will not always be explicit, especially to those unaccustomed to identifying the theological moment within critical philosophy. Rather, their use of theology will at times rise above the surface and make itself readily apparent, especially in the Mosaic concept of *Bilderverbot* (image ban), while at other times it will follow Walter Benjamin's observation: that theology today has "wizened and has to keep out of sight" (Benjamin, 1969: 253). However, when theology is utilized, it is always demythologized, de-dogmatized and thoroughly translated into philosophy, except in the case of Walter Benjamin, who often lets theology speak for itself alongside philosophy (Adorno, 1999: 401-402; Horkheimer, 1978: 239; Benjamin, 1969). In other words, through this migration from the religious to the philosophical, core theological categories and sentiments, both Jewish and Christian, are both negated and preserved within secular critical philosophy.

Despite Adorno's apparent troubles with the Jewish elements within Critical Theory, others within the Frankfurt School were more emphatic about the Jewishness of Critical Theory, especially Leo Löwenthal, Erich Fromm, and Max Horkheimer, all of whom expressly attributed Jewishness as being an essential component of the Frankfurt School's work, albeit at various times in their lives.[8] According to Löwenthal, as he reflected back on the development of Critical

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[8] This is especially interesting as Horkheimer was unimpressed with the theological strain within Adorno's early thought, which can be attributed to the influence of Walter Benjamin. Despite his initial apprehension, Horkheimer would come closer to both Adorno's and Benjamin's theology later in life (Abromeit, 2011: 349-393). Nevertheless, it would not be correct to say that Horkheimer was uninterested in religion, theology and religious morality until late in life. Evidence of his keen interest can be found throughout his collection of early fictional novels. See *Max Horkheimer: Gesammelte Schriften Band I: Aus der Pubertät. Novellen und Tagebuchblätter < 1914-1918.* Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1988. Additionally, Horkheimer's interest in Schopenhauer and his metaphysical pessimism began at the very beginning of his intellectual career. He was introduced to Schopenhauer through Pollock, who recommended a book that "proved decisive for his further intellectual development," i.e. Schopenhauer's *Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit* (Abromeit, 2013: 24-25). To highlight Horkheimer's determinate negation of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Abromeit writes that the young Horkheimer's "pessimism did not lead to resignation. He concurred with Schopenhauer's criticism of metaphysical systems or philosophies of history, such as that of Leibniz or Hegel, that justified the status quo as desirable, rational, or necessary. On the other hand, Horkheimer did not follow Schopenhauer in hypostatizing the negativity of the world by granting it the status of a metaphysical principle… Horkheimer transformed the philosophically founded rejection of the world, which he discovered in

Theory, he stated, "some of us [first generation of the Frankfurt School] longed denied its [Judaism's] *essential* role in our development. In retrospect, this must be corrected" (Löwenthal, 1989: 83).[9] In addition, he would later confess that Judaism had a much larger role than was previously admitted to, an admission that acknowledged Judaism's foundational role in Critical Theory. He said,

> However much I tried to convince Martin Jay that there were no Jewish motifs among us at the Institute, now, years later and after mature consideration, I must admit to a certain influence of Jewish tradition, which was *co-determinative* (Löwenthal, 1987: 112).[10]

Max Horkheimer further testified to this "co-determinate" role in his September 1969 letter to Otto O. Herz, in which he attempted to explain Adorno's "complicated relationship to religion" after the latter's unexpected death and subsequent funeral. Horkheimer writes, "the critical theory that we both had a hand in developing has its roots in Judaism. It arises from the idea: Thou shalt not make any graven images of God," which is the 2nd commandment in the Jewish Decalogue (Horkheimer, 2007: 361). Because the Jewish aspect of Critical Theory appeared so prevalent to him, Gershom Scholem claimed that the Frankfurt School was one of the "three most remarkable 'Jewish sects' that German Jewry produced" (Scholem, 2012: 131).[11] If Critical Theory could be seen, as Scholem surmises, as a "sect" of Judaism, it would certainly be heretical. Yet, as Isaac Deutscher has argued, the heretical nature of Critical Theory could not exorcise it from the Jewish Tradition, for even heresy was a Jewish tradition (Deutscher, 1968: 25-41).

Schopenhauer's writings, into a critique of the world *as it is*. He never despaired entirely of the possibility of change" (Abromeit, 2013: 47).

[9] Emphasis added.

[10] Emphasis added.

[11] Scholem followed up this claim stating that "not all of them [Jewish sects] liked to hear this," which certainly seems true for some of the members of the Frankfurt School.

In light of Adorno's early issues concerning the possible Jewishness of his thought, and the insistence of others that it was an "essential" component in the development of Critical Theory, we must discover what exactly was intrinsically Jewish, if anything, in the work of the Frankfurt School, especially in the first generation. If we are going to derive some concrete conclusions, we want to avoid the superficial aspects of the Frankfurt School's biography, such as the claim that all of the first generation of Critical Theorists were Jews. While it is certainly correct, this base description does nothing for our understanding of *why* this kind of left-wing thought was attractive to so many Jews, especially Jewish intellectuals, more so than to other minority group at this particular time and place. It should be unequivocally stated that there is *no biological determination* in Critical Theory, i.e. it is not *because* they were ethnically Jewish that they were *determined* by their genetics to think in any given way, as some in the Nazi party accused the Jews of. Löwenthal strengthens this claim when he stated that certain aspects of the "Jewish tradition" (religion) become "co-determinative" factors in Critical Theory, not Jewish ethnicity. Therefore, we must make a clear separation between Jewish ethnicity and Judaic thought and praxis, as the prior is born into while the later can be freely adopted and/or abandoned. In addition, the relationship of these scholars to Judaism varies widely. It ranges from those who began with religious upbringings and left it behind, such as Fromm and Pollock, to those who concerned themselves with Jewish issues and ideas later in life, such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Löwenthal, to those who never made their Jewish background a subject of interrogation, such as Henryk Grossman (Jacobs, 2015: 7-42; Jay, 1996: 31-37). With this in mind, we must ask the question: what is it about *non-conformist* political, economic and social thought – like the "Critical Theory" they developed – that attracted these Jewish intellectuals? What are the common characteristics between non-conformist thought (or what

Marcuse called *leftism*) and Judaism – or the Jewish experience – that would make them compatible (Marcuse, 2005: 180)? In other words, is there something within Judaism or the Jewish experience (in the West especially) that compels Jews towards thought that is incongruent with the dominant culture, society and ideology? In essence, what makes Jewish intellectuals, especially during the early 20th century, so often "non-conformists" intellectuals? Although Martin Jay denies that their "ethnic roots" in Judaism or the Jewish experience in Germany can be considered the sole or even predominant reason for the Institute's radical critique of society, it is, in his estimation, neglectful not to consider it as "one contributing factor" (Jay, 1996: 34).

Context: Jews in the "Bourgeois Age"

The first generation of Frankfurt School scholars came of age within a period of Jewish assimilation and secularization in Germany and other parts of Central and Western Europe (Wat, 2010: 401-710; Wohl, 1979: 42-84). The Enlightenment's insistence on the universal qualities of all men and the legal privileging of no particular religion allowed the Jews to escape from both their social and physical ghettos and enter into various spheres of European society that had hitherto been barred from them due to their religious/ethnic affiliation. Secular liberalism, not religion or religious authorities, had liberated the Jews from the strictures of the medieval mind-frame of "Christian" Europe, who had maintained that the Jews had committed *deicide* against Jesus of Nazareth (Carroll, 2001: 401-471; Lindemann et al, 2010: 47-93; Mark 15:13; Matthew 27:22; John 19:15).[12] No longer did the Jews have to baptize their children in the local cathedral

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[12]   This legal liberation of the Jews by no means ended the profound hatred for the Jews throughout Europe. The nature of anti-Semitism changed; it migrated from a religiously inspired hatred to one more science oriented: *biology*. This pseudo-scientific biological anti-Semitism was the form that was most dominant in the National

to "gain the entrance ticket to European culture," as Heinrich Heine once remarked, but rather could live openly in a pluralistic society as observant (or non-observant) Jews, and still maintain the same rights as non-Jewish citizens (Jacobs, 2015: 11). Or, they could forgo their Judaism all together and assimilate into the broader non-Jewish culture. Many Jewish families, including Adorno's, Horkheimer's, Pollack's and Löwenthal's, took advantage of the new opportunities in business, government and academics and excelled in their professions (Wiggerhaus, 1994: 41-105). Most optimistically, it was a time where assimilated Jews were attached to their national identities; they lived and felt German, Dutch, Austrian, French and Belgian, and, as Horkheimer wrote, "the historical vicissitudes of the Jews made them dependent on [the enlightened society's] pluralist culture" (Horkheimer, 1974: 104). Consequently, they fully participated in the nationalist frenzies of the given countries, including service in various militaries on both sides of the conflict during World War I. For these Jews their religious heritage was not the determining factor in how they lived their everyday life, but rather they most often recognized themselves as being fully part of their various national cultures. To the anguish of many conservative and/or Orthodox Jewish communities, the Jewish laws (*mitzvah*) were not adhered to adequately (or at all) by Jews who had left the small religious communities (*shtetls*) for the urban centers (especially Frankfurt and Berlin), which led many Rabbis to worried whether or not this amalgamation of Jews into the non-Jewish world would lead to the death of the Jewish community in Europe – a form of cultural suicide through integration and assimilation (Clausen, 2008: 21, 36-41). Where once the Torah and Talmud thoroughly saturated the lives of the Jewish community, they were now replaced by Goethe, Schiller, Voltaire, Shakespeare and other secular humanist thought. According to Horkheimer, the rise of *liberal Judaism*, by which individuals

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Socialism of the Third Reich. See Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy's *Antisemitism: A History* for a good overview of anti-Semitism post-Enlightenment.

freely associate and "form a part of the national state in which they happen to live," developed in contrast to more traditional forms of Judaism, which still "determine[d] the life of both individual and society and in large measure prescribed the course of daily life and the relations of Jews with each other" (Horkheimer, 1974: 108). Like much of Protestant Christianity, Judaism had become *confessional*, a private matter between the individual and the divine (Horkheimer, 1974: 108). In other words, liberal Judaism made compromises with bourgeois society that traditional Jews were unwilling to make, and thus modernity forced an antagonistic split within the religion itself. Because of these liberal modifications to the Jewish tradition, many Orthodox Rabbis believed that Jews who assimilated into gentile culture would become *indistinguishable* from non-Jews and in doing so the community could lose the "covenantal" favor of the divine – a perilous thought for a religious group who regarded themselves as God's chosen people, and a charge that would resurface in light of the *Shoah* (Holocaust) (Birnbaum, 1977: 488-494). Consequently, assimilation had eschatological and salvation consequences: if God removed his favor for the Jews because of their faithlessness to the covenant made with Moses on Mount Sinai, and for the sin of disobedience (or neglect) of his laws, then God could remove his favor from them and leave them unprotected in a world that was still *hostile* – even if not officially – to their presence.[13]

Yet, why would they need heavenly protection and favor if the Bourgeois Enlightenment, which guaranteed their basic civil rights, had liberated them from their ghettoized existence? Wasn't one of the promises of the Enlightenment to produce a society rooted in universal *liberté, égalité, fraternité*? Would this society not include Semites? Why then should they still need

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[13] The idea that Auschwitz was divine judgment or even vengeance against the Jews was one among many Jewish responses to Hitler's genocide. It was an attempt to answer the theodicy problem in the face of God's "chosen people" being systematically annihilated. See *Speaking of God after Auschwitz* by Franklin Sherman, in Michael L. Morgan's (Ed.) *The Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

God's protection if the Enlightenment values had already established the conditions for Jewish emancipation, protection and equality?[14] As we'll see, although the Enlightenment may have promised the *formal* liberation and emancipation of the Jews qua Jews, it often failed to deliver on such a promise *substantively*, as anti-Semitism proved to be adaptable to the changing social-political conditions.

Maintaining a Jewish identity within a society that understood the universal nature of humanity as being the basis for political emancipation, while at the same time often failing to uphold such august humanistic claims, forced Jews to ask a precarious question: how does one remain Jewish yet assimilate the dominant culture? Additionally, how does one forcefully insist on the preservation and actualization of universal humanistic values, such as liberty, equality and fraternity, while in a society that still practices anti-Semitism, without contributing to the idea that such universal values are simply camouflage for advancing a particular, in this case Jewish, interest? In a 1940 letter written by Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno from Paris, Benjamin makes a remark that hints at the fragile balance of Jewish identity politics within secular Enlightened Bourgeois society. Speaking of Marcel Proust and the Jewish nature (or non-nature) of his work, he writes, "the very fact that Proust was only half Jewish allowed him insight into the *highly precarious structure of assimilation*; an insight which was then externally confirmed by the Dreyfus affair" (Adorno & Benjamin, 2001: 329-330; Jacobs, 2015: 57).[15] What, we must ask, was the "precarious structure of assimilation" that was made visible by the Dreyfus Affair, and how did that affect the lives of the early Frankfurt School scholars and their relationship to Judaism?

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[14] The revolutionary promise of liberty, equality and fraternity was one of the main reason why Jews were attracted to France and later other nation that adopted the liberal ideas of secular republicanism, even when they fell short of full and substantive emancipation (Carroll, 2001: 414-438).
[15] Italics added.

Despite the fact that millions of Jews had thoroughly assimilated and thought them to be completely integrated into European society, there always existed a "Jewish" remainder. This "otherness" of being Jewish in the European context, even if it was not based on religious or theological categories, was a distinguishing factor within society. Just underneath the lofty ideals of the Enlightenment laid the entrenched legacy of anti-Semitism, which could not easily be removed from the European landscape by developments in political-economic philosophy. As they often discussed, the experience of anti-Semitism within the German Army during WWI, at least for Horkheimer and Löwenthal, demonstrated the hypocrisy of the Enlightenment's rhetoric about the equality of mankind and Enlightened Europe's dedication to such equality (Jacobs, 2015: 10, 14). In light of the tenure of modern anti-Semitism, it is possible to read the "precarious structure of assimilation" as thus: although a Jew may live as a gentile, psychologically identify with the gentile world, and recognize himself within and through gentile culture, they somehow remain intractably Jewish (outside of biology), and that identifiable "Jewishness" is a barrier from complete assimilation and/or acceptance. Echoing Adorno's assertion about the *otherness* of Jews in Europe, we can argue that there is a remainder that European society – by and large – identified as a marker of otherness, as in not belonging to Europe, and therefore not fully a part of European identity (Adorno, 1999).[16] What the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) did was highlight this very fact most poignantly, as Benjamin pointed out in his letter to Adorno. To understand the point of Benjamin's remark, we should briefly return to *l'affaire Dreyfus* and the problem of Jewish identity within the context of the enlightened Europe.

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[16] The identification of Jews as "not belonging to Europe" varied in both degree and kind in different parts of Europe. Where the Enlightenment took hold, anti-Semitism became more political, economic and even pseudo-scientific. Where the Enlightenment didn't reach, mainly in Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism mostly remained religious, i.e. and therefore should more accurately be described as anti-Judaism (Lindemann and Levy, 2010).

Although Captain Alfred Dreyfus served his French government admirably, and had excelled beyond most of his gentile counterparts, he was nevertheless falsely accused of passing French military secrets to the Germans, and was found guilty of the crime despite the overwhelming evidence that the real culprit was a non-Jewish French Army Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy (Carroll, 2001: 450-463). Dreyfus served as a convenient scapegoat for the anti-Semitic courts primarily because public opinion of Jews remained unfavorable despite the universalism of Enlightenment ideals. Additionally, France had recently experienced an explosion of nationalism that highlighted the *foreignness* of the Jews in the nation (Golsan in Lindemann and Levy, 2010: 143). Indeed, his arrest and trial "set off an explosion of anti-Jewish invective in the press" according to James Carroll, which took many assimilated Jews by surprise (Carroll, 2001: 454). Despite the integration and assimilation of Jews in France, what did popular French society continue to label Jews, even if they served honorably and loyally in the military, government, business or academics? The answer to this question remains surprising consistent with pre-modern accusation against the Jews: as had been done in the medieval period, they were accused of being liars, thieves, hucksters and traitors.[17] Jews were still portrayed by writers, such as the nationalist anti-Semitic writer Edouard Drumant, as being "evil incarnate," as "carrier[s]

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[17] The "image of the Jew" was expressly addressed in the Frankfurt School's work *The Authoritarian Personality,* where they studied the attitudes towards Jews in relationship to the religious views of the American working class. In viewing Christianity as the "religion of the son" that harbors resentment towards the "religion of the father" (Judaism), they remind us that many of the modern stereotypes of Jews are the legacies of religious anti-Semitism. They write the "fantasies about Jewish bankers and money-lenders have their biblical archetype in the story of Jesus driving the usurers from the Temple. The idea of the Jewish intellectual as a sophist is in keeping with the Christian denunciation of the Pharisee. The Jewish traitor who betrays not only his master but also the in-group, to which he has been admitted, is Judas. These motifs are enhanced by more unconscious trends such as expressed in the idea of the crucifix and the sacrifice of blood. Although these latter ideas have been more or less successfully replaced by "Christian Humanism," their deeper psychological roots have still to be reckoned with" (Adorno et al, 1950: 729).

of mental illness," and as people who "contaminated and infected everything [they] touch[ed]" (Lindemann and Levy, 2010: 144).[18]

Like so many Jews living in gentile societies, Dreyfus however knew full well what his sole crime was: "to have been born a Jew" (Carroll, 2001: 454). Yet for nationalists like Drumont, the Dryfus affair confirmed every stereotype that he held dear, as the accusations against Dreyfus fused easily into his narrative of the Jews as being the pervasive illness within European society. Consequently, what Proust understood, and what Benjamin was pointing out to Adorno, was that regardless of one's accomplishments, one's loyalty to a nation-state, or one's humanistic philosophy, all Jews were imprisoned within the pejorative singular-concept of "the Jew" in most of Europe. As Adorno would later write in his *Negative Dialectics,* "the philosophy [of] pure identity is death," and escaping their Jewishness was not possible even after the Enlightenment's universalism began to shape the trajectory of the political sphere in Europe (Adorno, 1999: 362).[19] In fact, within the context of modernity, anti-Semitism took an even more sinister trajectory: it became *pseudo-scientific*. Jews could not simply change their religion to

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[18] Even Karl Marx regrettably criticized the "huckstering" nature of the Jews in the second half of his *On the Jewish Question,* which resulted in some, including Gershom Scholem, arguing that his analysis was anti-Semitic and "repulsive" (Marx and Engels, 1978: 47-52; Scholem, 1981: 222-223).[18] Horkheimer himself, in a 1969 letter to Anna Steuerwald-Landmann, said he placed Marx in the camp of "Jewish anti-Semites" whom he found "loathsome" (Horkheimer, 2007: 353). However, it can be argued that Marx was engaged in an *inner-critique* of Jews – judging them based on their own religion's moral commitments, against which the characteristics of "huckstering" would stand condemned. If this were the case, and I readily admit it is just one possibility among others, then it would be unfair to categorize Marx as an anti-Semite, as his critique would tacitly be in defense of normative Jewish mores and values. Nevertheless, men like Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, and himself an assimilated Jew from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, lost faith in Europe's enlightened embrace of pluralism and the "autonomous individual" in light of the Dreyfus affair (Horkheimer, 1974: 110). Herzl's pessimism led him to claim that if Jews wished to survive, they must assimilate on a higher order; just like the European nations, Jews must become nationalists in a land of their own, i.e. Zionism as Jewish nationalism (Horkheimer, 1974: 110). Such an earthly homeland was necessary, Herzl maintained, because that which continued to distinguish Jews as Jews despite their assimilation into non-Jewish society was that which would continue to attract hatred and violence, and therefore the only real solution, which the Dreyfus affair made clear to Herzl, was for Jews to leave Europe all together. Despair in the face of the Enlightenment's failure to realize its promises was leading to drastic answers, including Marxism's overthrowing of bourgeois society to Zionism's abandonment of Europe and its dream of cosmopolitanism (Shlomo Avineri, 2013: 114-140).

[19] In the fourteenth lecture of his *Metaphysics* series, Adorno said that, "one might say that the pure identity of all people with their concept is nothing other than their death..." (Adorno, 2001: 108).

hide their "Jewishness" as they had often done before. What now identified Jews was their biology – a permanent aspect that cannot be exorcised through religious conversion, as Karl Marx's father had done, as he had "abandoned Judaism and entered the Evangelical Church as a convert" (Payne, 1968: 21)[20] Neither could Edith Stein, the Jewish philosopher who converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun, escape her "Jewishness" through religious conversion to Christianity. She too was sent to Auschwitz under the category of a "biological Jew."

Subsumed under the modern biological argument, were the theological accusations of Jews being "Christ-killers," "deniers of the Messiah," and the reason why the second coming of the Messiah Jesus failed to happen. However, the modern form of anti-Semitism was divorced from the theological; it was genetic, hygienic, and nationalist. In light of the hypocrisy of the Enlightenment and other instances of "modern" anti-Semitism, many sons and daughters of successful Jews began to challenge the liberal ideology that allowed their parents to escape from the ghetto and engage in civil society (albeit on the margins). The limits to the tolerance of Jews had been made clear to those who attempted a full and substantive integration only to be stymied by new forms of anti-Jewish biases. Many retreated behind their parents' assimilation and emphatically embraced their Jewish identity and became Zionists (both secular or religious) or even Kabbalist mystics. Some abandoned Judaism all together and became Soviet-style Communists, including Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, while others determinately negated their Judaism and brought it together with socialist and/or German philosophy, as many in the Frankfurt School did (Jay, 1996: 35). In all ways, the status quo was being challenged by WWI

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[20] Robert Payne quotes Edgar von Westphalen, Marx's father-in-law, as saying that Heinrich Marx, formerly Hirschel Marx, was a "Protestant *à la* Lessing," meaning that he was "prepared to conform to the outward forms of the Church but did not believe that any faith was superior to any other" (Payne, 1968: 21). Nevertheless, the elder Marx had his son baptized and confirmed. The biographer of Karl Marx, Francis Wheen, contends that Heinrich converted to escape being subject to the Prussian Edict of 1812, which "effectively banned [Jews] from holding public office or practicing in the professions (Wheen, 1999: 10). As such, Heinrich raised his family in a household of "patriotic German[s] and Lutheran Christians (Wheen, 1999: 10).

era Jews who would no longer accept the hypocritical space between the ideals of liberal theory and the reality of Jewish life within liberalism (Jacobs, 2015: 15-20).[21] On the generational divide between their successful parents and the WWI generation of Jews, Löwenthal states "my parents' home symbolized, so to speak, everything I didn't want – bad liberalism, bad enlightenment, and two sided morality" (Löwenthal, 1989: 240). An alternative to this hypocritical situation had to be found.

Regardless of their theoretical and political differences, the "oppositional" nature of all these movements, or the "critique of existing society" as Horkheimer calls it for the Frankfurt School, is the common thread that unites them, and in light of the hypocrisy of liberalism that was becoming more evident as time progressed, it best describes the mood among many younger Jews at this time (Horkheimer, 2007: 369). In this sense, the failure of the Enlightenment to actualize its universal humanist claims seemed to cement the resilient "otherness" of the Jews in Europe, both in the views of the detractors of Judaism and in much of the Jewish community itself. Within this discontentment with the ideals of the Enlightenment and the reality of their failure, as it related to the Jews, the Frankfurt School was conceived and molded, and especially for purposes of this study, its philosophy of religion was developed out of its broader critical theory of society.

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[21] Additionally, Adorno bemoaned the possibility of Jewish assimilation while in exile in the United States, partly because of the "barbaric semi-civilization of this country [which] will spawn forms [of fascism] no less terrible than those in Germany" (Jacobs, 2015: 59). Through their study of anti-Semitic tendencies in *The Authoritarian Personality,* members of the Frankfurt School became aware of the extent of anti-Semitism within the U.S., which had grown steadily in between the two world wars (Adorno et al, 1950; Jacobs, 2015: 62-63).

If it is the case that European society suspected duplicity in their Jewish neighbors, that somehow they became equal citizens but remained the "other" to the majority non-Jewish community – because of what Horkheimer identified as the "historically conditioned nature of the Jew" – and many Jews identified with this same conditioned nature – that they adopted the dominant lifestyle of their nationality while tacitly preserving something specifically Jewish – we must then ask what exactly is this "Jewishness" that they both identify (Horkheimer, 1974: 107). Whether or not this occurred does not seem to be questioned, at least not for Horkheimer, who maintained the idea that there were social forces that tacitly bound ethno-religious groups together outside of their explicit religious principles and ideals (Horkheimer, 1974: 106). Speaking of Jewish assimilation, he writes,

> neither emancipation nor assimilation are identity. The specific character of an ethnic or religious group does not depend solely on the conscious principles or the rules for life and conduct which the group may accept or reject. Along with the doctrines proper to the Catholic or Protestant as well as to the Jewish religion, certain patterns of thought, associations, inclinations, and repugnances have developed, and these extend to non-religious matters; the same holds analogously for groups whose cohesion depends on something other than a religious faith (Horkheimer, 1974, 106).

To further solidify the point, he continues,

> Think, for example, of the German dialect groups: Rhinelanders, Schwabians, or Saxons. What distinguishes such groups from one another and from other groups as well is not simply the dialect, but all that goes with speech: the concrete thought-forms, the gestures, the emotional reactions which have been developed along with the language in the course of history, the ways in which people question and invite, sorrow and rejoice. The child does not enter into all this as a natural inheritance... rather in his earliest years he sees all this exemplified in mother and father and makes it his own. Thus, the otherness attaching to a historically developed set of characteristics affects even the smallest details; the more so, the more highly developed and nuanced the otherness is (Horkheimer, 1974: 106).

With this in mind, we must ask what is it that remains Jewish even when all outward signs of Judaism, or adherence to its beliefs and rituals, are abandoned by the Jewish individual themselves? In other words, what "otherness," as Horkheimer described it, maintains Jewish identity in the life of Jews who have abandoned all outward signs of their forefather's religion? Before we explore this question as it concerns the Frankfurt School, we should return to one of their predecessors, Sigmund Freud, who best exemplified this phenomenon Horkheimer speaks of (and was aware of it). In examining this highly influential predecessor, we can establish that it is indeed possible to abandon all explicit forms of a religious identity – the manifest appearances – while maintaining an *essential core* that serves as a motivating force for an individual's work. Such a determinate negation of religion, as we'll see in Freud, is critical to my later argument that certain religious semantic and semiotic material can and will be translated via determinate negation from religion into the secular philosophy by the Frankfurt School.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that an individual can abandon all manifest aspects of his religious tradition yet remain in essence a member of a believing community. However, In Freud's case, which I believe is true for the various Jewish members of the Frankfurt School, this determinate negation of an outward religious identity and the subsequent preservation of the essence is precisely what Freud argues is his condition. In his preface to the Hebrew translation of his book *Totem and Taboo,* Sigmund Freud makes an insightful comment that sheds some light on this issue. He writes,

> No reader of [the Hebrew version of] this book will find it easy to put himself in the emotional position of an author who is ignorant of the language of holy writ, who is *completely estranged* from the religion of his fathers – as well as from every other religion – and who cannot take a share in nationalist ideals, but who has yet never repudiated his people, who feels that he is *in his essential nature a Jew* and who has no desire to alter that nature. If the question were put to him: 'Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your countrymen, what is

there left of you that is Jewish?' he would reply: 'A very great deal, and probably *its very essence'* (Freud, 1989: xxxi).[22]

As demonstrated in the previous section of this work, Freud was no proponent of religion; he believed it belonged to the infancy of humanity and displayed certain characteristics congruent with neuroses; he rejected the existence of God; failed to live in any way as an observant Jew; and rejected the validity of "revealed" scripture as it was only a symptom of man's psychological problem: his need for "the benevolent rule of a divine Providence [which] allays our fear of the dangers of life" (Freud, 1964: 47; Fromm, 1972: 95-104). Freud was a man of science and was dismissive of religious obscurantism unless it provided clues to the inner-workings of man's mind. Nevertheless, this scientific atheist still believed he was "in his essential nature a Jew" and that he embodied the "essence" of being Jewish. If Freud's claim is true, and one can abandon all perspicuous forms of being Jewish, including adherence to Jewish life, beliefs, and rituals, and still maintain the *essence of Judaism* (or of being Jewish) within oneself, then we have to accept the idea that, at least for Freud, the esoteric "essence" of Judaism can be divorced, rescued, or even determinately negated from the exoteric component of Judaism.[23] In other words, Freud believed that his life and work embodied that which cannot be abandoned within Judaism without abandoning being Jewish en total. The essence of Judaism, or as he stated the "essential nature of the Jew," has transcended (*aufhebung*) the Jewish *accidentals* (outward appearances); it has been preserved within the secular-scientific life of the non-observant Jew and continues to animate his work. But what is this seemingly non-tangible

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[22] My emphasis added.

[23] I am intentionally neglecting the biological idea of a "Jewish race" as there in substantive scientific proof of such a thing, even though it was thought to exist in most of the 20th century. Following the example of the United States, the *rassenpolitiks* of the Nazis did the most to cement such an idea. Furthermore, Jews are of various races, including those from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, etc. In this sense, Judaism is not bound to one racial category. Furthermore, matrilineal thought – to be a Jew is to be born of a Jewish mother – within Judaism itself it highly contested. Historically, many Jews born of non-Jewish mothers continue to be accepted as Jews within the religious community. Adorno himself was born of a non-Jewish mother but is still regarded by most as being ethnically Jewish.

"essence" Freud speaks of? Without falling back into some kind of mystical gnosticism, or without reducing all Jews to a single identity – the danger of such we can see within the anti-Semitic ideology that resulted in the Shoah – we must ask "what must be necessarily preserved in order to remain 'essentially Jewish' while abandoning all other aspects associated with Jewish life and religion?" The key to answering this question may reside in Freud's working life, which, I argue, has an important export for the first generation of Frankfurt School scholars who share this same – or similar – characteristic.

In Freud's career as a specialist in neuropathology and later as a psychoanalyst – and founder of the discipline of "clinical" psychology – he spent much of his time engage in empirical observations of his patients, attempting to discover the root conflict within their unconscious which lay at the core of the neurosis. Developing his psychotherapy, Freud spent countless hours with those who were mentally broken by the traumatic experiences of life; who were suffering unspeakable pain due to some unarticulated and repressed tragedy of the past that had clouded their present; and those who felt the wrath of society for failing to conform due to their debilitating mental trauma. Freud diligently cared for his patients and attempted to heal their mental conflicts and wounds by gazing deeply into the recesses of their psyche in search of it conflicts. In other words, despite his initial professional success, which placed him among the elites of society, Freud dedicated his life to the broken, the marginalized and the wounded, albeit through science and not religion. However, if we look into the Jewish tradition, we find a concept that has been important to both religious and non-religious Jews in guiding their way-of-being-in-the-world which helps answer the question of what could possibly be "essentially Jewish" and maintained by both religious and non-religious Jews. Importantly, this concept also corresponds to the idea of care or concern for the broken, an essential characteristic needed in

Freud's case, and later in the case of the Frankfurt School. This concept lays at the heart of Judaism's moral claims but can be understood outside of the framework of organized or institutional religion, which helps explain why atheists like Freud could still view themselves as being essentially Jewish without adhering to the Mosaic commandments, laws (*mitzvot*) and scriptures typical of Jewish religious life.

Freud did not claim that science in particular or even the search for knowledge in general was his *essence of Judaism,* but on the contrary, it seemed to be partially responsible for his "estrangement" from the "religion of his fathers." As such, something outside of the secular pursuit of knowledge of the mind of man was identifiable to him as being still *Jewish.* This something has to be an intrinsic part of Judaism but also something that can migrate from the depth of the religious tradition and be translated into a secular life, thus preserving the Jewish *essence* of it while abandoning the Jewish *appearance*.

In his introduction to the book *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law,* Gerald Blidstein argues that the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam,* is, "in the most general sense... the thesis that Jews bear responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual, and material welfare, but for the moral, spiritual and material welfare of society at large" (Shatz et al, 2005: 1). Furthermore, according to George Robinson, *tikkun olam* is the "duty of every Jew to seek justice" (Robinson, 2000: 243). He states that,

> In a world unredeemed, a world that is damaged, it is the job of every Jew to participate in *tikkun olam/repair of the world.* In areas of social justice, social action, Judaism has set itself clear mandates. "You shall do what is right and good," we are told in Deuteronomy 6:18 (Robinson, 2000: 243).

Although Marcuse is skeptical of the claim that "Jewish leftism" is rooted in "Talmud and Torah," George contends that the social consciousness of Jews is rooted precisely in sacred scripture, as "Jewish law is predicated on our understanding that we are God's partners in

creation, that we alone can repair the unredeemed world," which is a socio-theological position *unique* to Judaism (Marcuse, 2005: 180; Robinson, 2000, 244). He continues,

> It is no accident that in the secular world Jews have usually been in the forefront of movements for social change and social justice. For many secular Jews, social action is what connects them to their Jewish identity. For all Jews, it is nothing less than what our tradition demands of us (Robinson, 2000: 244).

If we think of Freud's work as being geared towards what the Jewish tradition calls "repairing the world," in his case through each individual he doctored, then we can think of his work as fulfilling this peculiar Jewish responsibility.

The phrase *tikkun olam* originates in the *Mishnah*, which is the redaction of the Jewish "oral tradition," and it is understood to denote Jewish responsibility to heal a world that has been broken since the fall of man, in hopes of cultivating a future reconciliation of mankind (Shatz et al, 2005: 17-59; Genesis 3:1-24). It is not an exclusionary concept, in the sense that it is not *only* directed towards the Jewish community, but rather *tikkun olam* is radically ecumenical; Jews are responsible for *all* members of the human family, non-Jews included. Being "God's partners in creation" and the sole agent of the world's redemption, as the above quote states, is a position that is exclusive to Judaism. Such an augmented role for the community of believers cannot be found within the other Abrahamic faiths of Christianity and Islam, which posit a messianic individual as the redeemer of history. This insistence that Jews themselves have this redemptive position reveals the essential humanistic qualities of Judaism; it is not an ahistorical Messiah, an apocalyptic Mahdi or a heavenly savior that will redeem the unredeemed world, but the people *of* the world – who are bound by history – who are tasked to do so.[24] In Freud's case, the healing of the individual in order that they achieve freedom and happiness, through the tools of reason and

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[24] In many way, those political-philosophical movements, like Marxism, that have a messianic quality to them wherein a given group, in Marx's case the "proletariat," who are to bring about the end of history through its self-realization, are generally influenced by Judaism itself. It can be argued that Marx's also translated the responsibility of *tikkum olam* from the Jews to the working class.

science, is both "rooted in the spirit of the Enlightenment" – as it is free of religio-ethnic considerations – and is in accordance with the humanistic and ethical imperative (*tikkun olam*) of Judaism itself (Fromm, 1978: 98; Shatz et al, 2005: 61-102). As such, through his clinical work with his patients, Freud remains faithful to both his enlightened science as well as to the essence of Judaism, to "heal" the world.[25]

Paradoxically, religion for Freud was one of those social-psychological forces that estranged and debilitated man's mind and remained as an impediment to man's psychological maturation. In other words, religion is an illusion (or better a *delusion*) that mankind continuously imposes on itself which has devastating effects on its ability to achieve happiness and mental health. He says that religious ideas are "illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes." (Freud, 1964: 47). Part of Freud's mission is to overcome and liberate mankind from such debilitating illusions. But that brings us to a paradoxical situation: while Freud is attempting to alleviate mankind's attachments to his religious illusions, he is simultaneously engaged in what the Jewish tradition itself would consider a religious imperative: healing the brokenness of mankind. In this sense, his scientific research into the psyche and his practice of psychoanalysis is in service to a religious imperative. It seems that something in Freud's *essence*

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[25] In regards to Freud's "relation to Judaism," Löwenthal also connects it to his work healing the afflicted. He writes, "If we want to speak of *Freud's relation to Judaism* without resting content with an appreciation of his scientific treatment of Jewish themes and experiences, then we must direct our attention to those qualities he displays in the whole of his life. We celebrate in Freud the great doctor: the helper to those in psychic need for whom there has been no remedy until now; the fighter against the terrible illness of psychic affliction whose medical treatments might remind us of Goethe's Iphigenia as she redeems the chaos of passion through human dialog. But we celebrate in him the great scientist as well. Especially as a psychologist, through his teaching, through his students and beyond his specialization, he furthers and stimulates sciences which, in conjunction with the practice of public life, help analyze and will one day do away with the primary causes of psychological misery for many people. We think of society, of teaching. *Help and reconstruction for individuals and for society as a whole – that is the star that illuminates Freud's life and work*" (Löwenthal, 1989: 45). Emphasis added.

of Judaism language betrays that fact that he's tacitly mindful of the Jewishness of his psychoanalytic practice, even if he cannot positively articulate it as such (Freud, 1989: xxxi).

World Suffering, Tikkun Olam and the Frankfurt School

In light of their lack of explicit religiosity, I would argue that it is partially the awareness of and sensitivity towards the victims of history and the search for healing that bind Freud and the Frankfurt School in their *essential Jewishness.* As Siebert has written, "Horkheimer's critical theory is doubtless influenced by the Jewish tradition... he shares with this tradition a sensitivity to human pain (especially as connected with evil or sin) and a longing for justice" (Siebert, 1976: 134). At the very minimum, both Judaism and the Frankfurt School are aware that human life is horribly damaged and in need of healing. The esoteric Jewish *geist* that transcends the exoteric Jewish tradition is found precisely in this concern for the broken, the suffering, the alienated, and the marginalized, as both expressed by the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* and the corpus of the first generation of Frankfurt School intellectuals (Mendieta in Habermas, 2002: 4). This, as I have just argued, is what maintains the essential Jewishness in assimilated non-believing Jews. It is impossible to say for sure, as he was vague in his descriptions, but this shared characteristic may have been what Löwenthal meant by the Jewish nature of Critical Theory – "sympathy" for the suffering and marginalized, just as Jews had been suffering and marginalized since their *galut* (exile) from the Jewish homeland, and even prior to that when the prophets of the Hebrew Bible excoriated the community for their reckless spiritual *galut* from the divine and his laws.[26] This long and tortured history of suffering, some have concluded, has thoroughly saturated Jewish thought until the modern period.

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[26] Sympathy (συμπάθεια) – "to suffer with" or "to identify with the suffering"

The one time member of the Frankfurt School, Erich Fromm, in his book *You Shall be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition,* identifies the origins of Jewish sensitivity for the suffering within the tortured nature of Jewish history, especially in the experience of losing one's homeland and living in exile and the move from "Priestly religion" to "Prophetic religion."[27] Fromm writes,

> The Jews were in possession of effective and impressive secular power for only a short time, in fact, for only a few generations. After the reigns of David and Soloman, the pressure from the great powers in the north and south grew to such dimensions that Judah and Israel lived under the ever increasing threat of being conquered. And, indeed, conquered they were, never to recover. Even when the Jews later had formal political independence, they were a small and powerless satellite, subject to big powers. When the Romans finally put an end to the state after R. Yohanan ben Zakkai went over to the Roman side, asking only for permission to open an academy in Jabne to train future generations of rabbinical scholars, a Judaism without kings and priests emerged that had already been developing for centuries behind a façade to which the Roman gave only the final blow. *Those prophets who had denounced the idolatrous admiration for secular power were vindicated by the course of history. Thus the prophetic teachings, and not Soloman's splendor, became the dominant, lasting influence on Jewish thought.* From then on the Jews, as a nation, never again regained power. On the contrary, throughout most of their history they suffered from those who were able to use force (Fromm, 1969: 15-16).[28]

For Fromm, we see that the turn away from temporal power – the life of the king and priest – towards the prophetic, rooted in the prohibition of idols and the idolization of the phenomenal, became the dominant mode of being Jewish after the Roman destruction of the second temple in 70 CE. Judaism transformed from the religion of the priests who administers, via the routinized (and now systematized) authority of the prophet, to the prophetic that critiques via the authority of the divine (Fromm, 1981: 41-57). Prophetic religion, Fromm maintains, always remains on

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[27] Fromm will later develop these two categories in his essay "Prophets and Priests" in his book *On Disobedience.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 41-57.
[28] Emphasis added.

the margins of society, being *from* the people but not *of* the people.[29] He states that "it is the function of the prophet to show reality, to show alternatives and to protest; it is his function to call loudly, to awake man from his customary half-slumber" (Fromm, 1981: 43). On the other hand, the priest "control[s] people by controlling their thoughts... the priests use the [once prophetic] idea to organize men, to control them through controlling the proper expression of the idea, and when they have anesthetized man enough they declare that man is not capable of being awake and of directing his own life..." (Fromm, 1981: 43). The traumatic experience of losing their home and the subsequent turn towards the prophetic in Judaism, which radically changed its nature, generated the humanistic characteristics within Judaism that directed its spirit towards liberational movements. Fromm continues,

> But is it not natural that the story of the liberation from slavery in Egypt, the speeches of the great humanist prophets, should have found an echo in the hearts of men who had experienced force only as its suffering objects, never as its executors? Is it surprising that the prophetic vision of a united, peaceful mankind, of justice for the poor and helpless, found fertile soil among the Jews and was never forgotten? Is it surprising that when the walls of the ghettos fell, Jews in disproportionately large numbers were among those who proclaimed the ideals of internationalism, peace, and justice? What from a mundane standpoint was the tragedy of the Jews – the loss of their country and their state – from the humanist standpoint was their greatest blessing: being among the suffering and despised, they were able to develop and uphold a tradition of humanism (Fromm, 1969: 16).

This sympathy for the victims, the broken and the marginalized within a society that is *not quite* one's own, and the experience of being the persecuted minority religious/ethnic group, partly explains Jewish solidarity and communal life in European history as well as the humanist core that resides within the Jewish tradition, from which the Frankfurt School is rooted. Being the perpetual outsider, a status that didn't immediately disappear with the Enlightenment, helped solidify the preservation of that which binds Jews together – those common Jewish

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[29] Adorno makes a similar claim for Critical Theory, that the "dialectically minded critic of culture must both participate in culture and withdraw from it. Only then can he be just toward both culture and himself" (as quoted in Schweppenhäuser, 2009: 143).

characteristics that couldn't be dissolved into the national culture – especially the sense of "otherness" that couldn't be escaped no matter how assimilated and integrated the particular Jewish family or individual was. Additionally, sympathy for communities and individuals on the margins of society was cultivated by Jews who were themselves kept on the margins of society (Lindemann and Levy, 2010). Although he was less inclined towards questions of religion, but was nevertheless a keen student of Jewish history and anti-Semitism, Herbert Marcuse echoed Fromm's sentiment about the historically conditioned nature of Jewish humanism and political radicalism when asked about his own Jewish identity in 1977. He replied,

> I am Jewish by tradition and culture [and] I've always defined myself as a Jew when Jews were unjustly attacked. In Germany, being Jewish in the face of overt anti-Semitism was being on the left, instead of on the right. *Roots of leftism in Judaism come from historical oppression* (Marcuse, 2005: 179).[30]

When asked about the source of Jewish leftism being rooted in the Jewish tradition itself, Marcuse responded with,

> perhaps the indictment of injustice and inequality is derived from the prophets, and was motivated by sympathy for the oppressed. Jewish leftism is derived from sensitivity for oppression and the will and effort to do something about it (Marcuse, 2005: 180).[31]

Especially with the shortcomings of the secular Enlightenment, which stressed the universality of humanity over the particular, inter-communal solidarity for the Jewish community, born out of Jewish history, was expanded to solidarity with all who suffer some form of marginalization and/or oppression. On the idea that "earthly injustice" conditioned the Jewish community to not only desire their own salvation, but to also live in solidarity with others who suffer, Horkheimer writes "the expectation that against all probability and despite the previous course of history paradise would someday come, as the Torah and the prophets had promised, was the source of

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[30] Emphasis added.
[31] In this same interview Marcuse denies that the origins of Jewish leftism come specifically out of religious texts or ethics, but rather believes it is more likely to derive out of the historical experience of being the oppressed.

solidarity among Jews and between Jews and outsiders who were upright men" (Horkheimer, 1974: 150). The common experience of victimhood, exploitation, being subject to random violence, and hated, while at the same time longing for a more peaceful and reconciled world and working towards that world, motivated many Jews to seek social bonds with other disparaged peoples (Bieler in Shatz et al, 2005: 145-158). Additionally, it made certain social and political philosophies more attractive, such as Marxism, which in theory and praxis is rooted in a vision of a society of universal equality and freedom (beyond the realm of alienation and exploitation), which Jews in Europe – it was presumed – would benefit from just as they initially benefited from the revolutionary Bourgeois ideals of the 18th century. To wish to be equal to someone else is to be sensitive to the suffering caused by unequal and unjust social conditions and to see the moral value in the equal status of mankind regardless of their religion, class, gender, race and ethnicity. The centuries of Jewish suffering at the hands of anti-Semites in Europe, beginning with the Roman Empire's disdain for their non-assimilating religious traditions and beliefs, instilled in many Jews the longing to transcend the unjust conditions of European society, and many found an ally in Enlightenment thought, including the members of the Frankfurt School, who, like most of their parents, believed in the truth of equality that was articulated by the great Enlighteners, even after those ideals collapsed into the barbarism of the world wars, consumer society and potential for nuclear annihilation (Jacobs, 2015: 7-42).

The historical experience of being unjustly marginalized for their Judaism/Jewishness in the medieval "Christian" society, and later in the post-Christian "Enlightened" society, as well as the sympathy for the suffering of the finite individual, attracted many Jews to those prophetic causes that attempted to transcend the existing society. Yet, this did not occur entirely by religious believers, but more often than not by those who had abandoned outwardly religious

adherence while maintaining the longing to transcend the unjust conditions that oppressed the Jews and others. As Horkheimer remarked, "religious" opposition to the *world-as-it-is* has by-in-large come to an end with the Death of God. Modern praxis in the "struggle for a better world has thrown off [its] religious garb" and has dawned secular clothing – "true discipleship... does not lead men back to religion," but is rather often led by "disillusioned believers" (Horkheimer, 2002: 130-131). Nevertheless, it is the inheritance of the Jewish (and Christian) "image of perfect justice" that animates the struggle for liberation even among the non-religious, albeit in a secular form (Horkheimer, 2002: 129, 131). He says, "part of the drives and desires which religious belief preserved and kept alive are detached from inhibiting religious form and become productive forces in social practice," thus preserving the prophetic nature of religion within secular thought and praxis (Horkheimer, 2002: 131; Siebert, 1976: 131). Therefore, the longing that unites both the religious Jews and the atheists like Marx, Freud and the Frankfurt School, is both the prophetic oppositional nature to the world-as-it-is as well as the longing for *tikkun olam*, world-healing, or a future reconciled world beyond unjust social conditions which are the cause of unjust suffering (Ott, 2001: 97-98). The precondition for this healing is the liberation of mankind from that which enslaves, oppresses, and exploits. What separates the religious and secular is not the longing for a future reconciled society, but is rather the method by which this overcoming of unjust conditions is brought about (Horkheimer, 1974: 48-50).

However, unlike Freud, who posited a systematic way of healing the psychological wounds of his patients, and therefore developed a positive method for *tikkun olam*, the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers remain silent and gave no positive and/or systematic proscriptions on how to overcome that which ails the world. Unlike Christian Messianism, where the answer to the ills of the world lies in the Messiah's creation of a new world, and Marx, where

113

the proletariat will usher in a world of classlessness, the Frankfurt School's comprehensive

diagnosis of what ails the world is not followed by an equally comprehensive roadmap on how to

fix it. In terms of political-economic proactivity, the Frankfurt School remains *philosophically*

apophatic, or *favete linguis* (remaining silent). Their form of *tikkun olam* takes on the role of the

social researcher, who is tasked with discovering the subject, structure, and dynamic of what

distorts society, but does not venture into creating systems that claim to systematically overcome

that distorting force. They are, in Martin Jay's language, the "gadfly of other systems," a

constant pestilence that negates but does not positively replace that which is negated, despite the

longing for such a positive solution to the ailments of history (Jay, 1996: 41).

In Horkheimer's *Dawn and Decline* (1978)*,* he writes of philosophy's inability to give

practical advice for the overcoming of a world in chaos (especially post-religion).

> Right away, people always ask what should be done now, they demand an answer
> from philosophy as if it were a sect. They are in distress and want practical
> pointers. But although philosophy presents the world in concepts, it has in common
> with art that by an internal necessity – without intent – it holds a mirror up to the
> world. It is true that its relation to practice is closer than that of art, it does not
> express itself figuratively but literally. But it is no imperative. Exclamation marks
> are foreign to it. It has replaced theology but found no new heaven to which it
> might point, not even a heaven on earth. But it is true that it cannot rid itself of that
> idea, which is the reason people always ask it for the way that could take them
> there. As if it were not precisely the discovery of philosophy that that heaven is
> none to which a way can be shown.[32]

Whereas some forms of prophetic thought, including philosophy and religion, attempt to

overcome the ills of society through a definitive plan, political party or comprehensive ideology,

the Frankfurt School does not. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of Critical Theory points to the

overcoming of the world and its unnecessary antagonisms that are the basis for unnecessary

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[32] The issue of the Frankfurt School's lack of political-economic proscriptions will be addressed later in the work in
a more detailed fashion.

suffering. The awareness of and longing to negate such suffering and heal the wounds that plague history determines the entire trajectory of their work.

Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity

Any critical examination of Jewish history has to take into account the immense role that anti-Semitism has had on its development (Lindemann and Levy, 2010: 17-33). Indeed, much of the early Frankfurt School's work was directed towards understanding the nature of anti-Semitism, the function it plays in capitalist society, and its continuation post-death of Hitler and the Third Reich. According to Horkheimer, that which keeps Jews within the Jewish tradition despite their particular relationship to Judaism and Jewish practice, which they may reject or neglect, is not only their relationship to the world, but in particular their relationship to those who despise them. Anti-Semitic hatred, he claims, is partially a reaction to Jewish theology and its social consequences. As this is a penetrating insight that goes to the core of the religious reasons for not only anti-Semitism, but also how the Frankfurt School remained Jewish without being explicitly adherent and devout Jews, and because it points to the centrality of the Jewish concept of *Bilderverbot* (image ban) within Jewish identity, it is important to reproduce Horkheimer's quote entirely here. He writes,

> The Jews are the enemy because they witness the spiritual God and thus relativize what puffs itself up as the absolute: idol worship, the nation, the leader. The support non-Jews must look for from medicine-men the Jews find elsewhere. This is why their mere existence – the fact that they are "God's people" – becomes a stumbling block. They must be eliminated, and the more absolute a system aspires to be, the more urgent that necessity becomes. For every Jew is experienced as a member of the Jewish people, the people that almost two thousand years ago lost their state and that, though scattered, were held together by the idea of God. It is thus a people in the highest possible sense of the word, the sense of a substance all others feel their own people cannot equal. And precisely for that reason, they

115

frantically insist on that absoluteness. In his own isolation which the other vainly tries to break out of by making an idol of his nation as the collective to which he belongs, he sees the Jew who need do nothing, not even go to the temple, not even speak Hebrew, who even a renegade, remains part of his people. And the other, in his separateness, sees him possessing something he craves – *an essence*. That people experience Jews largely as Jews arouses the thirst for revenge which even death cannot slake (Horkheimer, 1978: 131).[33]

There are four distinct claims being made in this passage: first, that the adherence to the "spiritual God" – the God beyond all positive articulations (both pictorial and oral) – forbids Jews to *idolize* (to *deify* or to make *absolute*) any phenomenal entity; second, this iconoclastic relationship to the divine, which is translated into a societal norm against idolizing the state, a leader, or the nation, etc., forces them to be distinguishable from non-Jews, who do not share the same prohibition, and therefore they are perceived as "non-conformists"; third, absolutism in earthly matters does not tolerate the non-conformist and anti-absolutist nature of the Jews, and therefore their presence must be eliminated – as Horkheimer states, the more absolutist the greater the imperative to eliminate the Jews, for their recalcitrance remains a threat to the false absolute; and fourth, this adherence to the unseen and unarticulatable divine being, which causes their non-conformist way of being, congeals into an *essence,* which is shared among "the people," regardless if they are religiously adherent ("speak Hebrew"), for even the "renegade remains part of the people" (Horkheimer, 1978, 131). Here, Horkheimer brings together the ugly legacy of anti-Semitism and the rich theological soil from which it grows.[34] One can abstract

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[33] Emphasis added.

[34] In *The Authoritarian Personality,* Adorno et al also make a claim concerning the theological basis for anti-Semitism. They write, "Christianity as the religion of the 'Son' contains an implicit antagonism against the religion of the 'Father' and its surviving witnesses, the Jews. This antagonism, continuous since St. Paul, is enhanced by the fact that the Jews, by clinging to their own religious culture, rejected the religion of the Son and by the fact that the New Testament puts upon them the blame for Christ's death. It has been pointed out again and again by great theologians, from Tertullian and Augustine to Kierkegaard, that the acceptance of Christianity by the Christians themselves contains a problematic and ambiguous element, engendered by the paradoxical nature of the doctrine of God become man, the Infinite finite. Unless this element is consciously put into the center of the religious conception, it tends to promote hostility against the outgroup… the "weak" Christians resent bitterly the openly negative attitude of the Jews toward the religion of the Son, since they feel within themselves traces of this negative

from this passage the following; an important component of the *essence* of Judaism is the *Bilderverbot* – the radical 2nd commandment of the Jewish Decalogue, and the *Bilderverbot* has more than just theological consequence, for it serves as an "essential quality" of what it means to be Jewish, and to be Jewish, regardless of active adherence to the laws and commandments, is to be non-conformist in a conformist and idolatrous society. In other words, the Mosaic commandment against creating false idols descends from the *noumenal* (the uncreated in Abrahamic terms) and imprints itself onto the *phenomenal* (the created). As no other god can be made in heaven, so too can no other god (absolute) be created on earth. Thus is the origin or the Jewish conflict with the world; the theologically rooted Jewish non-conformism, especially in terms of political-economy, does not allow Jews to submit to any other absolute other than the one divine being which cannot be *imagined* (imaged).[35] No man, no state and no ideology can be absolutized, and therefore the singular absolute remains sovereign and the standard by which all phenomena are critiqued and judged. Judaism, by nature of its non-conformity, inherently embodies the prophetic critique of all attempts to absolutize the temporal. As we'll see in the following chapters, this refusal to absolutize – the embodiment of the prophetic nature of Judaism – animates much of the Frankfurt School's critique of society.

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attitude based upon the paradoxical, irrational nature of their creed – an attitude which they do not dare to admit and which they must therefore put under a heavy taboo in others (Adorno et al, 1950: 728).

[35] Historic examples of this rebellious nature can be found in Jewish history. While under the occupation of the Greeks, through the revolt of the Maccabees, and later under the Romans, through the Zealots, Essenes, and other apocalyptic movements (including that of Jesus of Nazareth), we can see that the Jews refused to live under banner and dominion of false gods, whether those are the Greek pantheon or a deified Caesar. Although they were not unique in their rebellions against the foreign occupier, they were unique in the fact that they often rebelled due to purely religious reasons, the majority of which had to do with the presence of images of foreign and "false" gods in or near sacred areas for the Jews, i.e. the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

As stated before, there is no major systematic treatment of religion in Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin or Marcuse's work, but rather the issue of religion and theology is embedded within their broader analyses of society, polity, economy, philosophy, psychology, and culture.[36] Yet, we should understand that, according to Eduardo Mendieta, their attention to religion and theology is not just "incidental or ancillary," but rather is "central [and] deliberate" and can be characterized as an "explicit confrontation" (Mendieta, 2005: 8). However, the unsystematic nature of their critique is no accident. Martin Jay, in his section on the "Genesis of Critical Theory," reminds us of the early Frankfurt School's methodological concerns in regards to their writing. He states that,

> At the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems. To present it as such would therefore distort its essentially open-ended, probing, unfinished quality. It was no accident that Horkheimer chose to articulate his ideas in essays and aphorisms rather than in the cumbersome tomes so characteristic of German philosophy. Although Adorno and Marcuse were less reluctant to speak through completed books, they too resisted the temptation to make those books into positive, systematic philosophical statements. Instead, Critical Theory, as its name implies, was expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions (Jay, 1996: 41).

Additionally, Adorno argued that systematic thought was already problematic because its first loyalty was to its own logic and not the *subject* in which it investigates – which was already "incomplete, contradictory and fragmentary" (Adorno, 2006: 31). The consequence of this problem is that the system then fails to comprehend its subject precisely because the system itself – having been imposed upon the subject – distorts and disfigures that which it is attempting to investigate. Furthermore, the system is unreflective, i.e. it is often unaware of the distortions it

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[36] The first generation Critical Theorist that wrote most explicitly and extensively on religion was Erich Fromm, who wrote several books addressing the issue of religion in the contemporary world.

imposes, and therefore remains blind to its own imprint on the subject (Adorno, 1999). Instead of a system of first principles, Adorno, following the work of his colleague and friend Walter Benjamin, prefers thinking through "constellations," as Walter Benjamin said, "ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars" (Benjamin, 1977: 34). This model serves as an insightful model for dialectical reason, which reflects on its own incapability of grasping and articulating the totality of any given reality. Furthermore, in his *Actuality of Philosophy,* Adorno argues that the proper role for philosophy is inherently different from the sciences, which uncovers "indestructible and static" facts about a given subject; philosophy has but to interpret the subject, so that it does not impart justification for "that which exists" (which does not exist as a whole – as science seem to present – but only in fragmentary form) (Adorno, 2006: 31). Systematic thought, especially the positivistic sciences, tend to either neglect or camouflage the limits of concepts to grasp and articulate reality. This Adorno believes, must not be emulated by philosophy. With this critique of the distorting nature of systematic thought in mind, we can see through the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, and even Benjamin and Marcuse, that religion and theology are treated as constellations that in some moments shine brightly in their critique while in others remain dim and/or imperceptible (although they may still be there). In this sense, there is no all-encompassing reductionist theory of religion that attempts to collapse the entire phenomenon (or major components of it) to psychology, as you have in Feuerbach and Freud, to social dynamic like alienation, as you have in Marx and Lenin, or to society and history as you have in Weber and Durkheim, nor does it simply attribute it to irrationality as does the current "New Atheism" movement led by Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. In their critique of the "totally dark world," the optimistic potentials of theology and religion sometimes remain illuminated within the darkness, especially in the secular age, while other

times they are admittedly the cause of historical darkness, wherein secular and/or atheistic critique is the guiding light (Horkheimer, 1978: 124). Therefore, like Immanuel Kant, the Frankfurt School takes a dialectical approach to both religion and theology – which is critical concerning their liberational and emancipatory potentials – unlike many other philosophers (or scientists) who dogmatically and unreflectively designate religion and theology to be outside the bounds of reason, as being obscurantist and culturally anachronistic. When it comes to religion and theology, these absolutist critics fall victim to the same totalizing identity thought that Adorno warns us about in his *Negative Dialectics*: religion and theology become absolute and universal wrongs, evils, or foolishness, and as a consequence of this totalizing identity thought their semantic and semiotic potentials for radical praxis, liberation, and utopic vision of a possibility other than the given, are deflated and/or entirely discarded. Religion and theology, in this analysis, plays no part in the struggle for a better existence for mankind. But from my perspective, which I believe is shared by the Frankfurt School, the reductionist philosophies have thrown out the liberational baby with the stale bathwater, and, as the philosopher Christopher Craig Brittain has judged, the "complete abandonment of theology surrenders life to the suffering of the status quo" (Brittain, 2010: 170-171). Even Horkheimer, in his *Eclipse of Reason,* argued that the Enlightenment thinker's attack on religion in the name of reason not only killed the church, but "metaphysics and the objective concept of reason itself, the source of power of their own efforts" (Horkheimer, 2004: 12). Therefore, something of "otherness" that is represented in religion and metaphysics must be preserved. Following that thought, I argue that the Frankfurt School wants to avoid this positivistic draining of revolutionary and liberational potentials from religion and theology, but rather they will attempt to rescue that which lends itself to human emancipation and translate it into Critical Theory. However, before we can understand what

Critical Theory is attempting to do by determinately negating religion, we must first understand what the subject itself is.

Although Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin often use the words "religion" and "theology" interchangeably, I argue we should be distinguished from one another, for they are not identical (Abromeit, 2013: 362). Therefore, we must ask "what is religion," and "how is it different from theology?"

The *academic* discipline of religion, especially in its positivistic forms, have failed to provide us with a comprehensive and universally (or even majority) agreed upon definition (Fitzgerald, 2000: 3-118; Preus, 1996). Various schools of thought define religion in profoundly different ways. Not even religious studies specialists and academic theologians will have an adequate and failsafe answers to that question. However, they do make one thing abundantly clear: religion and theology are not synonymous – there is a fundamental difference between these two disciplines that reflects the nature of the subjects themselves. According to Siebert, Hegel criticized bourgeois philosophers for their agnosticism concerning God; since they considered any knowledge about the divine impossible, they viewed any positive utterances, or negative ones for that matter, as being "entirely subjective," and therefore it is "absolute arrogance" to posit a objective definition (Siebert, 1976: 132). This philosophical dichotomy, which exorcised God out of religion, moved into academics, and theology eventually became a topic purely for theologians, not for philosophers and religiologists, as the lack of God's "objectivity" was an abiding factor for their "scientific" and/or rational study of the world. In other words, because the divine lacks material objectivity, as it cannot be empirically validated, it cannot make its way into a positivistic/scientific study of religion, and therefore remains solely the business of speculative "non-scientific" theology. Religious believers, institutions, practices,

and rituals have material reality and are therefore verifiable via science. As such, they can be studied by "scientific" religiologists (sociologists, psychologists, historians, anthropologists, etc.).[37]

Thus following the positivistic and bourgeois trend in the study of religion: in the debate on the definition of "religion," we have to designate that which is sufficient and that which is necessary to categorize a given *system of thought* (if I can even use that phrase) as religion. In this discussion, the general contention centers around one important issue: first, whether theism is a necessary requirement for any given comprehensive and/or metaphysical worldview to be considered a religion. If the answer is affirmative, and a divine being is made necessary, how do we classify traditional Buddhism, which is anthropocentric and atheistic? Is it just an atheistic philosophy? It certainly has other characteristics that we normally do not associate with philosophy (at least Western philosophy), i.e. ritual, sacred space, sacred time, sacred scriptures, neither is there a dogmatic insistence on the use of autonomous reason in determining truth, as is common in most philosophical systems or schools of thought. Buddhism simply doesn't fit what most would view as philosophy. Yet if there is an insistence on the presence of a divine being, then it doesn't fit a theocentric definition of religion either (Pals, 2015: 10-13).

If a divine being is not a necessary condition for the definition of religion, can certain forms of Marxism be rightfully considered a religion? Meaning, is it sufficient to have a comprehensive and/or systematic metaphysical worldview to be considered a religion even if it is without a divine object of worship or divine cosmogony? Although Marx himself was an atheist, and many of his followers were too, they certainly regard his and other Marxist books as being elevated above all others (almost to the status of sacred scripture); devoted followers go on

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[37] The non-empirical nature of theology was one of the core reasons why it was so important for the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. We will explore this in more detail later.

somber pilgrimages to Highgate Cemetery in Britain and place stones on his ornate grave (a

Jewish tradition); communists devotionally visit and venerate Vladimir Lenin's tomb in Red

Square in Moscow as Christians would venerated a tomb of a saint; they celebrate anniversaries

of major event in Marxist history, such as the October Revolution in 1917, which have religious-

like qualities to them, as they include many rituals (parades, singing of songs, etc.); they display

graphic icons of revolutionary figures such as Marx, Engels and Lenin, just as the Christian

church has of Jesus, Peter, Mary, etc. They even take up the religious language of being

"orthodox" Marxists. In the words of Ernest Gellner, the Communist Party systematically

attempted to "turn the profane into the sacred" (Froese, 2008: 42). Additionally, both Joseph

Schumpeter, in his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943), and Robert Tucker, in his

Philosophy and the Myth in the Thought of Karl Marx (1961), argued for Marxism to be

understood as a religion, because both advanced their own unique "eschatology and teleology"

just as traditional religions have always done (Froese, 2008: 203).[38] And Lauro Martines, in his

study of Girolamo Savonarola, reminds us that in the "so-called Marxist states, the metaphors

that have frequently attended the concept of 'Party' have often turned it into something

transcendent, something luminous, standing above all conflict or divisiveness, and representing a

kind of ultimate value, as if filling in a void caused by the removal of God" (Martines, 2006:

297).[39] Yet there is no *divine* being to worship or venerate in Marxism. Neither is there any

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[38] Against other scholars who claim the Marxist culture of the Soviet system was a "civil religion," Paul Froese argues that the Soviets attempts to "kill God" and replace the Orthodox church with atheist Marxism disqualifies it as a civil religion, as it went far beyond what any other form of civil religion did to traditional religion. Civil religion usually attempts to reconcile the dialectical tension between the sacred and the profane within a society whereas official Soviet policy was to utterly destroy religion in the Soviet Union (Faroese, 2008: 40-70).

[39] Girolamo Savonarola was a 15th century Dominican friar who led the effort to oust the Medici family from power in Florence. His attempts to both reform the Catholic Church as well as institute republican government post-Medici, made him the enemy of both the most powerful families in the city as well as Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia), who would eventually excommunicate him in 1497. Despite his initial success in Florence, he was eventually hung and burned after being tortured by the state at the request of Rome in 1498. See Horkheimer's

otherworldly metaphysics in Marxism like there is in Buddhism. Additionally, is capitalism a religion like Walter Benjamin argued (Benjamin, 2004: 288-291)? If not, what then are we to define as religion? Does an "*ideology*" (non-Marxist usage of the term) plus a divine being equal a religion, and does an ideology without divinity equal a philosophy? Do we determine what is or what isn't a religion solely on the basis of theology or can we rather define it based on anthropological and sociological considerations? Despite the many quality attempts to articulate a definitive definition, an absolute consensus, or even a majority consensus, remains absent.[40]

Leaving aside the debate that perpetually rages concerning a concrete and comprehensive *definition* of religion, there is one aspect that the academic discipline of religious studies continues to return to when looking at "religion" (either with or without a divine), and that is its common denominator: *humanity*. Most secular scholars of religion are unconcerned with the reality of God (or non-reality of God). They are most concerned with the lives of those temporal incarnations that happen to believe in a divine being[s] and how such beliefs are embodied and enacted within their lives. The scientific study of religion, which categorically takes an irreverent "outsider's" perspective, rarely seeks definitive answers to the metaphysical questions that preoccupy the time of theologians and philosophers, rather they focus their critical (or non-critical) examination of those who have corporal reality, as the "non-corporal" (divinities, gods, angels, etc.) lack the materiality by which they can be examined, observed, and engaged. When they do concern themselves with theology, it is only from a positivistic angle: a simple collection of data on the theological thoughts of a given religious community. "Ultimate Truth" is not the

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article "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era" in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings.* Trans. G. Frederick Hunter et al. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993.

[40] As such it is beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, I will adopt the Frankfurt School's method of speaking about religion, as a constellation that allows us to see the semblance of religion without locking it within an artificial definitive construct that disallows it from articulating itself outside of such a construct. Religion is always developing – a perpetual state of becoming – and we should avoid doing violence to it by limiting it by our definitional concepts.

object of interrogation; it is rather simply the accumulation of "correct" statements concerning the beliefs of theologians and believers. In this sense, the academic study of religion is often methodologically victimized by the same positivistic, "scientific" (or scientism), and/or simple empiricism as other disciplines.

Marx understood religion to be the result of the material conditions of humanity, that it reflects both the pain and suffering of the individual in this world and also the protests against the pain-inducing world, it is a human construct, and as a human construct it must be studied through the lenses of history, society, psychology, etc. However, from the dialectical materialist perspective of Marx, it also points in the direction of that which must be negated if a world beyond alienation and suffering is to be created, as the "abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions" (Marx, 1978: 54). I contend that the Frankfurt School, especially Horkheimer and Adorno, treat "religion" in the similar way as Marx did – as something being bound to sociological and anthropological concerns. It is a phenomenon tied to history, temporality, and material conditions. In other words, it does not transcend (*aufhebung*) its origins, its context, and or its limitations – it is not pure, wholly abstract and outside the influence of history. As a construct of history (more so than theology because of its indwelling within the material conditions of the world itself, i.e. it manifests itself within the same material limitations as all other acts and institutions of man), it will be regarded as a separate entity than theology, which, because of its abstract and transcendent nature as speculative thought, can reside or remain outside of the determinate constructs of history and the material conditions. In other words, theology *can be* a wholly other form of thinking about the truth, and determining what is True, outside the coordinates of given

material conditions, and independent of the world that governs material-bound religion. Indeed, according to John Abromeit, theology, as well as metaphysics, served as "placeholders, for a claim to an emphatic concept of truth that transcended the truth claims of science and any knowledge based solely on what was empirically given" (Abromeit, 2013: 362). I argue that the theological component within religion often impregnated much of the Critical Theory's secular philosophy, while the commonly identifiable day-to-day praxis of traditional religion was entirely abandoned. In this sense, the Frankfurt School did not become more religious – in any traditional sense – in their critical studies of religion, even when they introduce theological concepts into their philosophy. They became theologically wiser without becoming more religiously pious. Where religion is treated as history, theological concepts are often treated as being outside the bounds of history and as such have the potential to be liberated from their religious exoskeleton. In other words, philosophy can appropriate utopian – or negative – theological categories, but it will resist becoming a religion itself. It, according to Horkheimer, will point to no new heaven (Horkheimer, 1978: 148).

In the case of the Frankfurt School, the two historical religions that they were most familiar with were Judaism and Christianity. Only on rare occasions will the first generation of scholars include the third Abrahamic faith in their discussions: Islam.[41] Despite its common origins, beliefs and practices, their knowledge of Islam was very limited and so was their understanding of non-Western religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Jainism, Animism, etc. One can simply blame this on their Occident-centric outlook, or their status as so-called "German-Mandarins," which paternalistically looks down upon the thought (or thoughtlessness) and practices of "mass society," or one can see that the dominant crisis in the

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[41] The second generation Critical Theorist, Jürgen Habermas, has written much on Islam and Muslims as a religious phenomenon from a sociological perspective. No one that I'm aware of from the Frankfurt School has actually engaged Islamic theology.

West – and therefore the world post-WWI and WWII – had little to nothing to do with Eastern religions, and Eastern religions could not rescue the West and the Enlightenment.[42] However, secular modernity, including capitalism, was infused with the problems inherent within the modern trends of Judaism and Christianity, especially the problem of individualization and secularization, and thus they rightly turned their attention to those religions (Jay, 1996: 293). Therefore, when the Frankfurt School refers to "religion" in general they are referring to the institutionalized or "objective" forms of Judaism and Christianity and I will treat them as such throughout this work.

Especially in the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, the term "theology" is even less delineated, but is made use of more approvingly than the term "religion." According to Christopher Craig Brittain, theology, having its "roots in the Western philosophical tradition," is often defined as being the "reasoning about God" (or the nature and structure of divinity) (Brittain, 2010: 11). Being abstract and unencumbered by the dirt and grime of human history, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin tend to approach theology in a more inquisitive and abstract manner. One cannot say that they are *reverent* towards traditional and/or academic theology; even it does not escape their penetrating critique. However, one can say that they were at least more optimistic about the emancipatory potentials of theology over institutional religion, which has too often become the handmaiden of repression. According to John Abromeit, Horkheimer and Adorno saw theology as having a "emphatically utopian connotation, particularly insofar as

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[42] It is true that many in the West sought solace and consolation in eastern religions especially after the failures of the Third Youth Movement. As has been articulated elsewhere, when those movements failed to change the external conditions of the world (especially in the West), those once revolutionary youths retreated inward via eastern religion to reform their own inner-world. Various forms of Hinduism, the "religion of imagination (or phantasy)" as Hegel called it, became attractive to the disaffected youth. However, as a Marxists pointed out, this journey inward did nothing to alter the political-economic "iron cage" that they remained enclosed in. This will be discussed with greater detail later in this chapter. See Rudolf J. Siebert, *Manifesto of the Critical Theory of Society and Religion: The Wholly Other, Liberation, Happiness and the Rescue of the Hopeless.* Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2010), 78-86.

it preserved – as it did for Benjamin – the possibility not only of a non-antagonistic, or "reconciled," human society, but also the transformation and redemption of past suffering" (Abromeit, 2013: 362). To be sure, no empirical science has the power, or even claims to be able to redeem the dead and bring about a society absent of antagonisms. This "utopian" vision is left to the theologians and religious believers.

To demonstrate just how important theology became to some of the Critical Theorists, we need only to invoke Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project,* which was his comprehensive reconstruction and critique of Bourgeois Paris, the "capital of the nineteen-century," through the perspective of the wandering *flâneur,* who experiences the "pre-history" of the twentieth century through the commodities, artifacts and cultural constructions of the vibrant Parisian arcades of the past century. In this comprehensive but unfinished tour of the phantasmagoria of French consumerism, via the lenses of literature, philosophy, psychology, religion, etc., Benjamin writes, "my thinking is related to theology as blotting pad is related to ink. *It is saturated with it.*" (Benjamin, 1999: 471).[43] In this critique Benjamin frequently, although sometimes cryptically, invoked religious themes, including issues of eschatology, redemption, messianism and a theological critique of the "science" of history (Benjamin, 1999: 471). In his late aphoristic work, *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* the theological moment will shine even brighter as he forcefully brings theology into contact with Historical Materialism (Benjamin, 1969: 253-264). As we'll demonstrate in a subsequent chapter, Benjamin feels just as at home within Marxist philosophy as he does within religious and theological language, especially the messianic, which the latter is often deployed within a Marxist framework. Much of his religio-Marxian work will cross-pollinate the later work of Horkheimer and Adorno, especially in their use of religious concepts.

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[43] Emphasis added.

Additionally, through their correspondence, we see Adorno's approval of Benjamin's use of theology in his critical philosophy, and joins him in his construction of an "inverse theology." Writing to Benjamin about his *Arcades Project* in a letter dated December 17, 1934, Adorno states, "it seems to me doubly important that the image of theology, into which I would gladly see our thoughts dissolve, is none other than the very one which sustains your thoughts here – it could indeed by called an 'inverse' theology. This position, directed against natural and supernatural interpretation alike, first formulated here as it is with total precision, strikes me as utterly identical with my own..." (Adorno and Benjamin, 1999: 66-67; Buck-Morss, 1977: 140-141). As we'll see later, Adorno agreed with much of Benjamin's theological thought, as it was not only reminiscent of his own Kierkegaard study, but determinately negated positive religion while preserving the negative potential of theology. Although he agreed with Benjamin's general foray into theology, he would later criticize Benjamin's uncritical appropriation of Gershom Scholem's mystical Kabbalistic theology, which he found to be non-dialectical (Adorno and Benjamin, 1999: 249).[44] Nevertheless, Benjamin's 1940 *Theses on the Philosophy of History* had a profound influence on Adorno's later foray into a theologically pollenated philosophy.

Indeed, theology had an important place within the first generation's Critical Theory, but it did have its limits, as it had to be subject to and/or reconciled with dialectical reason, which could not be abandoned for an impotent retreat into theology as an escape from a repressive world-weariness. The concreteness of human suffering had to remain at the forefront of their critique; theology, when possible, had to be pressed into service to the liberation of that concrete

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[44] In a 1938 letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno criticizes Scholem when he "makes himself the mouthpiece of the theological moment of your, and perhaps I might also say of my own, philosophy," and that his attempts to rescue theology were already prefigured in his and Benjamin's work. He continues by saying "but my sense of duty also immediately asserts itself here and compels me to admit that your own comparison with the sheet of blotting paper, *your own intention to mobilize the power of theological experience anonymously within the realm of the profane*, seems to me utterly and decisively superior to all of Scholem's attempts to salvage the theological moment" (Adorno and Benjamin, 1999: 249) Emphasis added.

reality. But modern forms of instrumental reason cannot contain man's longing for a world other than the world-as-it-is. At least for Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, theology pointed to something beyond the given world of nature and history, and for that alone it had to be taken seriously as an expression, or even a postulant of a possibility – to transcend the world-as-it-is.

Going forward, we want to make one distinction very clear as concerns to theology and institutional forms of religion. Objective religion, "positive" religion, or even "historical" religion, as ritual, sacred spaces, sacred figures, ecclesiastical authorities, etc., is bound by the material world of history, whereas theology, the conceptualization and discourse about the nature of the divine, has a transcendent element that resists beings limited to the reality of what is the case. In other words, both can serve as interpretation of reality and orientation of action, but objective religion as a very earthly phenomenon remains embedded within the material conditions it finds itself, whereas theology can transcend any given material condition and by definition points in a direction outside of the world-as-it-is, or the status quo. This is one of the most important reasons why theology finds a place within the philosophy of the Frankfurt School whereas religion, as just defined, does not. With this methodology in mind, Rudolf J. Siebert has described the Frankfurt School's approach to religion as being "dialectical religiology"; through their critical philosophy they will both negate and preserve, as well as elevate and fulfill, certain aspects of religion and theology: that which can be enlisted into the service of human emancipation and the realization of substantive freedom must be preserved and fulfilled, while that which ensnares man in his worldly misery, suffering and oppression, must be negated (Siebert, 2010). This follows Walter Benjamin's first thesis in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* which calls for historical materialism to "enlist the service of theology" so that it may

"win all the time" (Benjamin, 1969: 253). Of course, only certain forms of theology can be enlisted, as some would categorically undermine the project of Critical Theory.

Chapter 4: The Frankfurt School's Dialectical Critique of Religion

When theism adopts eternal justice as a pretext for temporal injustice, it is as bad as atheism insofar as it leaves no room for thoughts of anything else. Both of them have been responsible for good and evil throughout history of Europe, and both of them have had their tyrants and their martyrs.[1]

~ Max Horkheimer

In contradistinction to their predecessors, who, in the spirit of Enlightenment thought religion to be an impediment to man's progress psychologically, socially, morally and politically, etc., the Frankfurt School, while remaining critical, took a more dialectical approach. Wanting to avoid the mistakes made by their Enlightened predecessors, who *abstractly* negated religion, many in the first generation of the Frankfurt School chose to follow Hegel's dialectical logic and *determinately negate* (*bestimmte negation*), or engage in a *sublation* (*aufheben*) of religion, thus preserving within their philosophy religion's liberational, emancipatory, revolutionary as well as critical and utopian potentials (Adorno, 1999: 207; 1998: 138, 142; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 17; Horkheimer, 2002: 129-131; Horkheimer, 2007: 361-362, 368; Horkheimer, 1978; Benjamin, 2007: 253-264).

For a sense of clarity, we should consider how Hegel defines *determinate negation* in the introduction to his *Science of Logic*,

> All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to strive to gain this quite simple insight – is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results; which strictly speaking is a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediacy, not a result. Because the result, the negations, is a specific

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[1] Max Horkheimer, "Theism and Atheism" in *Critique of Instrumental Reason: Lectures and Essays since the end of World War II.* Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 49.

negation it has a content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed – and has to complete itself in a purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced. (G. W. F. Hegel; *Hegel's Science of Logic,* 54).[2]

According to the Critical Theorist Michael R. Ott, the Frankfurt School followed Hegel's dialectical logic in terms of religion, and "allow[ed] the still relevant and meaningful, liberating and humanistic content of religion to migrate into a modern secular form," through which it would "become a possible anamnestic, present and proleptic force of resistance" against the "totally administered, cybernetic, dehumanizing and oppressive society" (Ott, 2007: 169). Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Löwenthal, and Fromm, were all painfully aware of the crisis of faith unleashed by the rapid evaporation of religious absolutes in Europe. This secularization crisis left an existential void that would be filled by capitalism, fascism, nationalism, Stalinism and other forms of modern ideology that gave individuals a sense of meaning, a sense of belonging, an interpretation of reality and orientation of action. Although they would never advocate for an artificial and anachronistic "return" to religion in order to resist this turn towards ideology, they were painfully aware of the dangers hidden within the dialectic of Enlightenment as it pertains to a world without God and the abandonment of religion and metaphysics. Nevertheless, in order for them to determinately negate religion, and thus rescue what was still *true* within religion, they had to engage in a robust critique of the *untrue* within religion. In other words, they had to critique in order identify what ought to be preserved, augmented and fulfilled. However, in order for them to dialectically critique religion, they had to reassess their

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[2] Additionally, in his *Science of Logic,* Hegel defines "sublation" as having a "twofold meaning," stating that "on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to. Even 'to preserve' includes a negative element, namely, that something is removed from its immediacy and so from an existence which is open to external influences, in order to preserve it. Thus what is sublated is at the same time preserved; it has only lost its immediacy but is not on that account annihilated" (G. W. F. Hegel; *Hegel's Science of Logic,* 107).

predecessors' non-dialectical critiques, and ultimately rescue much of what had previously been discarded. For the purposes of this study, I will emphasize three important ways in which the Frankfurt School critiques religion. First being on the basis of the dialectical tension between positivity and negativity within religion, the second being a false "return to religion" that has its basis within the unfulfilled promises of modernity, and last I will focus on their critique of religion as positive metaphysics, which gives untrue meaning to suffering, especially in light of barbarity of Auschwitz.

On the Necessity of Differentiation

In Adorno's May 11th, 1965, lecture on metaphysics and theology, he reminds his students of the nature of philosophy − that it is to differentiate if it is to make progress in thought. He states,

> I believe it can be stated more or less as a dogma that philosophical insight is more fruitful the more it is able to differentiate within its subject matter; and that the undifferentiating approach which measures everything by the same yardstick actually embodies precisely the course and, if I might put it like this, the uneducated mentality which philosophy, in its subject, pedagogical role, is supposed to overcome or, as I'd prefer to say, eliminate (Adorno, 2001: 6).

Adorno's contention that differentiation is needed for a penetrating, i.e. philosophical, understanding of a subject matter is especially important in any *critical* study of religion. Unlike many of their predecessors, who did not differentiate between certain *forms* of religion, even if they did differentiate between different world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) the Frankfurt School developed two categories that served as the general basis for much of their critique. It is perfectly obvious to any observer that not all religions are the same in their theologies, dogmas, rituals, and sacred space, etc. What is not obvious is that they all fall within

134

two distinct categories developed particularly by Horkheimer and Adorno: *religion that affirms and religion that defies*. This differentiation is one of the most important differences between the critical theory of religion as developed by the first generation of Critical Theorists and some of those philosophers whose work they built upon. Many philosophies of religion that preceded the Frankfurt School's repeated this same deficiency. Hegel, who probably understood the complex nature of religion better than any other philosopher of the Bourgeois age, hinted at the mechanism by which religions affirm or deny the world-as-it-is outside of their particular content. His *Philosophy of History* differentiates between *subjective religion* – the personal religion and religious life of the believer, often referred to as "folk religion" – and *objective religion* – that of religious institutions, dogmas, and catechism, or "public religion" (religion as institutional structures) – but that analysis still does not penetrate into the *forms* of religion that the Frankfurt School finds most important in the modern period, as such affirmative and denying trajectories can animate both subjective and objective religions (Hegel, 2004). Nietzsche differentiated between the religion of resentment and asceticism (Christianity) and the religion of manliness, conquest, and life-affirmation (Islam), but his anachronistic and essentialist theories failed to recognize the way in which both of these religions embodied within themselves the tendency to both affirm and deny at different times and within different contexts (Almond, 2007: 7-21; Jackson, 2007). Marx, despite his uncharacteristic acquiescence that "we can forgive Christianity much, because it taught us the worship of the child," still maintained a monolithic view of religion: that religion – regardless of which one – was an impediment to man's realization of himself for himself (Fromm, 1981: 252).[3] Especially in his later life, Marx had no

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[3] Eleanor Marx-Aveling, the daughter of Karl Marx who relates this story, does not elaborate on what "the child" meant for her father, so it is left ambiguous in the text. However, the story was told within the context of another story, which is of Marx taking his young children to the Roman Catholic Church to listen to the music. While there, he taught them about the "carpenter whom the rich men killed." In the context of the story, which relates that

ear for a sympathetic reading of religion; for him, Feuerbach's discovery of the anthropocentric nature of religion finished the debate: it was entirely rooted in alienation and therefore a roadblock to man's emancipation, and would "disappear as social dependence disappears" (Kamenka, 1970: 65). Lastly, Lenin's analysis only saw religion through the lenses of state utility, and therefore could not contribute to the freeing of the workingman from the ruling class. None of these previous philosophies took into account the emancipatory and liberation qualities within religion. For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, in light of the social catastrophe that was modern "progress," this stood to be corrected.

Recognizing the dialectical nature of religion, that it contains within itself both negative and positive aspects in terms of man's realization of himself for himself, Horkheimer writes,

> In its symbols, religion places an apparatus at the disposal of tortured men through which they express their suffering and their hope. This is one of its most important functions. A respectable psychology of religion would have to *distinguish between its positive and negative aspects*, it would have to *separate proper human feelings and ideas from an ideological form* which falsifies them but which is also partly their product (Horkheimer, 1978, 58).[4]

If we are to "eliminate," as Adorno states, the undifferentiated approach, in this case as it pertains to religion, we must not fail to differentiate between religions and how they *substantively* relate vis-a-vis to the world-as-it-is, lest we fall into the same undifferentiated analysis of many of their philosophical predecessors. Therefore, if I am to argue that the first generation of Critical Theorists wished to determinately negate religion, and by doing so rescue certain aspects of religion by allowing those same aspects to migrate from the depth of their sacred stories, social teachings and theology into critical philosophy, we must then turn our

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children flocked to Marx wherever he went, it is safe to say that "Jesus," the child whom Christianity taught devotion to, was symbolic for the object of unconditional love. Given Marx's overall attitude towards religion, it is safe to say that he did not mean "worship of the child" as being "worship of Jesus," but rather something very human that Jesus, the poor murdered carpenter, i.e. first century Jewish proletarian, represented to Marx.
[4] Emphasis added.

attention to what they found to be worthy of rescue, and not approach religion in an undifferentiated, i.e. monolithic, manner. Thus, in order to identify that which must be rescued, we must first identify that which must be negated. Only after that can the revealing light of religion be rescued from its overwhelming darkness.

Affirmation and Emancipation

A consistent theme running through the first generation of Critical Theorists' work on religion is twofold; religion is dialectal, thus it is (1) a source of man's suffering, enslavement and oppression, and (2) it is potential source of his emancipation, freedom and transcendence. In different times and in different contexts, religion can motivate mankind to engage in revolutionary and emancipatory praxis, while at other times it justifies and sanctifies the existing coordinates of the status quo. Consequently, the history of religion is equally full of bloodied corpses and tombs of saints. Theology is the same; it contains within itself the potential to aid man's imagination of a world substantially different from the one that currently inhibits his actualization, while it can also provide divine sanction for his complacency, idleness, and submission to irrational authority. This binary dynamic within religion leads the theorist Roland Boer to state that "resistance and compromise" are the strongest motifs within the Frankfurt School's critique of religion (Boer, 2012: 12). Along those same lines, Eduardo Mendieta has written that religion has been both the "fertile soil for ideas of autonomy, authority, power, and development of critical thinking," as well as being in "the service of new and more acute forms of domestication and pacification" (Mendieta, 2005: 9). In other words, there resides within the phenomena of religion a constant dialectical tension – or dissonance – between those aspects that

137

aim towards man's liberation from the world-as-it-is and those that chain him to his present condition. The *compromising* quality of religion seeks to reconcile the individual to the horror and terror of nature and history, while the *transcendent* works towards directing the individual towards resisting the brutality of the given. Horkheimer highlights such a dialectical understanding of religion, writing,

> What is religion in the good sense? To sustain, not to let reality stifle, the impulse for change, the desire that the spell be broken, that things take the right turn. We have religion where life down to its every gesture is marked by this resolve. What is religion in the bad sense? It is this same impulse but in its perverted form, as affirmation, prophecy, that gilds reality in the very act of castigating it. It is the lie that some earthly or heavenly future gives evil, suffering, horror, a meaning. The lie does not need the cross, it already lives in the ontological concept of transcendence. Where the impulse is honest, it needs no apology. No reason for it can be advanced (Horkheimer, 1978: 163).

In this succinct apothegm, Horkheimer acknowledges the dialectical tension within religion; its "impulse" towards liberation as well as its tendency to reify, affirm and therefore reinforce the already existing unjust social structures. As such, religion is schizophrenically split within itself. "Good religion" is directed towards social dynamics transcending the unjust given while "bad religion," albeit often through the same semantics and impulses, is geared towards social statics – it makes a "lie" out of the impulse to transcend the given by imparting "meaning" into the already existing, and thus arresting the emancipatory potential within the "impulse for change." Therefore, in the history of mankind, religion was sometimes a source of rebellion and revolution – as recognized in the life of the *stifter* (founder or initiator) of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, and the founder of Islam, Muhammad ibn ʿAbdallah, and others such as Girolamo Savonarola, Martin Luther, Thomas Müntzer, John Brown, Newton Knight, Malcolm X, Ali Shariati and the Jewish prophets – all of whom attempted to transcend the oppressive power

relations of their given society guided by religious faith.[5] However, religion has equally been on the side of tyranny and submission, as can be witness through the history of Papal power, Christianity's legitimation of slavery and colonization, and contemporary religious fanaticism and terrorism (Duffy, 2006; Toscano, 2010).[6] The history of martyrs on both sides of the dialectical tension witness to this conflicted dynamic. With this in mind, we can conceptualize the forms of religion that attempt to transcend the status quo through its emancipation of imagination, and the articulation of alternatives to the imminent, as "negative religion." Such religion attempts to break the spell of the "given reality" which dominates modern peoples who, unfortunately, have a "mythical scientific respect" for social conditions that appear to them as being unchangeable. The "reified" given presents itself as a "fortress before which even the revolutionary imagination feels shamed as utopianism" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 33). Negative religion is ideology critique, as its critical spirit undermines the status quo by forcibly juxtaposing the possibilities for another form of society against the society that already is.

On the other hand, we can conceptualize those forms of religion that attempt to bind man to the status quo, to forestall the breaking out of the already existing social conditions as being "positive religion," the determining characteristic of such is its *affirmation* of the world-as-it-is (*pro mundum*) as opposed to a critique of and a rebellion *against* the world-as-it-is (*adversus mundum*) (Adorno, 1998: 138). For the first generation of Critical Theorists, the continual struggle between negative religion, or what is sometimes described as "prophetic religion" and positive religion, or "priestly religion," is a lens through which they determine what can be

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[5] Karl Marx even proclaimed the Peasant's War, which was led by the most uncompromising Christian reformer, Thomas Müntzer, the "most radical event in German history," as he attempted to reform and reconcile the church to its early radical spirit of *omnia sunt communia* (all things in common), as expressed in the book of *Acts*.

[6] We should not forget that this dialectical nature of religion shows itself within any given religion at very specific times. When positive religion is on the march, it is often opposed by negative religion and vice versa. It is usually not the case that any one particular form of religion prevails throughout a given period or event, but rather that the contestation between the two saturates the history of religion at all times.

rescued from religion all together. That which liberates can be rescued; that which perpetuates the given must be negated. In their attempt to rescue and negate, Critical Theory is engaged in what Eduard Mendieta has described as a "non-secular critique of religion for the sake of religion," which is a "critique that uses reason against religion, not so as to reject religion, for reason can no more do this than it can reject itself, but for the sake of reason itself" (Mendieta, 2005: 9). Thus, both reason and religion are negated and preserved in this dialectical approach to religion, as the truth of religion in the face of pathological reason reveals itself as prophetic, just as the truth of reason in the face of pathological religion reveals itself as emancipatory. In this sense, Critical Theory, Mendieta claims, is a "deliberate attempt to think religion *with* religion and *against* religion, but also the urge to rescue theology for the sake of reason" (Mendieta, 2005: 9). Theology rescued by reason, and reason restored to its critical function by theology, resuscitates the negativity of religion, its being transcendent towards the given, and this negativity will ultimately be translated into dialectical philosophy.

The negativity of prophetic religion is portrayed by Horkheimer as the uniting factor within all forms of religion that articulate discontent with existing conditions; it is the unquenchable "longing for the totally other" (*die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*) than what is the case in nature and history than animates negative religion (Horkheimer, 1978: 239; Ott, 2001: 103-125). Such a longing transcends, in Boer's words, all "temporal arrangements of power," including the "state, economics, church, synagogue" etc. (Boer, 2012: 12). It is also the reaching for something other than the given that gives negative religion its critical nature, as that which is already established fails to embody that which *ought to be*, as conceptualized (in the negative) in the "totally other." Similar to his conception of art's transcendent qualities, for Adorno, it's religion's and theology's "non-identity" – the fact that it cannot be conflated with or

made identical to that which already is – that maintains the potential for another this-worldly existence, as it is not "bound inescapably to what merely exists" in the same way positivistic thought is (Wilson, 2007: 71-72; Adorno, 1999: 207; Brittain, 2010: 112). In other words, an "inverse theology," or what is sometimes called "negative theology" or "apophatic theology" attempts to liberate reason from its present positivistic confinement, so that it may transcend the given and refrain from conflating the "world as appearance" with "absolute truth" (Siebert, 1976: 130).

For Horkheimer, God, an "omnipotent and benevolent Being," also transcends its traditional Judeo-Christian and Islamic images and articulations, and is translated into the non-dogmatic "totally other," which, as I argue later, has a definitive social dimension. In his attempt to decouple God from what is the case, Horkheimer reformulates the traditional concept of "God" into "a longing that unites all men so that the horrible events, the injustice of history so far would not be permitted to be the final, ultimate fate of the victims" (Horkheimer, 1978: 239). In this sense, it is the terror of nature and history that determines (albeit in a constellation like fashion) the nature of the totally other than this world; it is its opposition – its negative other. This world is defined by nature and history, both of which are saturated with suffering and despair. Nature is a complex web of death and destructions – as one organism devours another, and history is replete with war, torture, rape and genocide, or as Benjamin's "Angelus Novus" states, history is "one single catastrophe that keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin, 1968: 257). The "longing" expresses the discontent with the imminence of nature and history; it voices the protest against the possibility of their misery being the "final fate of the victims," even if in history their fate is sealed. However, the longing to transcend this immediate state of suffering is the longing for the totally other, and that longing is the basis of "faith." This "faith,"

141

as Horkheimer calls it, is emancipated from religious symbols and concepts, and is no longer a positively articulated as *dogma*, but rather by emancipating such a longing from the particular semantics of historical religions, it ecumenically expresses all of humanity's desire to transcend the world and its horrors (Horkheimer, 1978: 239). According to Roland Boer, Horkheimer means "God" when he uses the term "the totally other," which he is "comfortable" in using "such a widely abused name only when it means utter opposition to conformism with anything constructed by beings" (Boer, 2012: 16). Boer believes that Horkheimer's use of the "terminology of God or the 'Eternal'" isn't God in a traditional sense, i.e. a positive articulation of a divine-being that invites worship, but rather a united longing that expresses the "indwelling protest against things as they are" (Boer, 2012, 15-16). Therefore, that which is godly is that which is in opposition to the horror and terror of finite existence and the unnecessary suffering that is created by the status quo. Furthermore, if this is the case, then Horkheimer's conception of "God" is the unarticulated and unimagined God that remains after the God of traditional theology is dead, as Horkheimer's work resists any theological justification or legitimation of any earthly order, even one that is hypothetical (or even unarticulated).[7] Horkheimer and Adorno give us no reason to believe that such a God is committed to any particular nation, creed, or religion, and thus the God that remains after the God of theology is dead – the absolute beyond the absolute – is liberated from sectarian constrains; it expresses the depth of the longing for the totally other for whomever longs for the totally other than what is the case. As such, they engage in *idology critique*, the "destruction of the idolatry of race, nation, charismatic leader, and commodity fetishism" (Siebert, 1983: 114). Being thus liberated from idolatrous positivity, this

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[7] Boer recognizes this when he writes of Horkheimer: "here he becomes quite Protestant – human beings cannot influence God although they so often try to do so, through institution, rite covenant, or any work or deed. As soon as someone, some political group or state claims that this omnipotence actually sanctions their own position, opinion or power, we know that the radical opposition required of the doctrine has been compromised (Boer, 2012: 18).

"God" is entirely apophatic and as such remains a postulant, resisting all attempts at positive (or idolatrous) articulation (Boer, 2012, 16). Horkheimer once wrote "critical theory, which we follow, gives unquestioned priority to existing reality as its object" (Horkheimer, 1974: 139). As "God," or the ultimate *thing-in-itself*, is not penetrable by human reason, nor is it subject to materialist verification, it is not firmly established within "existing reality," thus giving it power of critique against existing reality. Being free from the domination of the given delivers to it its power of critique.

Horkheimer's conception of God signifies that which is outside of the domination of the given, outside of the domination of the prevailing social schema, and thus points to an alternative to the already existing. Horkheimer recognizes that this "hope that earthly horror does not possess the last word" is not a "scientific wish," but rather is "social-philosophical" in nature, as does Adorno (Horkheimer in Jay, 1996: xxvi; Siebert, 1983: 110). Therefore, it is not something subject to empirical investigation, it is outside of scientific consideration, as both the "longing" and the "totally other" are metaphysical (non-materialist) in nature. In recognizing this, he contends that this de-dogmatizing of God, translating him into the "totally other," has produced a "more positive evaluation of certain metaphysical trends, because, against the positivists, the "empirical 'whole is the untrue'" (Horkheimer in Jay, 1996: xxvi). However, the apophatic nature of the "totally other" continues unabated into the political-economic and social philosophy of the Frankfurt School. As stated earlier, although they take on the role of the physician that diagnosis the illnesses of society, they do not positively proscribe any medicine or plan of action to overcome the illness (Jay, 1996: 41-85). As Gerhard Schweppenhäuser said of Adorno, he "gives us no detailed picture of utopia. He refuses to conjure up images of the better condition" (Schweppenhäuser, 2009: 77). In other words, they do not give practical advice; they

do not draw up political programs, and they do not offer a utopia to work towards. Their work remains critically apophatic.[8]

Negativity Betrayed

Whereas Jewish history moved from the priestly/affirmative form of religion to a more prophetic/negative form of religion, especially after Rome destroyed the Jewish kingdom in 70 CE, Horkheimer thought that the history of Christianity provides a penetrating template for understanding how the inherent negativity in religion can be transformed in the opposite direction: from prophetic negativity against the world-as-it-is to priestly affirmation of the status quo and its unjust conditions. In Horkheimer's short essay *Thoughts on Religion,* he posits the idea that Christianity's God once served as the repository of man's hopelessness with this world. He states,

> The concept of God was for a long time the place where the idea was kept alive that there are other norms besides those to which nature and society give expression in their operation. Dissatisfaction with earthly destiny is the strongest motive for acceptance of a transcendental being. If justice resides with God, then it is not to be found in the same measure in the world. Religion is the record of the wishes, desires, and accusations of countless generations (Horkheimer, 2002: 129).

Reminiscent of Marx's definition of religion, being the "sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions," Horkheimer identifies that religion, being the record of man's grievances against the world, proposes "other norms" – *alternatives* – to the world as it is. It lays forth unto the believer a whole canvas of possibilities that are

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[8] This theme will be worked out in more detail as it pertains to the image ban. However, it is possible to argue that after Auschwitz this resistance against creating action plans for a more peaceful and reconciled society was modified, as Adorno could not resist offering new imperatives so that Auschwitz could not occur again – which he stated was the "new categorical imperative." Nevertheless, he doesn't explain *how* such imperative are to be achieved, or that they must be achieved in order to forestall future genocides. Neither does he articulate what how the world is situated politically, economically, culturally, etc. without the human destructiveness that tends towards a recurrence of Auschwitz. See his essay *Education After Auschwitz* (Adorno, 1998: 191-204).

radically distinctive from the world that they know and are subject to. It guards, protects and augments the vision of a society beyond the society of suffering and alienation, beyond the society of need and beyond the society of social antagonisms. Christianity, in this sense, offers the believer a messianic vision of the way the world *ought* to be (utopia), in contradistinction to the way the world is. It is, wrote Horkheimer, "in utter opposition to conformism, however much secular authority may often have been indebted to religion," as "non-conformity, freedom, self-determined obedience to Someone Other than the status quo may be regarded as typically Christian realities" (Horkheimer, 1974: 149). Being an alternative to the already established society, such a non-conformist vision gives the believer the criteria by which to judge the morality of the given society, including its socio-economic structure. Thus Christianity's otherness served as an inquisitor to "reality," or the "really existing society," even the reality of the institutionalized church itself. Furthermore, negative theology is the self-critique of theology itself; it attempts to determinately negate its own fallenness – it's positivity.

In the antagonism between what ought to be and what is, the conceptual tools and religious sentiments that were offered to the believer through the stories of Jesus of Nazareth became especially important in social relations. *Agape,* or brotherly love – the perversion of the *aristocratic law of nature* – was encouraged and cultivated for the suffering of the innocent, for those who are martyred, and for those who were castigated for their faith or other forms of "otherness," just as the martyred "Christ" had done. A religious education, Horkheimer surmised, was in many ways responsible for the modern believers' non-conformists' transcendence of self-centered bourgeois coldness, as it instilled in them the "capacity for dedication and for acting according to the model provided by the founder of Christianity," a

model that was adversarial in regards to the world-as-it-is (Horkheimer, 1974: 150-151; Siebert, 1976: 135).[9]

Those same conceptual tools offered to the believer became especially important also in regards to its relationship to the state. After nearly three hundred years of persecution by the hands of the Roman Empire, Christianity finally found an ally in the Emperor Constantine, who legalized Christianity with the *Edict of Milan* in 313 CE, which made Christianity one among many tolerated religions within the Empire. However, being intimate with state power had a price. With Constantine's "conversion," his subsequent "legalization" of the faith, and his sponsoring of the Council of Nicaea (which codified core Christian beliefs in 325 CE) and later Emperor Theodosius' decree *Cunctos populos,* that made Nicaean Christianity the official religion (and church) of the Empire in 380 CE, Christianity became socially respectable, normalized, and powerful. It had become the ally of secular power and as such became institutionalized as it was *Romanized.* Unlike before, it became heavily *invested* in the status quo. Because the first three hundred years of Christianity were anything but peaceful, as Christians, believed to be a "sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief" (Suetonius, 1989: 221), were continuous persecuted for their beliefs yet remained recalcitrant towards being symbolically and physically integrated into Rome's *Pantheon* (shrine to "all gods"), this

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[9] See Roland Boer's *Criticism of Theology: On Marxism and Theology III,* for a discussion of Horkheimer's analysis of Jesus, the "founder" of Christianity. Although Horkheimer frequently refers to Jesus by this designation, I categorically deny the claim that Jesus was the "founder" of Christianity, as recent scholarship has overwhelmingly demonstrated that Jesus would have experienced himself as a Jew and whose mission was well within the purview of Judaism. In many ways, "The Church" was the consolation for the non-appearance of the second-coming Messiah, the parousia (παρουσία) delay. Nevertheless, we could argue that the life and teachings of Jesus served as the initial spark that would eventually develop into Christianity. However, it would not be intellectually defensible to attribute the production of a new religion to one whose followers – many of whom did not learn directly from him – were more instrumental in developing the subsequent theology, institutions, rites and rituals than the initiator. As such, Christianity is the religion *about* and *centered on* Jesus of Nazareth but not the religion *of* Jesus of Nazareth. Horkheimer unfortunately does not make this distinction. However, if we can assume that the Gospels are somehow faithful to the spirit of Jesus' work, then we can be confident that such a mission was *negative* in nature; Jesus was discontent with the world-as-it-was in his time and appears in the Gospels to have been a non-conformist subversive. On this point, most critical historians are in agreement. See the work various publications of the *Jesus Seminar*, including the work of John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, and Marcus Borg.

marriage with state power seemed to secure the survival of the church. However, something vital, or essential, was lost in this development. Horkheimer argues that,

> the more Christianity brought God's rule into harmony with events in the world, the more the meaning of religion became perverted. In Catholicism God was already regarded as in certain respects the creator of the earthly order, while Protestantism attributed the world's course directly to the will of the Almighty. Not only was the state of affairs on earth at any given moment transfigured with the radiance of divine justice, but the latter was itself brought down to the level of the corrupt relations which mark earthly life. *Christianity lost its function of expressing the ideal, to the extent that it became the bedfellow of the state* (Horkheimer, 2002: 129).

With these two passages we see the double thesis of Horkheimer; first, Christianity in its early formative years expressed the *alternative* to "Rome," i.e. the "corrupt relations which mark earthly life," but second, once it acquiesced to the Empire for its own survival, it abandoned the alternative and embraced the given, which, according to Roland Boer, was both "necessary" and a "lamentable evil," as it was "necessary" for the survival of Christianity that it would make peace with an repressive empire but in doing so would temper or even destroyed Christianity's negativity towards the *world-as-it-is* (Boer, 2011: 35).[10] In other words, the "ideal" was sacrificed for the "real," the alternative, or "the image of perfect justice," was abandoned for the already existing society and its corrupt social relations. Christianity's early negativity, which still reflected the negativity of Jesus of Nazareth's dictum that the Kingdom of God cannot be made identical with the Empire of Rome, was replaced by positivity: The Roman Empire became God's Empire, and God was thought to sanctify and affirm the inherent power and brutality of the Roman state. Religion and the State were virtually indistinguishable. Therefore, Horkheimer states, the "productive kind of criticism of the status quo which found expression in earlier times as a belief in a heavenly judge" evaporates under the power of Rome's integration of Christianity

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[10] Horkheimer concedes that without such concessions to the Empire of Rome, "civilization with its tall cathedrals, the madonnas of Raphael and even the poetry of Baudelaire" would not have existed; they owe their existence "to the terror once perpetrated by such tyrants and their accomplices [the church]" (Horkheimer, 1974: 37).

in the structure of empire (Horkheimer, 1972: 129). As opposed to the teaching of Saint Augustine, it was not so much the Roman Empire that was transformed by Christian ideals as much as Christianity was transfigured and morally-deflated by Rome.[11] Both Rome and Christianity were determinately negated, resulting in Roman Catholicism.

Despite Christianity's absorption into state affairs, the "image of perfect justice," Horkheimer explains, was not "entirely banished," but lived within various elements that refused to be integrated into a state religion (Horkheimer, 2002: 129). This can be most clearly identified in the "Desert Fathers," who, in disgust with the growing *worldliness* of Christianity, turned towards the desert to recapture the *other-worldliness* – the *alternative* – that Christian ideals once embodied.[12] It may have been an "impotent revolt against reality," but through the Desert Fathers the *negativity* of early Christianity was preserved, albeit in a cloistered and therefore socially limited way (Horkheimer, 2002: 129). Nevertheless, from the fourth century onward, the dialectic between the Christianity that *affirms* and that other that *denies* continued unabated, and often appears in radical reform movements. Even before the Protestant Reformation, movements led by men such as St. Francis, Frá Dolcino, Girolamo Savonarola, etc., and later Leo Tolstoy, resisted the worldly nature of the church, often expressing their desire to reconcile the church with the "opposing principle" of the Gospels, especially in the matters of poverty, power and morality (Gallenga, 2005; Horkheimer, 1993: 211; Martines, 2006; Spoto, 2002). In these movements that "protest in the name of another, higher and more just order," the Gospels had

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[11] It is certainly not the case that Christian ideals had *no* influence on the Roman Empire, as over time they most certainly did. The question is to what degree did the negativity of Christianity compromise with Roman culture and at what price?

[12] The Desert Fathers themselves were most often itinerant, illiterate and from the lower classes within the Roman Empire. Along with the communitarian aspects of the New Testament, this, as well as Christianity's sudden loss of its egalitarian nature, undoubtedly conditioned their response to the splendor and majesty that Christianity was acquiring through its Romanization.

retained their "revolutionary significance," even though such significance was heavily muted by the power of the institutional church (Boer, 2012: 16; Horkheimer, 1993: 284).

Despite the constant struggle against a form of religiosity that emphasized the non-cooperation with the dominating structures of the given world, positive Christianity found an ally in theology, especially in Saint Augustine and his followers who did the most to bend the non-conforming nature of the Gospels towards temporal power. Augustine's seminal book *The City of God*, although calling Christians to reject the "earthly city" and focus on their "full citizenship" in the "heavenly Jerusalem," cemented the idea that Christian Rome and God's will had become infused, and that this new Rome, with its growing Christian population – which severed paganism from the *civitas* – was a city predicated on the values and ideals of Jesus of Nazareth (Augustine, 2014; Brown, 2000: 285).[13] His theology laid the foundation, even more so than Emperor Constantine, for the *worlding* of Christianity, as it gave theological legitimation for the infusion of state and religious authority, which has continued through the history of Christianity until the Bourgeois period. The effect being that the hope for the Messiah, which represented a time outside of the imminence of nature and history, was replaced by the consoling arms of institutionalized religion: the church. Horkheimer reminds us that, "theology has always tried to reconcile the demands of the Gospels and of power," and that "in view of the clear utterances of the founder [Jesus of Nazareth], enormous ingenuity was required. Theology drew its strength from the fact that whatever is to be permanent on earth must conform to the laws of nature: the right of the stronger" (Horkheimer, 1978: 36). Whereas Jesus of Nazareth repeatedly privileged the poor, the broken, the disfigured and the victims of history, i.e. the rights of the weak, the religion of the state – with few exceptions – deflated the former's negativity to mere

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[13] Although by the time Augustine wrote *City of God*, Rome had long been replaced as the political capital of the empire. However, it can be argued it was still the center of the Western society and a "symbol of a whole civilization" regardless of its lack of political power (Brown, 2000: 287).

formalism, or empty verbiage, as it conformed to the *aristocratic law of nature*: the right of the powerful to determine, abuse and devour the powerless. In this sense, the cross, which previously expressed the suffering of the oppressed, and the sword, representing the power of the state, were superimposed, and its victims were brutalized and exploited in the name of the one who had originally privileged them (Carroll, 2001). Nevertheless, the memory of Jesus of Nazareth's preference for the victims of history as well as his thought that there was a "goal beyond this world" – that which once "gave a new meaning to the lives of the masses" – was preserved in the subjective religious life of those who suffered in society, even when the "objective religion" – as Hegel's called it – neglected and/or abandoned them to the ravages of this world (Horkheimer, 1978: 36).

If I am correct in following Horkheimer in thinking that the conversion of Emperor Constantine and Augustine's subsequent Romanization is the "great betrayal" of Christianity's primordial negativity, then we should also witness the bourgeois period as being what I call the "great unraveling" of Christianity. This is the period when Christianity became most amorphous, most fungible and without concrete content, as its dictates, thoughts, ideas and visions collapsed into the fickle tastes of individual subjectivity.

In his article *On the Problem of Truth,* Horkheimer claims that unlike the Constantinian period, where the negativity of Christianity was abandoned in praxis but not in theory, the "opposing principle [negativity]" in the Protestant and later Bourgeois period "would be openly sacrificed to reality" (Horkheimer, 1993: 211).[14] Because Christianity was deflated of its "clear

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[14] Commenting on the advent of Protestantism and capitalism, Horkheimer states the "in a period in which, despite great resistance, reading and writing had to become common skills for economic reasons, and the contents of the Bible could not remain a permanent secret from the masses, it had long been inevitable that the opposing principle of Christianity would be openly sacrificed to reality, and the vulgar positivism of bare facts along with the worship of success, immanent in this lifestyle, would be propagated as the exclusive and highest truth" (Horkheimer, 1993: 211).

and definite content" with the secularization of society and the state through science and technology, as well as through liberalism and atomistic individualism, what was left of religion became "formalized, adapted, spiritualized," and "relegated to the innermost subjectivity," which was "compatible with every activity and every public practice that existed in this atheistic reality" (Horkheimer, 1993: 211-212). Christianity, as a social-force and a bearer of universal "truth," lost its objectivity – the basis for its absolute claims – and therefore, as a matter of subjectivity (via privatization), could be deployed to justify and legitimate nearly anything, thus representing nothing. In this sense, the negativity of Christianity that was previously preserved, albeit in a diminished way, was now openly surrendered to the given; it had become "largely… neutralized" in contemporary western society (Adorno et al, 1950: 729). Only the "shell of Christian doctrine" remained, while the content, if taken seriously, became a mere sign of a "non-conformist attitude" (Adorno et al, 1950: 729, 731).[15]

Because Christianity became an exclusive affair of the internal, the private, the subjective, the individual became the true authority over the religion, thus bending it towards his/her own interests. Without its content, Christianity was no longer a substantive countervailing force against certain societal tendencies, but was the dishonest companion of all manner of activities. With this move, philosophy of this age "in all fields has ever more clearly fulfilled the function of erasing the contradiction between the dominant way of life and Christian or Christian-oriented theoretical and practical doctrines and ideas" (Horkheimer, 1993: 212). For Horkheimer, the only Bourgeois figure – or in his words "great spirit" – that was outside of this

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[15] Horkheimer, in a 1945 letter to Adorno, complained of the role of education in neutralizing religion. He wrote, "If we want to tackle it, we must consider the fact that our whole educational system functions in such a way that any child or adolescent grasps the undertones in the moralistic and religious teaching and clearly experiences their ideological aspect. He understands that the universal values which form a regular part of the instruction in school and church must be professed and exhibited at innumerable occasions, and yet be practiced with definite limitations. He is fully aware of the relativity of such values in our society… (Horkheimer, 2007: 230).

perverse attempt to reconcile society with a deflated form of Christianity was Nietzsche, as his brutally honest critique of Christianity and its values was outside of the "thickening... fog" of this age, for he did not pretend to reconcile Christian morality with the Bourgeois *zeitgeist*, but rather saw the decadence (and incompatibility) of them both (Horkheimer, 1993: 214-215). Thus, the religion of the Crucified, with all its asceticism and decadence, could not be made identical with Bourgeois ideals, let alone the übermensch society he envisioned (Kee, 1999). In light of his critique, it may be that this "great spirit" Nietzsche was the only truly honest Bourgeois thinker in terms of religion. However, his critique failed to make a dent in the overall trajectory of this age; the hypocrisy of which, as it regards religion and Christianity in particular, continues into the political realm of the 21st century, where amorphous and contentless forms of religion, which have migrated especially into forms of American Evangelicalism (which focus on subjective experience over objective content), are used to legitimate wars, to fight against anti-poverty initiatives, and to resist efforts to arrest global climate change and other "moral" issues. Tensions that should ascent to the forefront of discussions when attempting to reconcile the ideals of the Gospels with the dictates of power, fail to materialize, as the amorphous form of religion, like chameleons, find homes in all positions (Gehring, 2015; Goldberg, 2006; Linker, 2006; Wallis, 2005). Yet, religion in the Bourgeois period, as Horkheimer thinks, does not fail to disappear; it fails to take sides because all sides functionalize it. That which historically bound it to its once normative moral scaffolding, i.e. its negativity, now being absent, leaves behind nothing but a wet blanket of legitimizing concepts which can be infinitely bent towards any purpose. It is a deflated agnosticism shrouded in Christian semantics.

Yet all in religion is not lost for Horkheimer, as certain elements have escaped its diminishment into meaningless agnosticism. Acknowledging that certain "propulsive concepts"

152

within Christianity have at times been forces for human emancipation, in distinction to the ahistorical and essentialist accounts of religion in many of his predecessors, which often ignore the dialectical development of Christianity through its history, Horkheimer writes,

> Historically, the religious machinery did not always serve to distract from earthly practice; in part, it itself developed the energies which today unmask these distractions. The idea of a justice which is absolutely impartial toward the things of this world is contained in the belief in the *resurrection of the dead and the last judgment*. If those ideas were to be discarded along with the myth [sacred story], mankind would be deprived of a propulsive concept which, though certainly not as a belief, might today be applied as a criterion to judge the powers that be, and the church in particular (Horkheimer, 1978: 58).[16]

For Horkheimer, the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment are outside of that which determines the concept of justice in this world, which, if we accept Marx's dictum that the "ruling ideology of every age is the ideology of the ruling class," then such administrations of justice are intimately bound with class and power relations. The justice that is served through an eschatological judgment day includes no considerations for the interests of a given ruling class; it is *absolute* justice as opposed to *conditioned* justice. If, Horkheimer thinks, such a justice can be translated into earthly praxis, it could provide a "criterion to judge the powers that be." Yet Horkheimer is aware that history has demonstrated the pitfalls with such attempts to make identical the justice of man and the justice of the divine, as the phrase *deus vult* (God wills it) most often finds itself in league with the ruling ideology. He writes, "whether noted by a bourgeois or a proletarian revolutionary, the alliance between church and the ruling clique, for example, is a fact, and that fact is all the more revolting because it is directed against the one

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[16] Emphasis added. The phrase "though not as a belief" in this passage by Horkheimer is curious. I understand him to be saying here that the "propulsive concept" he speaks of is no longer a positively articulated religious belief that can be identified as being a part of any particular religion, but is rather similar to his conception of the "longing for the totally other," which is an ecumenical and post-ecumenical (religious and non-religious) concept that preserves an essential motive or ideal originally found in religion while simultaneously negating the religious cloak that such a motive or ideal was once articulated within. In this case, this "propulsive concept," which may serve as a "criteria to judge the powers that be," no longer appears as explicitly religious, as it has been profaned as it enters into secular political praxis. Although profaned, the concept nevertheless retains the negativity of the original religious concept.

element which might serve the church as an excuse: suffering men" (Horkheimer, 1978: 60). Where the justice of the church, following the eschatological notion of divine justice enacted on judgment day, should be on the side of the suffering, it has rather allied itself with those who impose suffering, and betrayed its original negativity.

As stated above, what we consistently see here in Horkheimer's analysis of religion is that religion is a dialectical phenomenon; it carries within it both the potential to liberate and to enslave; it delivers concepts and ideas that can either be directed towards man's emancipation or can be functionalized for his continued submission; religion can motivate its believers to struggle on behalf of their freedom or it can resign them to their oppressive fate. The hypocrisy of Western society as it concerns Christianity and Christian ideals is such: that "it is not part of life in this civilization to take religion seriously. Only the powerful have to be respected; the poor and powerless are worshipped in religion, i.e., in spirit, but mistreated in reality" (Horkheimer, 1978: 91). According to the Critical Theorist of religion Michael R. Ott, Horkheimer is arguing that, "through such class distortion of the content of religion, the concrete, historical and religious distinction between the oppressed and innocent victims of society and their oppressors is erased" (Ott, 2001: 35). Christ becomes the savior of both predator and prey; oppressor and oppressed; abuser and victim; murderer and murdered, and the moral ideals of the Gospels are no more condemnatory of the sinner as the sinned against. All are reconciled with the heavenly redeemer in this "bourgeois Christianity." Ultimately, Horkheimer claims that, "if someone attacks Christianity in his speeches, he must be persecuted, but he must also be prevented from making it a reality" (Horkheimer, 1978: 91). Similar to Ott's interpretation, I read Horkheimer as saying here that Christian ideals, such as human compassion, mercy, solidarity (*agape*), the privileging of the poor and the weak, must be conceptually consented to as being moral "goods,"

154

but must never be actualized, especially under the conditions of bourgeois capitalism, as such values are antithetical to a social order that continually produces poverty, systemic violence, injustice and inequality, i.e. the reproduction of modern capitalist society. In Horkheimer's analysis, those liberating potentials that can be found within the theological repertoire of Judeo-Christianity still maintain their power, albeit in a diminished and passé form, and therefore, if allowed to migrate into secular philosophy, they may be reloaded. In other words, theology, as Walter Benjamin thought, must be make common cause with historical materialism if it is to regain an active role in the liberation of mankind (Benjamin, 1969: 253).

However, even if we can recognize the social value within certain theological or moral concepts, it is no longer possible to explicitly return to religion in an attempt to negate the present order. First, the metaphysical baggage that is attached to these concepts can no longer be assented to post-death of God in any serious fashion; and second, because Christianity has been so functionalized as a tool of "integration into the monopolistic reality," it has been outwardly drained of its revolutionary potentials; its betrayal of its original negativity and its prevailing *affirmative* nature has left it in the dustbin of history, unable to defend itself against its modern critics (Horkheimer, 1978: 168-169, 239). Furthermore, drawing on Marcuse's analysis of the one-dimensional nature of modern civil society, religion, which can be understood as a "cultural good" if only in its form and not its content, has been so thoroughly "incorporated into the established order," that it appears not to be in contradiction to the given society in any significant way (Marcuse, 1966: 57). Religion, like art, is the victims of the "absorbent power of society," which assimilates and therefore neutralizes "its antagonistic content" (Marcuse, 1966: 61). "In the realm of culture," Marcuse continues, "the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism, where the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in

difference" (Marcuse, 1966: 61). In this sense, religion is on the side of the Bourgeois because it is only bourgeois religion (non-redemptive Christendom) that survives in this "new totalitarianism" (Siebert, 1983: 114). Thus, it is precisely because the prophetic, messianic and eschatological components in Christianity, which were once what put the "fear of the lord" into social relations, has been thoroughly depleted, that Christianity still can find a comfortable place within Bourgeois society. The well-guarded secret in Bourgeois religion is: even when the ruling class evokes the awesome "name of Lord," they do not tremble, for they are *securi adversus Deum.*[17]

If there is something in religion that can still be salvaged or rescued, it may be the case that such religious concepts need new translators; in other words, they need to be translated into philosophy or publically accessible forms of reasoning. Despite the notion that such values and concepts have met their expiration date via their original religious semantics, that hasn't stopped some segments of modern man from attempted to retreat back into a pre-modern religious metaphysics as both a way of expressing and escaping his dissatisfaction with the present order. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, the Frankfurt School remained critical of any attempt to return to religion as a way of facing the harsh and brutal realities of society in the modern world. For them, it was simply not possible.

False Return to Religion

The modern man faces social, political and economic forces the likes of which no humans before him were ever confronted with. Modern man now has the capacity to not only destroy a nation in which he is at war, but to destroy the world entire; western man is engulfed in

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[17] "Indifferent towards God"

a society in which the culture industry inculcates false needs, manipulated desires and where he finds false individuality through the identification with and consumption of unnecessary commodities; he is increasingly becoming a small functionary within a society advancing towards total administration and where there appears to be no exit; and finally, he finds himself thrown into a context in which alternatives to the totally administered society and the culture industry aren't even contemplated as the given is wholly reified (Adorno, 2002; Fromm, 1976; Marcuse, 1966; Marx and Engels, 1978; Ott, 2001; Siebert, 2010). "There is no alternative" (TINA) is the axiom of the age. The horror of the two world wars, with its mass production of corpses – as if on an assembly line – the systematic murder of whole religio-ethnic groups, the use of atomic, biological and chemical weapons, the standardization of life and the nihilistic meaninglessness that accompanied life *without absolutes* has left much of mankind untethered from any spiritual and moral anchors (Horkheimer, 1974: 46-47). In western society, where the individual is primary, relativism is a moral virtue, radical self-interest is the highest value, where ethical and moral norms have to be developed primarily through the individual's own contemplation and life experiences without the aid of those religious traditions and philosophies which came before – themselves being a repository of human contemplation and wisdom – modern man is often trapped within a feeling of isolation, alienation, and helplessness, while he suffers from boredom, apathy and loneliness. Although this "isolated individual" is "regarded as free and responsible" for his own life, he is simultaneously, Horkheimer states, "in the present epoch necessarily dominated by anxiety and uncertainty" (Horkheimer, 1993: 212). He therefore is often desperate to escape from such a state of "freedom" (Fromm, 1994). Taking advantage of his crisis-of-being, capitalism attempts to fulfill his existential needs with commodities; the *having way-of-being* become the dominant form of life in capitalist society; the value of the

157

"mass individual" resides solely in what they own; without property they have no sense of accomplishment or self-regard; without the accumulation of stuff, which is a symptom of *necrophilia* (love of the inanimate), they lack recognition from their peers, and without such recognition they fall further into absolute despair (Fromm, 1976; Horkheimer, 1993: 282, 288-289). Additionally, the "claustrophobia of humanity," the encroachment of the "administered world" upon the lives of the individual, continues unabated, leaving the individual trapped within a "close weave that prevents any escape" (Adorno, 1998: 193).

In almost a perverse dialectic, Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* claims that,

> the sociological view that the loss of support from objective religion and the disintegration of the last precapitalist residues, in conjunction with technical and social differentiation and specialization, have given rise to cultural chaos is refuted by daily experience. Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm. (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 94).

Because the security of spiritual conformity that objective religion once provided continues to abate, secular culture, in the form of the "culture industry," rushes in to replace it, and alleviate the percolating fears. However, the "sameness" of this modern capitalist culture fails to provide a similar kind of security that religion once offered, but has instead collapsed around the individual, leaving him trapped without real alternatives, as it only offers an illusionary variety of decorative or ornamental elements to camouflage the eternally same – the totality of the prevailing schema (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 94-136). Although the Enlightenment promised liberation from his fears, from irrationality, from fatalism, he feels evermore contained within a society that forcefully dictates the coordinates of his own existence to him: the "iron cage" (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) of modernity (Weber, 2001).

From the cauldron of modernity, which grows deeper and deeper in its meaninglessness and control, many individuals attempt to escape by hastily retreating into a safer, and differently structured way-of-being in the world: religion. In contempt and weariness with secular modernity, religion has once again become a *sanctuary for the broken*, as it allows the individual to abandon the overwhelming burden of autonomy and melt into a self-assuring collectivity, which provides not only consolation in the face of despair, but an identity, a sense of purpose and a sense of meaning.[18] It also delivered a preconceived interpretation of reality and orientation of action; as such it rescued the believer from having to labor through such questions through their own seemingly *independent thought* (if that can even be conjured). Yet even as the Enlightenment emancipated man from his fear of nature as well as his obscurantist and speculative metaphysics, mankind found that it needed some form of meaningful consolation in the face of despair once again. The dialectical nature of the Enlightenment liberated man from one form of religion (myth) but simultaneously developed the conditions for his return to another. This "return to religion" can be seen as a futile attempt to *de-demystify* and *de-demythologize* the world, and thus *de-demoralize* it (Siebert, 1976: 144). *Enchantment* – a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery – at both nature and what could possibly be outside or beyond nature, is found within this back peddling of history. However, this *sanctuary for the broken* is not pristine; it too has also been broken by modernity, and as Horkheimer wrote, "the flight into the past is no help to the freedom that is being threatened" today (Horkheimer, 1974: 140). Speaking on art and religion, Adorno reminds us of the impossibility of retreating into religion. He penned,

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[18] I should make it clear that not all people who "return to religion" do so out of existential or psychological issues. For many, the church, the mosque and the synagogue are *literally* sanctuaries that their physical existence depends on. In these cases, they are necessarily providing "illusions" that console, but rather are meeting the material conditions required for the reproduction of life.

The individual might still be capable of having religious experiences. But positive religion has lost its character of objective, all-comprising validity, its supra-individual binding force. It is no longer an unproblematic, a prior medium within which each person exists without questioning. Hence the desire for a reconstruction of that much praised unity amounts to wishful thinking, even if it be deeply rooted in the sincere desire for something which gives "sense" to a culture threatened by emptiness and universal alienation" (Adorno, 1992: 292).

The nature of religion within the modern period is irretrievably different from the past; religious metaphysics, institutions, theologies, and comprehensive worldviews have been ontologically crippled and epistemologically undermined by the advance of autonomous reason, technology, science and the democratic state. The remnants of religious life are mere shadows of what they once were. Secular modernity has undermined and de-legitimated religion to the point that the "religious" individual is often hardly distinguishable from the society in general; his moral norms are more often than not determined by the social conditions of the culture he lives in as opposed to any revealed scripture or religious moral code. Religion, as Adorno wrote in *The Authoritarian Personality*, "does not play such a decisive role within the frame of mind of most people as it once did; only rarely does it seem to account for their social attitudes and opinions" (Adorno et al, 1950: 727).

Nevertheless, against the general "secularization thesis," which believed that the bettering of the material conditions in the world would inevitably lead to the diminishment of religion entire – almost mechanically – religion not only stubbornly remains, but has grown exponentially, if only individualistically – and for the most part artificially – in the atomized conditions of modernity. In other words, while secularity continues to grow in the family, civil society and the state, there continues a reaction and/or protest to its growth: a "return to religion."[19] In this sense, we are in what Jürgen Habermas has described as the *post-secular* age,

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[19] A clear example of this can be found in the growing numbers within the religious-right in the United States. Beginning in the 1960's, the increasing liberalization and secularization within the national culture, coupled with the

whereby religion remains (and even grows), albeit in a diminished and nearly incapacitated form, amidst a society increasingly becoming secular (Habermas, 2010; Habermas, 2006: 43-47).[20]

Against those who would see this return to religion as a vindication of the claim that man "cannot live on bread alone" (Matthew 4:4), but must also address his *spiritual hunger* with religious nourishment, the first generation of Critical Theorist disagree, maintaining that such a return undermines religion itself because it is rooted in a motivation that consequently falsifies the very religiosity they embrace.

As stated above, for many critical philosophers, psychoanalysts and theologians, mankind – within the conditions of secular modernity – has been left in a debilitating spiritual and existential void; a void in which absolute values, absolute meaning, and the unconditioned sense of purpose have evaporated (Fromm, 1994; Habermas, 2010: 15-23; Habermas, 2002: 147-

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younger generations abandonment of traditional religious affiliations, more individuals found security within the confines of an authoritarian and romantic Evangelical church, which focuses its scorn on the godlessness of secular culture, including the issues of abortion, pornography, prayer in schools, Ten Commandments in state buildings, etc. Until the 1970's, such groups practiced a form of political quietism, preferring to remain outside of America's "corrupt" political culture. However, it later found its political clout with the formation of the *Moral Majority,* led by Rev. Jerry Falwell. This conglomeration of religious conservatives spanned the breadth of Christian denominations, thus bringing Evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Vatican II-weary Catholics together in one grand anti-liberal coalition that was functionalized by the Republican Party, beginning with Ronald Reagan (Gehring, 2015; Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2004). A return to religion from the left can be seen via the "Francis Effect," i.e. the uptick in religious adherence, attendance and change of tone within the Catholic Church, as well as the effect Pope Francis has had on other denominations. Since his election to the papacy, the *left-leaning* (at least perceived to be) Pope has attracted the admiration of liberals, socialists, leftist atheists and many others who praise him for reinvigorating the "social gospel," which emphasizes mercy and care for the poor, marginalized, immigrants and sick, etc. His critique of capitalism, which is rooted both in the Gospels as well as Catholic social teachings, has made him one of the most influential leaders in the world. Through his papacy, he has made identifiable the longing for religion among the left, as long as it's what Kant's describes as "good religion," i.e. religion that sharpens the conscience as opposed to "bad" religion that dulls it. See John Gehring's *The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church.*

[20] Without labeling it such, Horkheimer hints at the post-secular condition in his essay *Threats to Freedom* written in 1965. He writes, "even in our own supposedly enlightened age when men seldom set aside social advantage, prestige, and health in order to obey religious impulses, the same anxieties and convictions that formerly played a conscious determining role seem to me to be still at work: a man will want to see a dear friend again in eternity, he will want to pass beyond with a conscience at peace. Theological concepts may have been sublimated and reinterpreted in the light of modern science, but the religious motives which can come into conflict with secular motives have – as far as I can see – continued substantially unchanged in the authentic believer (Horkheimer, 1974: 137).

167; Žižek and Milbank, 2009). Such a void is the new societal norm in the West. As such, his return to religion is predicated on his *need* to overcome this comprehensive nihilism. On the one hand, religion addresses man's needs beyond the simple material, and always has. On the other hand, other phenomenon and ideologies address those same *needs* of man. Nationalism, racism, totalitarian political ideologies, war etc., all can give man a sense of belonging, a sense of mission and purpose, a sense of community and recognition (Adorno et al, 1950: 733). In other words, religion is not the only force that can provide man his existential anchor; it is not the only thing that can provide an interpretation of reality and an orientation of action, and as such, religion is one among many alternatives to which man can choose to fill the void of subjectivity which is the epiphenomenon of nihilistic modernity. In addressing the no longer "unmodern" nature of believing in God, Adorno writes,

> in the best case, that is, where it is not just a question of imitation and conformity, it is *desire* that produces such an attitude: it is not the *truth* and *authenticity* of the revelation that are decisive but rather the *need for guidance,* the *confirmation* of what is already firmly established, and also the *hope* that by means of a resolute decision alone one could breathe back that *meaning* into the disenchanted world under whose absence we have been *suffering* so long, as though we were mere spectators staring at something *meaningless* (Adorno, 1998: 137).[21]

What Adorno is pointing out in the passage is the superfluous nature of "truth" regarding religion in the modern period, for it is no longer the case that man is *convinced* by the truth claims of religion, but gravitates towards its consoling arms because of man's *needs.*[22] Despite the pervasiveness of a society predicated on the death of god, the modern condition has so damaged man that he gladly returns to religion regardless of its inability to reconcile its claims with modern epistemology. What Adorno is not clear about in this passage is thus: does the individual who returns to religion do so *despite* its truth claims, i.e. he has considered them,

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[21] Emphasis added.
[22] Adorno sees a similar dynamic in the allurement of religious art in the modern period (Adorno, 1992: 295).

found them to be less than rational, and still proceeds to religion's consoling arms? Or, is the damage so great that the individual couldn't care less about the veracity of the truth claims as long as the religion *functions* in addressing his needs? In other words, does the "social applicability" outweigh the importance of truth and content when turning towards religion (Adorno, 1992: 295)? This question may simply be a difference in degree and not kind, as both religious adherents in these scenarios gladly accept what religion *gives* to them subjectively, and not what its objective claims are. Nevertheless, these individual's functionalization of religion resembles the traditional stance on religion by the Bourgeois: that it cannot be entirely believed in but should be part of a pattern-maintenance system – a system of control and/or regulation. In this Parsonian structural-functionalist line of thinking, religion plays a function in society – in mediates and stabilizes – but the truth content, especially if it is destabilizing or conflicting with the prevailing ideology, must be suppressed, or, as Horkheimer stated, not allowed to be actualized.

As has already been explained, the revolutionary and emancipatory potential of religion can be identified in its positing an alternative to the prevailing ideology – its being toward other-than-what-is-the-case, which makes it a destabilizing force within the conditions of the given. However, if religion can be functionalized for the reproduction of the status quo, it is tolerated and/or even promoted by the ruling ideology. As understood by the Frankfurt School, the problem of the states' or ruling class' functionalization of religion is that it further integrates the individual into the domination of the already existing society. By preying upon the weakness of the individual that it created – the very condition its existence is predicated upon – it uses the consoling and anesthetizing quality of religion to forestall any attempt to find an alternative to that which weakens and dehumanizes. In this sense, the autonomous individual, having been

subjectively damaged by society, autonomously abandons his autonomy for heteronomous forces, i.e. religion, and therewith he is integrated back into the domination of the status quo (Siebert, 1983: 112). Adorno writes that,

> the disparity between societal power and societal impotence, increasing beyond measure, extends into the weakening of the inner composition of the ego, so that finally the ego cannot endure without identifying itself with the very thing that condemns it to impotence (Adorno, 1998: 139).

He continues,

> Only weakness seeks bonds; the urge for bonds, which exalts itself as though it had relinquished the restrictions of egoism, of mere individual interest, in truth is not oriented toward the humane; on the contrary, it capitulates before the inhumane (Adorno, 1998: 139).

As stated before, the truth claims of religion – that which points in the direction outside of the given coordinates of the existing society – is neglected for the satisfaction of immediate needs, which keep the individual complacent within their fate. If greater numbers of the wretched and broken "return" to religion under the guise of needs, it may appear numerically (to positivists) that religion is on the rise. However, according to Adorno, this pseudo-return compromises the very foundation of religion: Truth. "If religion is accepted," he writes, "for the sake of something other than its own truth content, then it undermines itself" (Adorno, 1998: 139; Siebert, 1983: 111, 112). Religion has become mere ideology; the functionalization of which is directed towards social statics: conformity to the status quo. In *The Authoritarian Personality,* Adorno elaborates on that claim. He writes,

> While religion has been deprived of the intrinsic claim of truth, it has been gradually transformed into "social cement." The more this cement is needed for the maintenance of the *status quo,* and the more dubious its inherent truth becomes, the more obstinately is its authority upheld and the more its hostile, destructive and negative features come to the fore. The transformation of religion into an agency of social conformity makes it fall in line with most other conformist tendencies. Adherence to Christianity under such conditions easily lends itself to abuse; to

164

subservience, overadjustment, and ingroup loyalty as an ideology... (Adorno et al, 1950: 730).

Adorno recognizes the hollowing out of religion's truth claims and the damage it produced. Without such a powerful force, rooted in absolute truth claims, the veracity of the vision of otherness was diminished and/or castrated, and what is left is an empty formalism that is easily manipulated and functionalized by powerful heteronomous forces. For Horkheimer, the descent into mere formalism is "an escape route which the despairing take without admitting their despair to themselves" (Horkheimer, 1974: 155). The insistence upon the absolute truth of the religious claims perceptively guaranteed the true possibility of a vision of another society, and without it man was left with mere symbols whose "symbolic meaning no one knows" (Horkheimer, 1974: 154; 2007: 368). Symbols are not real alternatives to the status quo. Adorno states that

> There once was a time when religion, with good reason, was not so discriminating. It insisted upon its truth even in the cosmological sense, because it knew that its claim to that truth could not be separated from its material and concrete contents without incurring damage. As soon as religion abandons its factual content, it threatens to vanish into mere symbolism and that imperils the very existence of its truth claims (Adorno, 1998: 141).

Although we should agree with Adorno about the damage done by religion's relinquishing of truth and its subsequent impoverishment, but we should also remember that even the symbolic, especially through art, can potentially point to something beyond the given, which without that, we are left only with that which is. In my analysis, it is the descent into mere formalism that is most dangerous, as the exterior form of religion can be directed against the masses much more powerfully than vague symbols precisely because the imminent nature of the form, the church, church authorities, the architecture, the ritual, etc., are already intelligible and recognizable by the masses, whom submit to their authority in the face of such forms. Religious form without

religious content, especially its eschatological, messianic and emancipatory substance, leaves the believer in a state of submission without the ability for *inner-critique* – a method by which they could emancipate themselves from the form while remaining true to the content – and spirit – of the religion. Nevertheless, Adorno is correct in thinking that mere symbolism is a far-cry from a dogmatic truth claim about the real possibility of a world outside of the already established; that religion within symbols alone is a mere shadow of a religion that maintains concrete visions of a world rooted in and ruled by absolute justice – the longing for which has never fully vacated the spirit of religion despite its belittlement – for even the symbol carries within it the potential criteria by which this world can be judged. In this sense, a return to religion, even if it is merely a religion of symbols, may still preserve within itself the "longing for the totally other," for even when the return to religion is rooted in *need*, the attention to the need is ultimately an attempt to transcend the given that produces the need, and the symbol of the other world gives *hope* (most often without optimism).

The "totally other" is not purely theological and ephemeral, but is a concrete world without the needs that capitalism, the totally administered society, and the society of perpetual antagonisms artificially produce. Although it remains tacit, unrecognized, and buried deep within the oppressive reality of the imminent in human existence, the very concrete awareness of suffering that the individual experiences as *need* directs itself towards an indefinable other, if only in hope. How such a wholly other is conceived depends on whether or not the religion itself has been reduced to mere symbolism/formalism or whether or not it still posits the real possibility of a world outside of the already existing. Either way, the longing for the totally other, even if it cannot be totally "believed" in, because it remains, according to Horkheimer, a *non-scientific wish* in a scientistic age, is not entirely set in abeyance because the truth claims of

166

religion have been marginalized or vacated, but rather remains within the wish to transcend the *needs* that drive man back to religion.

Neutralized Religion

Even if we adopt the position that the longing for the totally other remains hidden within a religion that simply provides solely for the *needs* of mankind, but no longer offers it a sense of truth, modernity has, according to Adorno and others, *neutralized* religion to the point that it simply plays no meaningful role in the governing of society or even the public lives of the individuals.[23] It is reduced to a mere postulant; it seeks inclusion into the discourse but is rarely granted such entrance. In their studies on the authoritarian personality, it became clear that religion has become thoroughly marginalized in the life of modern citizens, as the conventional believer, who is little concerned with the subversive *content* of religion, has become indistinguishable from their surrounding culture and/or political ideology (Adorno et al, 1950). Because this condition is so extreme they claimed that, "the fact that a person really worries about the meaning of religion as such, when he lives in a general atmosphere of 'neutralized' religion, is indicative of a nonconformist attitude" (Adorno et al, 1950: 731). In one sense, to take the social ideals of the Abrahamic religion seriously, is to emphasize their prophetic and emancipatory value – their *adversus mundum* nature. The values of justice, charity, mercy and

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[23] It should be noted that Adorno et al published this claim in 1950 (*The Authoritarian Personality*) when participation in religion was at an all-time high in the United States post-World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War. We should remember that participation in religion was part of what many felt was their patriotic duty; to be American was to be religious which was understood as a distinguishing factor from the atheism of the Soviet Union. In other words, to be religious was part of a political identity within the context of the struggle against "godless communism." Therefore, even though this was a highpoint in religious activity in modern America, it was not entirely motivated out of purely devotional reasons but rather retained a nationalist or secular-political element. However, as it was functionalized as a social adhesive, religion (Christianity) did have the effect of unifying the nation, despite its sectarianism, against the political-economic enemy of capitalism.

equality, which are all core values within Abrahamic religions, stand in contempt of the unjust, uncharitable, merciless and unequal world-as-it-is, for even though they are widely recognized as "cultural goods," such a world fails to adequately realize these values within the antagonistic social totality. These "cultural goods," Adorno explains, are "no longer taken... seriously by anybody. They are rendered harmless and impotent" (Adorno, 1992: 295). Religion, in this sense, is "cheaply marketed in order to provide one more so-called irrational stimulus among many others by which the members of a calculating society are calculatingly made to forget the calculation under which they suffer" (Adorno, 1992: 294). Therefore, the individual who is concerned with the specific content of religion, and takes them seriously, and attempts to actualize them in their life, sees that such values do not accord with the social, political and economic dynamics that govern society. As such, non-conformity and maladjustment is the individual's *modus operandi*. In his autonomous non-conformity the individual emancipates himself from his "one-dimensionality" and the "rationality of the given system" (Marcuse, 1966: 12).[24] His allegiance is to the alternative, which the *negative content* of religion directs him towards. In this sense, religion provides the non-conformist with the ideals through which he judges the political-economic and social structure of society and delivers to him the motivation and strength to endure the flattening backlash from the conformist society. In terms of prejudice, and anti-Semitism in particular, this *taking the content of religion seriously* has an important societal import. Adorno writes,

> the stress on the specific content of religion, rather than on the divisions between those who belong and those who do not belong to the Christian faith, necessarily accentuates the motives of love and compassion buried under conventionalized religious patterns. The more "human" and concrete a person's relations to religion,

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[24] Marcuse defines "one-dimensionality" as the "pattern... in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (Marcuse, 1966: 12).

the more human his approach to those who "do not belong" is likely to be: their sufferings remind the religious subjectivist of the idea of martyrdom inseparably bound up with his thinking about Christ (Adorno et al, 1950: 731).

He continues,

the adherent of what Kierkegaard... called "official Christianity" is likely to be ethnocentric although the religious organization with which he is affiliated may be officially opposed to it, whereas the "radical" Christian is prone to think and to act differently (Adorno et al, 1950: 731).

Because the secular modern and antagonistic capitalistic world is so vastly opposed to the constitutional values of the revealed Abrahamic religions, to adhere to those values in any substantive way is to be seen and experienced as a "radical," someone wholly out of place in contemporary society.[25] Although the authors of the *Authoritarian Personality* recognize the value in religion's negativity, especially its ability to inculcate values that make an individual discontent with the status quo – with the suffering and injustice that pervades modernity – they nevertheless remain critical of the idea that such a wholesale return to religion, even if it does advance a penetrating critique of societal wrongs, is impossible in the modern period. Secularization has gone too far to retreat into the traditional worldviews provided by pre-modern religions. The impenetrability of a romantic return to religion is tacitly expressed in the individual's lack of concern in specific religious content, as such content proves itself to be unbelievable in light of modern epistemology, even if believers refuse to openly express their doubts. To concern oneself with such content is to risk *disbelief,* and to risk disbelief is to possibly lose the *use value* of religion, which is the original motivation for the return to religion and for many individuals the only source of consolation in a cruel and otherwise "godless" world.

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[25] It should be argued that the opposite could be just as true; under the conditions where religion plays a dominant social role, wherein it has effective authority, the embodiment of certain secular values may be deemed "radical."

Connected with the claim that there is a modern lack of concern for the content of religion, Horkheimer provides us with a useful psychological insight that sheds light on modern man's attempt to crawl back into the consoling arms of religion, especially after the unmovable reality of the given has frustrated his attempts to transform it. He states that, "the return to religion does not mean that it believes in heaven once again, but that it lacks belief in a better order for the world..." (Horkheimer, 1978: 185). This resigning pessimism about the possibility of another alternative for the world, for Horkheimer, also reveals the fact that the modern "return to religion" is not predicated on an honest consideration of religious and/or theological claims, but is rather motivated out of the capitulation to the world-as-it-is – a lack of hope in the betterment of *this* world. However, the global Third Youth Movement, which demanded a radical new love, new religion and new politics in the second half of the 20th century, did not immediately reject their former radicalism when their movement failed to bring about that "new world." These one-time revolutionaries did not immediately become status quo affirming accountants, lawyers, business owners, and politicians, but often *spiritualized* their former struggle to transform the world (Siebert, 2010: 78-80). This dynamic can be seen in the momentary return to religion after the "failure" of the New Left to radically change the pre-existing conditions of liberal civil society in North America and Europe post-WWII (Cranston, 1970; Marcuse, 2005: 183-191; Siebert, 2010, Vol. 1: 79).[26] In the 1960's, the last of the three

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[26] It should be noted that Marcuse did not believe the New Left "failed" in its task to transform society. However, we should remain skeptical of his attempt to save face. Gerd Rainer-Horn argues that whilst the New Left certainly did offer an alternative to the already existing society, and they fought hard to actualize it, especially in the sphere of culture, the movement only resulted in timid political-economic and cultural reforms, most of which did not last long (Horn, 2007: 231-235). Ultimately, it did not revolutionize Western society beyond the coordinates of liberal monopoly capitalism (Marcuse, 2005).

major youth movements, which were generally dubbed "The New Left," but included diverse groups such as the Civil Right Movement, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Weather Underground, Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement (AIM) and later groups who often turned violent, such as the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof Group), the German Revolutionary Cells, Carlos "the Jackal" Ramirez, and other "subversive" student and "revolutionary" groups, some of whom were influenced by the works of the Frankfurt School (especially Marcuse and Adorno), fought for a radical change of the overall existing structures of liberal capitalist society, especially the "prevailing structure of needs and the possibilities for their fulfillment" (Marcuse, 2005; 183).[27] Seeing the "agent of change" no longer exclusively with the working class, but rather most poignantly with those on the margins of society (racial minorities, women, etc.), they advocated for a freer and more just society; the liquidation of capitalism and the rapacious greed it was predicated on; life outside of the totalizing schema of the culture industry; some advanced the idea of "free love" and solidarity with the poor and dispossessed, while others fought for the emancipation of political prisoners and the discarding of the military-industrial-complex, which was fueled by Cold War hysteria and the American

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[27] According to Rosemary Ruether, these movements had three common characteristics; first, despite their common Marxist roots, they were "dissosociat[ed] from the original Communist state in Russia," second, they had "a new Marxian analysis of the revolutionary possibilities of post-industrial society," and third, they turned away from "European revolutionary practice to that of the younger revolutionaries in the third world" (Ruether, 1969: 247). The third characteristic was particularly important. Although they appreciated the leadership and revolutionary work of the old radical left, i.e. Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Bakunin, Mao, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, they went well beyond traditional communist parties and theories. Many of these violent leftist groups were accused of being "terrorists" by the authorities against which they fought. However, many of them, especially the Red Army Faction (RAF), used "terror" to evoke state repression and state terrorism, thus demonstrating that the conditions from which fascism arose during the 1930's remained present in the contemporary society. See Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; and Albrecht Wellmar's "Terrorism and the Critique of Society" in *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age"* Jürgen Habermas, (Ed). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987. Wellmar argues that the "traditions, historically evolved modes of life, and traditional models of interpretation," which have either been "destroyed or annulled by [modernity's] societal reproductive nexus," have led to a "loss of ethical life" (Albrecht, 1987). Such a loss can lead many into groups such as RAF, as an attempt to recover something of that was lost in liberal society. In this sense, these political-economic and cultural revolutionary ideologies function much the same way as the retreat into religion; both are aware that something is missing, something has gone wrong, but they generally disagree on how and what should be recovered.

neo-colonial war in Vietnam, etc. They were also critical of the Soviet Union, as they had often accused it of being "Red Fascism" and a betrayal of Marxism (Siebert, 2011: 92).[28] Drawing from Marcuse's emphasis on the humanistic philosophy of the early Marx as well as the work of Freud, they fought for a new socialist society; a "qualitatively different society," one in which "people's relationship to one another as well as the relationship between human beings and nature [were] fundamentally transformed" (Marcuse, 2005: 183). However, the reactionary right-wing forces in the United States and Europe, what Marcuse described as "neo-fascist," were able to suppress, undermine and eventually triumph over these radical forces of change, driving many to abandon their revolt against monopoly capitalism, neo-imperialism, and the suffocating nature of the "affluent society" (Marcuse, 2005: 188). Their resignation led many groups to retreat underground or to disband altogether (Marcuse, 2005: 187). In light of the "failure" of the New Left to affect "qualitative change" in the "system as a whole," some contemplated why such a failure occurred while many others turned to matters of the spirit, to what Max Weber described as *inner-worldly asceticism*, and became members of various religions and "guru-cults" which focused on inner-transformation as opposed to radical political, economic and social/cultural change (Marcuse, 2005: 79).[29] Ruminating on the reason for the Left's failure to radically transform society, Marcuse points out the self-defeating nature of the New Left's capitulation into ghettoized forms of "private liberation." He says,

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[28] As Rudolf J. Siebert has pointed out, Habermas even accused Rudi Dutschke, a radical student leader of the New Left, of being a "red fascist" too. He would later rescind that accusation after the 1968 assassination attempt on Dutschke, which nearly cost him his life. Dutschke, who was both a Christian and a socialist, and a student of Marcuse, would later die in 1979 from the complications due to his wounds (Siebert, 2011: 92).

[29] These may include the Erhard Seminary Trainings (EST), who state "to transform one's ability to experience living so that the situations one had been trying to change or had been putting up with, clear up just in the process of life itself" (Lewis, 2002: 307), the Hare Krishna Movement, Rajneesh Movement, and other various forms of Hindu mysticism. At this same time Sufism (Islamic mysticism) became popular in the West, as well as other forms of eastern thought, Buddhism included. In many ways, these movements, especially the purely "spiritual" ones, not only when behind metaphysics determinate negation of religion, but behind religion's determinate negation of myth and nature. They were attempts to re-enchant the world by retrieving "notions" from metaphysics and "God" from the Abrahamic religions, and thus restoring divinity back in to nature. In this sense, Horkheimer identifies such movements as being "primitive" (Horkheimer, 2004: 86).

the countercultures created by the New Left destroyed themselves when they forfeited their political impetus in favor of withdrawal into a kind of *private liberation* (drug culture, the turn to guru-cults and other pseudo-religious sects)... a premature disillusionment and resignation was expressed in all such forms of withdrawal (Marcuse, 2005: 185).[30]

In light of Marcuse's observation, coupled with Weber's analysis of inner-worldly asceticism, it becomes clear that these frustrated revolutionaries did not retreat into *mysticism*, as Weber articulates, which entails a "flight from the world" form of religiosity that attempts to totally escape the world as it abandons all hope of affecting change (Weber, 2013: 545).[31] Mysticism, Weber explains, "entails inactivity," and sometimes the "cessation of thought, of everything that in any way reminds one of the world, and of course the absolute minimization of all outer and inner activity" (Weber, 2013: 545). Rather, the resigned impotence of the New Left and other revolutionary social movements gave way to radical transformations of the individual self, or "inner-worldly asceticism," (*innerweltliche Askese*), which, through these new-religious movements, the individual still believed qualitative change was possible, but not *via radical politics* (Weber, 2013: 542).[32] In other words, that which was subject to *radical* change in most of these guru-cults was limited to the self, and only through the avenue of self-transformation could one affect the desired change upon the world. They came to believe that no amount of

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[30] Emphasis added. For an informative discussion on a list of specific reasons the "New Left" aborted their attempts to bring out its desired change, see Herbert Marcuse's full 1975 lecture "The Failure of the New Left" in *Herbert Marcuse: The New and the 1960s.* Douglas Kelner (Ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2005), 183-191.

[31] It is interesting to note that many of the members of the New Left accused Horkheimer himself of "retreating into theology," thinking his comment about the death of God and the loss of absolute truth demonstrated his abandonment of the Enlightenment for the consoling arms of religion (G. Wolff and H. Gumnior, 1970: 76-84; Siebert, 1976: 130, 135). However, according to Mansilla's 1973 interview with Horkheimer, his "a-religious" conception of theology remained unchanged from before the New Left's movement. The transcendent took on no positive form before or after Horkheimer made such comments. See Siebert, "Horkheimer's Sociology of Religion" in *Telos,* No. 30, Winter 1976-1977, pp. 127-144.

[32] On "inner-worldly asceticism," Weber writes, "the concentration of human behavior on activities leading to salvation may require participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them) on the basis of the religious individual's piety and his qualifications as the elect instrument of god... In this case the world is presented to the religious virtuosos as his responsibility. He may have the obligation to transform the world in accordance with his ascetic ideals, in which case the ascetic will become a rational reformer or revolutionary... (Weber, 2013: 542).

revolutionary action would change the nature of the liberal society if the subjects themselves had not already been converted, for it became too easy for many in the New Left to devolve into what they fought: authoritarianism, violence and oppression (Habermas, 1987: 290).[33] Therefore, the desire to radically change the world was *sublimated* into labor of the soul. In other words, many turned *inward* in an attempt to create the world-as-it-*ought*-to-be before they attempted to create the desired world outside of themselves.[34] Not limited to just a few leftist intellectuals, this shift from material revolution to spiritual revolution was a momentous shift in western popular culture.[35]

Despite the spiritualized revolutionaries' optimism, Horkheimer's comment, that the return to religion reveals a lack of belief in a "better order for the world," unveils the ideological function of these new guru-religions: they effectively neutralized the non-conformists' attempt to transform the material world into a *spiritual* endeavor, and thus reintegrated him back into the already existing society by, (1) satisfying his desire for radical change (albeit it subjective/spiritual terms) which, (2) simultaneously protected the objective status quo from radical change through such satisfaction, as their subjective transformation had no substantive

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[33]   In speaking about the RAF, Albrecht Wellmer said, "thus the very life conditions forced the terrorists to assimilate the most inhumane features of the apparatus they were fighting. After they declared the naked terror that the system spreads to its periphery (Vietnam) to be the system's sole reality, they themselves adopted a form of struggle instantiating this very feature of the system: the reduction of all life processes to the spreading of terror" (Habermas, 1987: 290).

[34]   We should clear that not all former radical leftists became inner-transformational ascetics. However, a large portion did retreat into their "personal liberation" movements and didn't come back out again until the Reagan-Thatcher years, when subjectivity was connected to products. In other words, when products became identical with personal identity.

[35] A mirror image of this move – born out of frustration – from political-economic radicality to inner-spiritual transformation can be seen in the history of Christianity, wherein Erich Fromm, posits, in his work *The Dogma of Christ,* that is was the early Christian's failure to substantially transform the Roman Empire that it eventually adapted to its general coordinates in the fourth century (Fromm, 1992: 3-91). Where the original religious community once expressed the initial radical impulse of Jesus of Nazareth, it became affirmative once it abandoned such radicality by identifying itself so closely with political power. Max Horkheimer would learn from Fromm's analytical model and adapt it to the Bourgeois and their abandonment of the Enlightenment's most revolutionary aspects in his article *Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era* (Horkheimer, 1993: 49-110). Also see John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School.* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 279-300.

effect on the political-economic workings of liberal society. When the desire to transform reality through spiritual means overcame the desire to transform the world through concrete means, the liberal status quo not only remained untransformed, but entrenched, as it had shown its ability to defang, integrate and therefore neutralize its own opposition. Additionally, through the spiritualization of the struggle against existing society, the *collective* nature of political protest against the status quo was dispersed into individual searches for inner-transformation, therefore the power of the collective movement was thereupon diminished into individualistic spiritual pursuits well suited for modern atomized society, with its narcissistic egocentrism.

What Marcuse pointed out with his comment on "disillusionment and resignation," is that the specific moral and ethical claims of the New Left – many of which were originally religious ethical claims which had been previously translated into secular theory and praxis, and which were partially responsible for their "non-conformity" – evaporated through their newly found ascetic-subjectivist religions. Inner-revolution deflated revolutionary praxis in the world outside of the self.

The dual claim of both changing the world while substantively changing nothing other than the self again reveals another ideologically conservative function: while the individual perceives they are *transforming* the world they are in fact being transformed by the already existing structures and patterns of the world. Through "spiritual" adjustment, they are being *reconciled* to the world-as-it-is, which had abandoned *tangible* radical change in the world. Marx's double thesis on religion, that religion is both the protest against the cruelty of the world while at the same time it drains the revolutionary potentials from the believer by consoling his discontent, is in full affect. Failure to achieve social change did not lead these one-time revolutionaries back into "believ[ing] in heaven once again," – *heaven* being the oppositional

175

ideal to the world – but led them to an impotent embrace of a consoling religion: "consoling" because it allows them to preserve the idea that (1) they were still "agents of change," (2) change was still possible, and (3) they were not failures for their previous inability to overcome the status quo as they were still engaging in that struggle, albeit "spiritually." It is precisely because this particular kind of "return to religion" reintegrates the believer back into the status quo, while at the same time protects the status quo from the very discontent that leads the believer to religion, that Horkheimer and Adorno designated such movements as *positive/affirmative religion.* Additionally, these countercultural guru-cults had simply become part of the overall consumer society; they gave their devotees identities that were easily acquired on the international spirituality exchange market that ascended after the 1960's and became fully commercially viable in the 1970's.

This dynamic further cements the problem with reintroducing religion into an zeitgeist of neutralized religion; what appears to be revolutionary is just as must reconciliatory as the already established religions in their "official" forms (Adorno et al, 1950: 731). Whereas the new believer sees the former as being inadequate for the modern situation, the new religion only appears to overcome the same problems as the old, but in truth often lacks the prophetic concepts and ideals that can be translated into secular philosophy and praxis. Whereas the religion of the prophets can be translated, and often are, into secular theory and praxis, because the prophets themselves were directed towards the outside world, i.e. society, the modern ascetic-subjectivist religions cannot. Despite their claims, their object of transformation is severely limited and egocentric. Their inward turn *effectively* abandons the commitment to the world outside, as the subjectivity of the believer is exclusively the object of his labor, a hurdle he/she never truly transcends. As such, the ascetic-subjectivist "new" religions have had even less influence on

176

society than their Abrahamic predecessors despite their great promise of emancipation from the "iron cage" of the ascendant "totally administered society" (Marcuse, 1966; Ott, 2009: 183-185).[36] They are in fact, following Horkheimer's analysis, a "regression" of the prophetic nature of the Abrahamic faiths; they are a capitulation to the world-as-it-is disguised as a new revolutionary movement, which can only lead to increasing social domination of the individual.[37] As Horkheimer states,

> we are the heirs, for better or worse, of the Enlightenment and technological progress. To oppose these by regressing to more primitive states does not alleviate the permanent crisis they have brought about. On the contrary, such expedients lead from historically reasonable to utterly barbaric forms of social domination. The sole way of assisting nature is to unshackle its seeming opposite, independent thought. (Horkheimer, 2004: 86).

Independent thought, I argue, is predicated on the possibility of radical otherness, dialectical imagination, and a critical stance that does not abandon the commitment to the material world.

No Positive Metaphysics

Before the world was disenchanted by modernity, religion comprehensively structured and gave substantive meaning to life's experiences. It did so by providing a well-defined moral code, the goal of salvation (a *telos*), a connection with the divine (via scripture and prayer, etc.), an institution to which the believer belonged (community), a sense that the divine was ultimately in control of history (security), and sense that what happened in history was *divinely impregnated with meaning*. All was part of "God's plan." For the Christians, the Holy Spirit was

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[36] Following Horkheimer, Ott writes that in such a "totally administered society... human individuality, autonomy, love, longing for that which is other than what is will be increasingly diminished through the necessity of conforming to demands of the social cybernetic iron cage system, from which no one can escape" (Ott, 2009: 183-184).

[37] It should be noted that the Abrahamic faiths could also abandon their prophetic nature and retreat into spiritual privatization and mysticism, thus relinquishing their negativity towards the status quo.

God's presence in the world after the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and for the Jews, the covenant with God remained valid and a source of identity, community, and spiritual and existential sanctuary. Nevertheless, the sense that God was present did not impede catastrophes from occurring, nor did it excommunicate suffering from the human condition. Despite this, it was thought that God remained present and available, as he was behind all things, good or bad. Even the theodicy problem couldn't "kill God," as the goal of thinking through theodicy, or the question of God's justice, was to determine *how* history revealed God's will (which was just and fair – even if painful and calamitous). The pre-modern age rarely questioned whether or not God was just, as such skepticism could dissolve the whole framework of God's infinite presence in the world and thus the foundations of the believer's worldview. Neither would the believer seriously consider the idea of God being unjust, as justice was constitutional for the definition of God itself, especially in Christianity.[38] To the degree that the world is not just, God must be. When catastrophe visited a given individual, family, or nation, believers – both the laity and the clerics – directed their critical reason to discovering the mysterious will of God *within* the horrific event. Was the divine attempting to teach a lesson, to punish, or to test the faith of the believer? What sins provoked God to send such a catastrophe? "God works in mysterious ways," but it was nevertheless "God working" for the faithful believers. In this sense, God is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Otto, 1958). Regardless of the answer to the vexing question, the event surely had a reason, a purpose for happening, and therefore it had meaning, and such meaning was understandable within the theological schema of the religion: one had to suffer one's personal "cross" in order to be worthy of the suffering "Christ"; one had to lose all of one's possessions in a war or famine in order to be purged of one's sinful attachments to the

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[38] Judaism is more open to the believer questioning the wisdom of God, just as Jacob wrestled with the Angel (Genesis 32:22-32). Later Jacob would be renamed "Israel," meaning "one who wrestled with God."

temporal, so that such attachment would not interfere with one's chances of salvation; one had to lose a child just as Mary, the mother of God (*theotokos*), had lost her child on the cross, as to increase one's faith in the mercy of the divine; one had to suffer illness and destitution as a test to see whether one will remain faithful to the religion. If fact, in Catholicism, the more one suffered the more one was believed to be beloved by God. In all these instances, the *meaning* of the catastrophic was ascertained within a theological and/or scriptural framework that pointed to the divine's active intervention into history. In other words, for the believer, history is revelatory; it is the language through which God reveals his will. The church (or scriptures) provided the interpretation of such history. In the end, the believer felt connected to the other-worldly author of history and believed such history had a personal meaning for the believer, and thus they were part of the divine's master plan, even amidst acute suffering.

With the Enlightenment's disenchantment (*entzauberung*) of the world – the draining of religion and metaphysics from the lifeworld – the idea that divine meaning is present in the face of suffering was immeasurably weakened. The reduction of history to rational and natural causation deflated the possibility that the divine hand was involved in the historical event, and therefore it was reduced to being only a matter of nature and material, not the design of omniscience, and there could be no *inherent* meaning in the natural and/or material world without an absolute. Nevertheless, the desire to give catastrophic events meaning stubbornly persisted beyond the Enlightenment, both institutionally and at the individual level. Even the Enlightenment philosopher Leibniz still had a theodicy, even if logical conclusions forced him to view God radically differently from traditional theism (Leibniz, 1990). However, like the rest of religion, which was privatized with the ascendance of the Bourgeoisie, theodicy was reduced from being a *national* question (what is God saying to the nation through this natural disaster,

war, etc.) to a matter of *individual* reflection (or non-reflection), even when the catastrophe was national in nature. Nevertheless, for Adorno especially, the 20th century would provide such a cataclysmic event as to forever nail religion and metaphysics in its historical grave: Auschwitz.[39] He states, "to assert that existence or being has a positive meaning constituted within itself and orientated towards the divine principle... would be, like all the principles of truth, beauty and goodness which philosophers have concocted, a pure mockery in face of the victims and the infinitude of their torment" (Adorno, 2001: 101-102). After Auschwitz, the "status of metaphysics" has "completely changed" (Adorno, 2001: 102). What does this mean for religion post-Auschwitz?

Much like positive religion, which affirms the status quo, Adorno is horrified by the possibility of a positive metaphysics that would affirm the barbarity of history and therefore impart an inherent meaning to Auschwitz, whether that be through philosophical metaphysics, such as Hegel's movement of absolute spirit through history, or a religious one wherein all historical events are part of the divine's master plan. His "inverse theology" allows for no conception of history as being guided by a *Heilsgeschicht* (salvation history), as history, following Benjamin's dialectical image of the *Angelus Novus*, is "one single catastrophe" that reveals the untruth behind the idea of modern conception of "progress" (Benjamin, 1969: 257-258; Mendieta, 2005: 10). For him, the introduction of an affirmative theology as a way of explaining Auschwitz, through which it would be given inherent meaning as an act of the divine, is to victimize the victims of the Shoah again. He states in his *Negative Dialectics,*

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[39] By "Auschwitz" Adorno had two meanings. First, the totality of suffering, torture and murder that was imposed on the Jews during the Third Reich, that is commonly called the "Holocaust" or the "Shoah." Secondly, he often broadened the concept of Auschwitz to include the "world of torture which has continued to exist after Auschwitz," which, in his thirteenth lecture of Metaphysics of 1965, he includes the death and destruction pervasive in the war in Vietnam (Adorno, 2001: 101).

> After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate. And these feelings do have an objective side after the events that make a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence (Adorno, 1999: 361).

Adorno wants to avoid the absurdity that would inevitably follow any attempt to deploy metaphysics and/or theological justifications in understanding Auschwitz. The theodicy question itself resides within a certain metaphysical construct and thus maintains within itself the potential to provide such an absurd justification. In other words, the thought that the divine authored Auschwitz to "test" the faith of the Jews, to "punish" the Jews for their callousness towards the covenant, or to "sacrifice" some Jews so that the state of Israel may be established, appears to Adorno to be both absurd and morally wrong (Adorno, 2001: 104; Berkovits in Morgan, 2001: 96-102; Greenberg in Morgan, 102-115; Fackenheim in Morgan, 2001: 115-138). It is "impossible," Adorno says, "to insist after Auschwitz on the presence of a positive meaning or purpose in being," for such metaphysical speculation only embraces the unnecessary and unjust misery, suffering and death of the victims of genocide by infusing meaning into the absolute "meaningless" (Adorno, 2001: 101).[40] Thus, to give a positive answer to the theodicy question in light of the gas chambers and crematoria is to import the morally absurd, for no theodicy answer can justify the sheer barbarity of the industrialized mass extermination of men,

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[40] Yet the Critical Theory resists falling into the positivists' reduction of Auschwitz into a systematized account of the mechanics of mass murder. In other words, it does not follow the historians' surface rendering of Auschwitz into a collections of facts: when were the camps built; what was the mechanics of moving millions of Jews to the concentration and extermination camps; how did the Nazi's administer such a comprehensive undertaking? Nor is a thick description of life in the conditions of Auschwitz adequate, for even that fails to go beyond just repeating of that which is already apparent and therefore offers no real insight into the subjective horror and terror that was imposed on the innocent victims. Instrumental reason, the kind used to investigate Auschwitz from a positivist perspective, is deficient to the task: it does not penetrate into the significance of Auschwitz as a phenomenon that, according to Adorno, completely changes the status of metaphysics, as instrumental reason is limited to *what-is-the-case* as its metaphysical basis. In fact, instrumental rationality reproduces the same "bourgeois coldness" that is needed to engage in a mass production of corpses, albeit in the disinterested historian. Adorno also mentions this coldness, which he sees as the essence of Bourgeois subjectivity, as being the necessary condition for the Jewish survivor to reflect on Auschwitz, since "by right [he] should have been killed" but goes on living (Adorno, 1999: 362-363).

women and children without once again placing the blame on the victims for their own annihilation.

Following Adorno's critique, to give a positive answer to the theodicy question unleashes a torrent of subsequent questions that can only be answered with absurd and perverse logic in the face of mass suffering: what "test" of God legitimizes the gassing of old men and women; what "punishment," or death sentence, is legitimate when perpetrated against innocent children; and where is the justice in annihilating millions of innocent civilians, who haven't given their consent, so that a political state may be established as the subsequent result of their suffering and annihilation? If the divine is omnipotent, could he have not simply made such an entity through other non-destructive means? Why did the divine require such a gruesome sacrifice? Was the divine *pleased* with the sacrifice he authored? If the mass murder of millions of Jews was his plans, were then Hitler and the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) the instruments of God? And if so, was it the Jewish God whom these Nazis were deployed by? And if Hitler and the SS were God's instruments against the Jews, why then should the Jews continue to worship such an anti-Jewish God? Does the Shoah make imminent the fact that the Jews must flee from this God, for this God seeks their destruction in the most barbaric fashion? On a broader level, after Auschwitz, can any segment of humanity still pray to a God who is capable of such sadistic depravity (Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, 1999; Siebert, 2010: 1030)? For Adorno, no answer escapes the perversity that again victimizes the victims (Adorno, 1999: 361).

As one can witness, to theologize Auschwitz is to deliver the catastrophe into the hands of the perennial debate between free will and predestination, a debate that has ended in the antinomy of equally incomprehensible and unacceptable theological answers. If there is a free will, and the Nazis autonomously chose to annihilate the Jews without the foreknowledge of the

182

divine, then what kind of "almighty" God do the Jews pray to, especially if that God could have intervened into history but either failed to do so or, more disturbingly, chose not to? If there is no free will, and everything is predetermined, thus making God the sole author of the Jews' destruction, does not this God warrant condemnation and hatred – a move towards *misotheism* (μισόθεος - hatred of God)? If so, who then are the chosen people and by whose design are they chosen? Are they chosen for persecution and not divine favor? If so, the language of the Mosaic covenant is fraudulent and therefore the contract between the divine and his "chosen" should be nullified. If we continue down this line of thought we will for sure circle down the rabbit hole into theological absurdity, which in the end takes us farther away from the *imminent*: the suffering and annihilation of millions of people. The abstractness of theology itself is unworthy and incapable of grasping the concrete reality of genocide, of the logic of the camps, of the production of grotesque camp language (a new vocabulary infested with sadistic perversity), and the design of instruments by which human corpses could be manufactured on the scale of a major industry. Just as Adorno once declared "poetry after Auschwitz" as being "barbaric," so too we may add is traditional *cataphatic* theology.[41] Theology, if it is to survive after Auschwitz, may have to migrate into a more suitable venue: dialectical philosophy, or maybe even into the extremities of *negative dialectics.*

As the chilling details of life in the extermination camps and the full horror of Auschwitz became more apparent, the limits of the Frankfurt School's analysis of anti-Semitism, which they had studied both in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* and *The Authoritarian Personality* became readily apparent. Such studies could investigate the cause of such attitudes as well as various aspects of their political manifestations, but metaphysics in the light of Auschwitz was

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[41] As opposed to *apophatic* theology, which only describes the divine through *via negative* – what the divine is not, *cataphatic* theology uses positive language in its description of the divine, thus bringing the ineffable into the limitation of finite species language.

simply beyond articulation. Looking back, it became increasingly clear to many thinkers just how wrong it was to give Auschwitz a positive meaning, or to "look for the positive" within the negative. There was no positive that came from the negation of the negative: it was *absolute* negativity. Adorno states that "such a construction [of positive meaning] would *affirm* absolute negativity and would assist its ideological survival – as in reality that negativity survives anyway, in the principle of society as it exists until its self-destruction" (Adorno, 1999: 361, 362).

Returning to our main contention, Adorno reiterates the perverse nature of placing Auschwitz within a totalizing schema – whether it is religious or secular – that imbues the suffering and annihilation of the Jews as having some positive export. He writes,

> In face of the experiences we have had, not only through Auschwitz but through the introduction of torture as a permanent institution and through the atomic bomb – all these things form a kind of coherence, a hellish unity – in face of these experiences the assertion that what is has meaning, and the affirmative character which has been attributed to metaphysics almost without exception, become a mockery; and in face of the victims it becomes downright immoral. For anyone who allows himself to be fobbed off with such meaning moderates in some way the unspeakable and irreparable thing which have happened by conceding that somehow, in a secret order of being, all this will have had some kind of purpose (Adorno, 2001: 104).

Indeed, the misotheist Elie Wiesel, expressed similar sentiments on the meaninglessness of Auschwitz in his *Plea for the Dead*.[42] He writes,

> In truth, Auschwitz signifies not only the failure of two thousand years of Christian civilization, but also the defeat of the intellect that wants to find a Meaning – with a capital *M* – in history. What Auschwitz embodied has none. The executioner killed for nothing, the victim died for nothing. No God ordered the one to prepare the stake, nor the other to mount it. During the Middle Ages, the Jews, when they chose death, were convinced that by their sacrifice they were glorifying and sanctifying God's name. At Auschwitz the sacrifices were without point, without faith, without divine inspiration. If the suffering of one human being has any meaning, that of six million has none (Wiesel in Morgan, 2001: 71).

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[42] A discussion of Elie Wiesel's miso-theism can be found in Bernard Schweizer's *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism,* pg.149-171.

Wiesel became painfully aware of the unintended consequences of placing Auschwitz within a certain conceptual framework when he unfortunately used the word "holocaust" to describe the destruction of the Jews in Europe, so much so that he regretted coining the phrase. The term "holocaust" originates in the Hebrew Bible as the form of animal sacrifice that was burned in the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem by the High Priest. For Wiesel, the Jews of Europe replaced the animal sacrifices as they were burned in the crematoria. However, the most perverse, but unintended consequence of Wiesel's appropriation of the word, is that the use of the term transforms Hitler into the High Priest of modern Judaism, as he was the tool of God's will – just as it was the will of God for the Jews to make animal sacrifices to him – that sent the Jews to their deaths. This, and many other attempts to imbue the meaningless with symbolic and or theological meaning only produce a descent into the horrifically absurd that "wrongs the victims" (Adorno, 1999: 361).

Continuing with this line of thought, and following Benjamin and Adorno's "micrology" method (Benjamin, 1999: 461; Adorno, 1999: 408; Siebert, 2010: 1430-1431), we see that the perversity of conceptualizing the burning of Jews in Auschwitz as a "holocaust" comes into full view in light of a small story, told by the Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoess.[43] In his memoirs, he writes of a Capo (Jewish worker in the *lager*), who, while dragging bodies from the gas-chambers to the fire-pits,

> suddenly stopped and stood for a moment as though rooted to the spot. Then he continued to drag out a body with his comrades. I asked the Capo what was up. He

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[43] Elsewhere Siebert writes that the "Enlightenment leaves behind almost no residuals of the metaphysical and theological truth content, thereby causing metaphysics and theology to immigrate into what Adorno called micrology as a refuge from the totality... totality becomes a radical evil in the totally administered society. Totality is the principle of domination of humanity over nature and itself, inflated into the Absolute. A micrological view of the world as nature and society demolishes the shell of the particular and exposes the fraud that the particular is merely an example of the universal. Since the whole is untruth, metaphysics and theology can only survive in the most minute and inconsequential particulars... According to Adorno, metaphysics and theology become correctives to the objective reason which informs the administered world" (Siebert, 1983: 109).

explained that the corpse was that of the Jew's wife. I watched him for a while, but noticed nothing peculiar in his behaviour. He continued to drag corpses along, just as he had done before. When I visited the Detachment a little later, he was sitting with the others and eating, as though nothing had happened. Was he really able to hide his emotions so completely, or had he become too brutalised to care even about this (Hoess, 2000: 152).

If we follow the logic of the ancient ritual of burnt sacrifices at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem – the original "holocaust" – we can see that this concept transforms this poor inmate, who has descended into a "callous indifference," into the one who burns his own wife for the God who demands it: Hitler (Hoess, 2000: 152). This forced reenactment of the Temple sacrifice delivers a perverse sacredness to Jewish immolation – an extreme transformation and/or conceptual vandalism of a sacred ritual. Yet, delivering her corpse to the fires of this hellish inferno was the only way in which she'd escape Auschwitz; what other choice did this God give him other than his own meaningless death? As Adorno remarked in his *Negative Dialectics,* "what the sadists in the camps foretold their victims, 'Tomorrow you'll be wiggling skyward as smoke from this chimney,' bespeaks the indifference of each individual life that is the direction of history. Even in his formal freedom, the individual is as fungible and replaceable as he will be under the liquidators' boots" (Adorno, 1999: 362). For Adorno, *false* meaning is gifted to that which has no meaning, that which is beyond all horror and that which cannot point to anything outside of its own inescapable imminence.

As we can see, Adorno is expressly concerned with the unintended consequences of incorporating Auschwitz into a positive, and therefore affirming, metaphysics. He contends that such a move renders metaphysics and/or theology into ideology, that is "into an empty solace which at the same time fulfills [sic] a very precise function in the world as it is: that of keeping people in line" (Adorno, 2001: 104). As such, the desperately searched for "positive within the negative" could only manifest itself in ideological assertions: false consciousness that gives

186

illusory consolation in the face of an inconsolable condition. Furthermore, such an ideological stance towards the past camouflages the conditions that enable the possibility of it happening again, as it is mistakenly perceived as something solely bound to the past as opposed to a real possibility for the future. Horkheimer reminds us that "there is no villainy which could not be reconciled with the public conscience," and in that reconciliation the potential for another catastrophe resides (Horkheimer, 1978: 88). As long as those conditions endure, the danger of a future Auschwitz is obscured behind ideological falsehoods.

In light of the mass catastrophe of Auschwitz, and the realization that the conditions for Auschwitz to occur again survived the fall of the Third Reich, Adorno forcibly rejects a retreat into the "empty solace" of religion, which is to look backwards for meaning, but rather offers a future-oriented remembrance, a "new categorical imperative" that must be observed: that Auschwitz should "not happen again" (Adorno, 1998: 191), and that "no person ever be hungry, that wars be abolished, and that concentration camps be eliminated" (Siebert, 1983: 113). Although Adorno sympathetically writes that "one of the great impulses of Christianity, not immediately identical with its dogma, was to eradicate the coldness that permeates everything," but that it had failed to do so because it did not "reach into the societal order that produces and reproduces that coldness," he nevertheless assigns no explicit role for religion in the struggle against the resurrection of fascism post-Third Reich in his *Education after Auschwitz* essay. Being his most proscriptive essay, in terms of what he thinks *needs* to be done to impede and/or excommunicate the possibility of another Auschwitz; he nevertheless can find no active role for *institutional* religion. This may be for many reasons, which include the difficulties of religion in the modern period that I have spelled out previously, or because of religion's tendency to turn catastrophe into ideology. It is better to remain silent that to clumsily justify the unjustifiable and

heap further misery onto the already miserable. Institutionalized religion, which failed to stop Auschwitz from occurring, failed to banish "coldness" from mankind, despite the work of many good individual believers, must also remain silent. It cannot justify its deafening silence during the slaughter by self-righteous homiletics after the catastrophe has already occurred. Nevertheless, if the inherent negativity of religion – the critical nature that allow the Protestant minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the White Rose (*die Weiße Rose*), the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), the political theologian and priest Georg W. Rudolfi, conservative German Catholics (as well as many Catholic monasteries) and others to reject fascism within the fascist state itself – is to be resurrected and rescued from the overwhelming positivity that not only acquiesced to fascism but often times contributed to its barbarity, then the origins of such negativity ought to be discovered and rescued, as it provides one more avenue for resistance towards barbarization. Seeing the world from the perspective of the "messianic light," which reveals the world's "displaced, alienated and contradictory" forces, Adorno understands that Hegel's slaughter-bench of history (*Geschichte Als Schlachtbank*), or even Golgotha history, continues unimpeded, and religion, with all of its theological, moral and communicative resources, has yet to curtail such slaughter, but the potential to do so still remains (Siebert, 1983: 113).

What then in religion can still be rescued post-Auschwitz? What ideas, concepts and or principles within religion could lend itself to Adorno's *new categorical imperative,* even when it was so apparently neglected during the reign of the Third Reich?

In the next chapter, I will argue that the Frankfurt School's first generation indeed did rescue certain aspects of religion from religion itself. After this chapter, which shows how they negated the untrue within religion and theology, the next chapter argues the second half of their

determinate negation, which shows precisely which aspects of religion they preserved in their non-conformist, secular and critical philosophy, and how those religious aspects contribute to the struggle against barbarity in the modern world.

Chapter 5: The Frankfurt School's Dialectical Preservation of Religion

*Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed,
every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm
of the secular, the profane.*[1]

~ Theodor W. Adorno

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the first movement in the Frankfurt School's determinate negation of religion by focusing on what they critiqued and negated in religion. In this section I will focus squarely on those aspects of religion that they rescued, preserved, and developed beyond their original meaning. I argue they managed to do this by translating those aspects thus preserved via determinate negation into secular philosophy, or in other words, they allowed certain semantic and semiotic materials to migrate from the depth of the religious tradition and theology into critical philosophy in such a way that we can consider those originally religious aspects, in agreement with Löwenthal, to be "co-determinate" foundations of Critical Theory; or, in Horkheimer's language, the "roots" of Critical Theory.

Although there is a considerable amount of overlap between the philosophy of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, especially when it comes to the religious and theological aspects of their philosophy, I have limited my inquiry to the following, (1) Adorno's translation and augmentation of the Jewish concept of *Bilderverbot,* or the "image ban" of Judaic Decalogue, (2) Horkheimer's definition of religion as the "longing for the totally Other," and (3) Walter Benjamin's political Messianism, which was partially influenced by the Kabbalist-philosopher Gershom Scholem, and the Historical Materialism of his Marxist friend Bertolt Brecht.[2]

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[1] Adorno, "Reason and Revelation" in *Critical Models,* 136.
[2] Although it would be possible to include Fromm, Löwenthal, and Marcuse in this analysis, I have chosen to focus on Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin for the fact that I think their philosophies are the most "saturated" – to use Benjamin's term – by religion.

Before we can highlight the process of translating religion into profane philosophy, we must secure a solid understanding of what exactly that process means; how do religious semantics and semiotics become secular; how do sacred concepts become profane, and what happens to that material once it is no longer clothed in religious garb? In order to do this, I briefly turn to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and his work on "profanation," or the transforming of the religious into the secular, the *sacred* into the *profane*, for these two mutually-exclusive realms are key to understanding how the Frankfurt School *preserves* religion within their secular philosophy.

From the Sacred to the Profane

In his book *Profanations,* Giorgio Agamben recalls the knowledge of the ancient Roman jurists who "knew perfectly well what it meant to 'profane'" (Agamben, 2007: 73).

> Sacred or religious were the things that in some way belonged to the gods. As such, they were removed from the free use and commerce of men; they could be neither sold nor held in lien, neither given for usufruct nor burdened by servitude. Any act that violated or transgressed this special unavailability, which reserved these things exclusively for the celestial gods (in which case they were properly called "sacred") or for the gods of the underworld (in which case they were simply called "religious"), was sacrilegious. And if "to consecrate" (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, "to profane" meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men (Agamben, 2007: 73).

In this passage, Agamben points out the Roman belief in two *mutually-exclusive* realms: the realm of the gods and the realm of mankind, both of which have distinct requirements, prohibitions, and/or allowances. That which belonged to the realm of the gods the Roman jurists designated as being "sacred," and therefore unavailable for the "free use" of mankind outside of the religious. Likewise, all that did not belong within that realm was considered "profane," or

within the realm of man's free use. Additionally, the Latin world *saecularis* denotes "worldly," or that which is bound by temporality. However, this term is not entirely adequate, as some things that are worldly or temporal can still be considered "sacred" in today's usage of the term. The temporality of given thing or activity does not inherently determine whether it is sacred or profane, but rather religious authorities (or the divine from the religious perspective) makes these determinations. For example, we can see that some activities, such as eating, bathing, thinking, traveling, etc. can be both sacred and profane, just as there can be material objects that reside in both realms, such as chairs (thrones), chalices (goblets), buildings (cathedrals, temples, mosques), *mikvah* (baths), art, etc. However, when religious authorities determine a given activity or entity as belonging to the realm of the gods (or God), they are *sanctified* or *consecrated* and henceforth understood to be "sacred" – as having a special designation that removes them from common usage. The sacredness that is bestowed onto them (either by the divine or its representatives) demands a different attitude, recognition or relationship towards them as they are subject solely to divine authority (via its representatives) and not the authority of laymen, and therefore man's authority over such entities is eclipsed by the designation. With that being said, there are certain actions that would be considered *sacrilegious* if mistakenly or intentionally performed within the boundaries of sacred space, sacred time, upon sacred objects or to sacred figures. Such actions would be considered "sacrilegious" precisely because they transgress the boundaries of the sacred and the profane.

On the other hand, according to Agamben, if something is taken from within the realm of the sacred and placed within the free usage of mankind, they are conversely *profaned*. Agamben quotes the Roman jurist Trebatius as writing "profane is the term for something that was once sacred or religious and is returned to the use and property of men" (Agamben, 2007: 73). What is

192

most important to this study of the Frankfurt School's relationship to religion is the idea that what was once sacred can somehow be made less than sacred and returned to man's free use and commerce. Religious artifacts, whether they are physical spaces or objects, or even more importantly concepts, can be *profaned* – removed from the realm of the gods and placed within the realm of mankind for him to use. An illuminating example of the profaning of material objects is found in King Henry VIII's confiscation of church property after his break with the Roman Catholic Church. Through the *Act of Supremacy* (1534), by which the Parliament of England made him the sole authority over the "Church of England," as well as the *First Suppression Act* of 1536 and the *Second Suppression Act* of 1539, Henry dissolved the Catholic monasteries of England, confiscated their properties, and placed them under secular authority, many of which would later become residences of the aristocracy. In this sense, King Henry VIII *profaned* sacred space and sacred objects. In doing so he "exorcised" the sacred from them and returned it to the "common use of men" in this case as living spaces (Agamben, 2007: 73).

For the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, this form of "profanation" is only synonymous with one form of "secularization." This "forced conveyance of church property to the secular state" as an act of "*unlawful appropriation,*" and connotes a hostile relationship between subject and object (Habermas, 2003: 103-104). Habermas would rather see another form of secularization be the standard for the rescue of religious semantics and semiotics: not an "expropriation" or "stealing" model, but rather a "replacement model" that would suggest a "progressivist interpretation" as being more appropriate for the sublation of religion into secular philosophy (Habermas, 2003: 104).

In regards to the work of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, we are not as interested in the profaning of sacred objects and sacred space as we are in the profaning of

religious concepts. As we'll see, the process of removing a concept from its religious and/or theological context, translating it into secular language, and thus allowing it to be used freely by men, in this case by philosophers, is the same process by which sacred objects are "translated" into profane objects.

Clearly, as we've previously demonstrated with Feuerbach, Marx, Lenin, Freud and Nietzsche, not all modern secular philosophers attempted to rescue, translate (or profane), religious semantics and semiotics into secular philosophy. The *explicit* attempt to do so began with Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, who understood the need to rescue and translate those critical and emancipatory aspects of religion that had previously been discarded by his philosophical predecessors (Ott, 2014: 45).[3] According to Tom Moylan, it was "Bloch's exploration of the utopian function in the history of religious discourse" that "superseded the mechanical materialism of Feuerbach and the positivist versions of Marxism that had relegated religion to the dustbin of history" (Daniel and Moylan, 1997: 98). As previously discussed, in contrast to their predecessors' *scientific*, and therefore *abstract negation* of religion, Bloch and Adorno perceived that something valuable, something emancipatory, had been discarded. There was a new awareness that something important was missing in a world where "God is dead," and the task of these critical thinkers was to rescue, preserve and fulfill these elements via *determinate negation* (Bloch, 2000).[4] However, their task was monumental: the march of modernity continued unimpressed by the fall of religion, theology and metaphysics. Because of this march of history, in his essay *Reason and Revelation,* Adorno explicitly states the need for theology to *migrate* into the secular if any of it was to survive the continual

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[3] It is clear that in many ways this attempt to reassess the value of religion and religious concepts began already with Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer, and other Enlighteners, but after the catastrophe of WWI the project took on a new sense of urgency and consequently became much more explicit.

[4] According to Stefan Müller-Doohm, Bloch and Adorno had a live radio discussion on the theme "Something Missing" in 1964 in Baden-Baden (Müller-Doohm, 2005: 421).

onslaught of the Enlightenment and/or modernity. In other words, in order preserve that which was liberational, emancipatory and revolutionary within theology and/or religion, it must be *translated* into publically accessible reasoning, as far as possible, by which the previously closed semantic universes of religion would be opened to secular discourse and deliberation. Adorno writes,

> If one does not want either to fall under the sway of the notion that whatever has long been well known is for that reason false, or to accommodate oneself to the current religious mood that – as peculiar as it is understandable – coincides with the prevailing positivism, then one would do best to remember Benjamin's infinitely ironic description of theology, "which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight." *Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed; every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular, the profane* (Adorno, 1998: 135-136)
> .

Because the modern world no longer recognized the value of *religious* thinking; because it no longer understood the closed world of religious semantics, i.e. the modern world had become religiously illiterate, such valuable potentials had to be refashioned into a language that was understandable: it must be expressed through autonomous reason.

However simple this "migration" may seem, the process of translating the religious into the secular leads us to a curious and paradoxical position: can something of the sacred remain once profaned? Can some residual of sacredness still be recognized within the former sacred space that has now been taken out of the realm of the gods? Although Agamben doesn't account for this, which I think is the most poignant weakness in his argument, I argue that we can rightly claim that at least in some cases there is a remainder of the sacred within that which has been returned to man, and this *sacred-that-remains* becomes the factor that allows the observer to recognize the entity (or concept) as a secularized sacred thing. Just as the religious purpose of the profaned monastery is still intelligible regardless of its current usage as a private home, the religious remainder of the sacred space/concept is identifiable within the now profaned edifice.

195

The entity has been translated, given new semantic garb, but the translation itself preserves within itself the original language, intent, and/or meaning; if it did not, the translation itself would be empty as it would be a signifier without the signified, as translations – although having independent lives of their own – always point back to an original or an older articulation. This unaccounted for "residue" (Bloch's term) will become an important factor in my argument for the Frankfurt School's translation of religious concepts into secular philosophy. We will return to that theme later in this work.

Adorno's Preservation and Translation of the Bilderverbot

In the discussion of the Jewish image ban and how it animates the entire trajectory of Critical Theory, it is pertinent to once again remember Horkheimer's letter to Otto O. Herz, written in September of 1969 in lieu of Adorno's funeral. In this letter, Horkheimer explains both Adorno's biographical relationship to religion, particularly his ties to both Catholicism and Protestantism, and how the Jewish element was translated into, and ultimately served as, one of the co-determinative bases of their critical philosophy. Ruminating on the idea of religion being one of the origins of Critical Theory, Horkheimer writes,

> I tell you this in order to make Adorno's complicated relationship to religion, to religious allegiance, comprehensible. On the other hand, may I say that the critical theory that we both had a hand in developing has its roots in Judaism. It arises from the idea: *Thou shalt not make any graven images of God* (Horkheimer, 2007: 361).[5]

Here, Horkheimer attests to the 2nd Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue, the *Bilderverbot*, to being the fertile soil from which Critical Theory sprang. Without equivocation, Horkheimer agrees with Löwenthal that this most basic of Jewish theological principles – the second

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[5] Emphasis added.

principle from which the totality of Jewish theology derives – was a determining factor in their critical work (Löwenthal, 1987: 112).[6] Adorno himself, in his essay *Reason and Revelation,* states how important the theological concept of Bilderverbot will become to his overall political, economic and cultural critique. He writes, "there I see no other possibility than an extreme ascesis [religious discipline] toward any type of revealed faith, an extreme loyalty to the prohibition of images, *far beyond what this once originally meant*" (Adorno, 1998: 142).[7] Knowing that the Frankfurt School was not a yeshiva, but was rather a "school" of non-conformist critical philosophical thought, it stands to reckon that somehow the traditional Jewish understanding of the *Bilderverbot* had to be translated into secular terms in order for it to serve as the "roots" of their social-political philosophy – which they extended "far beyond" its original theological meaning – into the realm of the political, economic, and even the cultural.[8]

If Horkheimer's claim is true, that the *Bilderverbot* animates not only his but also Adorno's contribution to the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, we must ask what the image ban is transformed into when it is translated into their secular philosophy. This will give us clues as to what factors within the religious ban on divine images lend themselves to Adorno's social critique of fascism, anti-Semitism, authoritarianism, capitalism, consumerism, and a host of other social phenomenon that contribute to damaged life. In other words, we are looking for the reasons why this religious concept, which he pledges an "extreme loyalty to," is so powerful that a secular philosopher would chose to translate – or *profanate* (to use Agamben's terms) – it into his modern secular philosophy, a philosophy that no longer looks to revelation, theology or

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[6] The first principle of Jewish theology can be found in the 1st Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue; it comes in the form of the *Shema Yisrael,* "Here O Israel, the Lord your God is One," which establishes the principle of divine monotheism.

[7] Emphasis added.

[8] Eduardo Mendieta describes the *Bilderverbot* as a "foundational presupposition" of Critical Theory (Mendieta in Habermas, 2002: 7).

197

religion for its legitimation? So before we can answer those questions, we have to secure an understanding of what the *Bilderverbot* entails in its "original language," its original context in traditional forms of Judaism. Once we have determined what exactly the traditional Jewish image ban is, what role it plays in Jewish theology and Jewish life, we then can pursue an understanding of why the *Bilderverbot* holds such an attraction for Adorno (and Horkheimer for that matter) that Horkheimer would consider it the "roots" of their philosophy.

The Hebraic Ban on Images

According to the French historian of iconoclasm, Alain Besançon, *apophatic* (negative) critiques of the *cataphatic* (positive) practice of "imaging" the divine – through physical representations, whether two dimensional or three dimensional, or even verbal – were already present among the philosophers of ancient Greece, but it was with the ancient Hebrews that the full ban on imaging the divine came into effect (Besançon, 2000: 13-62). In the book of Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch (five books of Moses), which recounts the enslavement and liberation of the Hebrews in Egypt, God reveals the Ten Commandments to Moses. After establishing the 1st Commandment, that the Divine is singular and is responsible for bringing the Hebrews "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," and that there should be "no other gods before me," the Divine articulated the 2nd Commandment, stating,

> You shall not make of yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but show steadfast to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:1-6).

The Ten Commandments, which are both theological and social, are offered as a binding covenant to the sons and daughters of Israel in Deuteronomy 5:2. In this purely religious form, it can be read as such: The Divine that liberated the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery demands their allegiance, for he is the God of Israel. He may not be the only god, but he is their God. However, part of that allegiance is the demand that the believers not represent the divine being through any manufactured images nor should they worship anything that is temporal, such as the "Golden Calf" (Exodus 32:4). The nature of the God of Israel is that he is wholly without image, unimaginable, and beyond all articulation via linguistic and/or material expression. If an otherwise physical or linguistic "image" is produced, it is *by definition not the divine*, for no image can capture the imageless, no language can capture the ineffable, nor can anything perfectly embody divine attributes. In other words, the negativity of the divine being cannot be depicted positively. Although this God is essentially imageless, it is nevertheless omnipresent, omniscient and responsible for creation. Divinity reveals its will through revelation and prophets but nevertheless remains a mystery (*mysterium* – hidden). However, this God intervenes into history, to reward the righteous and to punish the wicked, and therefore the Divine's dictates are to be followed with utmost care.

A religion without an image of God does not seem too vexing of an issue for the modern believer, but prior to the Axial Age (*Achsenzeit*), at a time when the Mediterranean pagan religions expressed their religious commitments through devotion to their anthropomorphic images of divine beings, the demand for the Hebrews to absolutely reject such commonplace practices was difficult. Indeed, as Moses was "speaking with him [God]" on Mount Sinai, his brother Aaron was crafting an image of the divine for the impatient Hebrews in the valley, saying "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:

1-6). What is clear from the text was that the people of Israel were not entirely or intentionally abandoning the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but wanted a tangible image to which they could direct their devotion, similar to the images of the gods they became accustomed to in Egypt. The desire to lay eyes upon the Divine was powerful, especially in a time when faith came through seeing, instead of "hearing" as it was for the Hebrews, and later the Jews.[9] However, to the transcendent God of Israel, the "corruption" of God's wholly otherness via images was akin to engaging in apostasy, and God was fully prepared to exact punishment on the Hebrews for their idolatry had it not been for Moses's intercession (Exodus 32:7-35; Besançon, 2000: 64). Despite the initial difficulties, the Hebrews had, with their move towards a singular and transcendent deity, an emancipatory break with pre-Axial age mythology, which was a great leap forward for the development of mankind's ability to think beyond the given and the imminent. According to Habermas, the Axial age religions, Judaism especially, "developed a monotheistic or acosmic concept of the Absolute" which,

> pierced through the uniform, flat surface of narratively interwoven, contingent appearances, thus tearing open the gap between deep and surface structure, between essence and appearance, which first granted humanity the freedom of reflection and the power to distance itself from the abyss of immediacy (Habermas, 2002: 158).

In that sense, the intellectual move to a more abstract, distant and unarticulated divine, one that was not accessible by magic, which defied control, which defied reification into a static "thing," and did not seem to reflect the society of men like other forms of myth, had social and political consequences. This divine that escapes human imagination became an abiding issue for the Romans when they conquered the land of the Jews, for their God could not be integrated into the

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[9] At the core of the "faith through hearing" notion is the *Sh'ma Yisrael,* which states, "*Hear* o Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," (Deuteronomy 6:4). This verse is the basis for Judaism's strict monotheism and points to the medium through which faith comes: hearing.

Roman pantheon, and therefore neither could the devotees of such a God. What was the reason

for such theological recalcitrance?

In the third book of the Torah, Leviticus, God once again enumerates the binding

conditions of the Covenant in the form of the *Bilderverbot*. He says, "You shall make for

yourselves no idols and erect no graven image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone

in your land, to bow down to them; for I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 26:1). Furthermore,

in Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, the God of Israel states,

> Therefore, take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that
> the Lord spoke to you at Ho'reb [Sinai] out of the midst of the fire, beware lest
> you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any
> figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the
> earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything
> that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the
> earth. And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun
> and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and
> worship them and serve them, things which the Lord your God has allotted to all
> the peoples under the whole heaven (Deuteronomy 4:15-19).[10]

Before Moses sent the Hebrews into Canaan, i.e. the "Promised Land," he once again warned

them against their idolatrous tendencies. He said,

> Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God,
> which he made with you, and make a graven image in the form of anything which
> the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a devouring fire,
> a jealous God (Deuteronomy 4:23-24).

So these rebellious Hebrews don't forget it, the commandment against creating idols is once

again repeated in Deuteronomy 5:8 and a reminder of their transgressions against the prohibition

again in Deuteronomy 9:12. For Moses, the nature of the Absolute, its wholly otherness, must be

maintained at all times, lest the Hebrews wish to risk divine wrath. In other words, there can be

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[10] In the Jewish Tradition Mount Ho'reb, also mentioned as Mount Sinai, is known as the "Mountain of God,"
whereon God delivered the Decalogue to Moses.

no anthropomorphism without risking divine sanction, for anthropomorphism is an attempt to "image" the unimaginable, akin to Feuerbach's projection thesis.

As the Hebrews entered into Canaan as conquering invaders, the ban on worshiping images was extended into the territory they conquered: "… you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces," (Exodus 23:24) "you shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars [images], and cut down their Asherim" (Exodus 34:13).[11] Not even the images of other's gods were allowed to exist in the land controlled by the Hebrews according to the Hebrew Bible.[12]

What we can take from these passages is twofold; first, in order for the Jews to be distinguishable from all other ancient peoples in the eastern Mediterranean, they must not follow their pagan ways, i.e. they must completely dedicate themselves to a different way-of-being in the world that corresponds to the nature of their radical monotheist and "jealous" God. Second, they must not create any images of the Divine as their neighbors do, for this God cannot be represented by, or made identical to anything earthly. God promises the Hebrews divine retribution if they fail to abide by the covenant, most importantly its strict monotheism and its absolute prohibition on images. In other words, anti-idolatry – the rejection of all things finite as being portrayed as infinite, whether verbally or pictorially – is at the core of both God's

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[11] Different translations of the Bible use "pillars" whereas others use "images" to denote idols. Additionally, the "Asherim" were cult objects connected to the worship of the ancient Canaanite goddess Asherah, who was a consort to the god Ba'al and, paradoxically, Yahweh, the God of Israel. Because of this, the Hebrews are often understood by historians of religion to be *henotheists,* those who maintain a strict devotion to their national god while recognizing the existence of other gods. Also, on the subject of pillar like images, modern Islamist groups, such as the Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), follow a similar command, and have thus eliminated many pre-Islamic statues and buildings that were within their domain of control, such as the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and the ancient Roman city of Palmyra, which maintained a temple dedicated to Baal.

[12] Archaeologists have contested this claim based on the overwhelming evidence that pagan shrines, temples, and other sacred areas have been found throughout the lands controlled by the Hebrews. Indeed, most scholars believe that many of the Hebrews themselves practiced various pagan rites with other peoples. There is even evidence in the Hebrew Bible for inter-marriage, i.e. Samson and Delilah, even though a major point of the story was to condemn the mixing of God's "chosen people" with their pagan neighbors.

commands *and* the identity of the Hebrews. To abandon the theological prohibition of the *Bilderverbot* was to abandon the Hebrew identity in total.[13]

On Idolatry: The False Absolute

As we continue to delve into the original theological purpose of the *Bilderverbot,* in search of the reasons why Adorno and Horkheimer found it to be such a powerful concept that they would translate it into their secular philosophy, we should look deeper into the nature and meaning of Jewish notion of idolatry. We've already established that the covenant between the Hebrews/Jews prohibited them from creating images of the Absolute, but we have not really answered the question to why Judaism insists on the imagelessness of the Divine? What is wrong with creating such an image? Are not images by nature harmless? Even if creating and worshiping images of other people's gods is forbidden, why can the Hebrews/Jews not solely make images of their own God? Lastly, what in the nature of "image-ing" god makes it so condemnatory for the Jews in general and Adorno and Horkheimer in particular?

Theologically, the function of the *Bilderverbot* is to protect God's chosen people from the "sin" of idolatry (Besançon, 2000: 65). Although in Greek, the word "eidolon" (εἴδωλον) strictly denotes a spirit-image of a living or deceased person, in the Hebrew/Jewish tradition it has come to mean simply an "image, statue, or symbol of a false god" (Besançon, 2000: 65). Idol worship (*eidolon latreia*) has been condemned by the writers of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as

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[13] Most historians begin to start "Jewish" history, as opposed to "Hebrew" history, in 586 BCE, when the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzer II, destroyed the Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and the Jews were exiled to Babylon. According to biblical higher criticism, this was the turning point from which the Hebrews, who had become henotheists like their Palestinian neighbors, returned to strict monotheism. This transition to radical monotheism marks the beginning of a form of Judaism more distinguishable from the pagan peoples surrounding them. It is also the period when scholars believe the Torah was written, which emphasized the idea that the Hebrews had abandoned monotheism and had mixed with their pagan neighbors, both religiously and sociologically.

well as the early church fathers, who considered it to be service to false gods. The word "latreia," Besançon points out, was used to denote worship and service to the one true and imageless God as well as the untrue and imaged gods (65), thus linguistically the same devotional act (latreia) is directed towards both false gods and the one true God, giving the false gods the reverence and worship reserved strictly for the true One. With this in mind, idolatry can be understood as the representation of a false god – a false absolute – that is worshiped as if it were the True God – The Absolute.

But what about icons? Are they not fundamentally different from idols? Aren't icons simply imminent yet harmless "representations" of the divine that aid in the worship of the distant divine? Don't they create a feeling of closeness that is lost when the divine remains so physically distant? According to Besançon, Gregory of Nazianzus claimed that idolatry was the "transferal to the creature of the honor due the creator," while the church father Origen distinguished an "image" (*eikon*), the "truthful representation of an existing thing," from an "idol" (*eidolon*), as being a "false representation of what does not exist" (66).[14] Whether or not it is seen as an aid to worship, or the object of worship itself, in the Hebrew/Jewish tradition, no image is acceptable, whether it is an idol or an icon. The absolutivity of the *Bilderverbot* commands absolute negativity: the divine can neither *be* an image nor can it be *represented* by an image. In the strictest reading, the *Bilderverbot* is an absolute prohibition on all images of Divinity *without exception*.[15] This is precisely because images of the Divine violate the absolute transcendence of the Divine by confusing the created with the Creator, the Unconditioned with

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[14] Gregory of Nazianzus was a 4th century theologian, priest and monk. He is considered one of the "Cappadocian Fathers" and would later become the Bishop of Constantinople before retiring to Nazianzus. He was partially responsible for the revivification of the Nicene faith. Origen was a 3rd century biblical critic, exegete, theologian and writer of spiritual tracts. Born in Egypt, he penned many important books that were influential on the Christian communities in the late Roman Empire.

[15] Both within Judaism and Islam, this prohibition against idols would also include the idea that the ineffable Divine incarnates, for in an incarnation a physical image is produced. Therefore, the Christian concept of Jesus as incarnation of the Divine is rejected as a violation of the *Bilderverbot.*

the conditioned; the Eternal with the temporal; the True with the untrue; the Perfect with the imperfect; the Ineffable with the effable, and the Omniscient with the agnostic. Any attempt to cataphatically articulate the Divine, whether through a physical or linguistic medium, is by definition not the Divine, as the divine Reality escapes any and all attempts to describe and or image it. In other words, divine Reality is inaccessible to human cognition and cannot therefore be conceived positively through the mind or depicted via the work of his hands. Knowing this, the ramifications of *apophatic* theology are thus: all attempts to positively articulate divine and/or ultimate Reality produce an untrue façade; a false reality, a reality that does not exist; a false idol, a false absolute. In other words, the divine Reality resists any attempt to drag it into human history through its idolization; it remains entirely transcendent and "totally Other" (*ein ganz Anderen*). Commitment to the idea of the Divine's complete transcendence undermines any attempt to idolize the absolute in history, or to make anything earthly into the Divine or the Absolute. In other words, the negative principle of the divine Reality resists any form of positivity that would assimilate and/or integrate it into the temporal and created. In the *Bilderverbot,* the two realms remain completely differentiated.

As we'll see, this theological rejection of the untrue and embrace of the wholly Other as the negative principle that stands in opposition of positivity has a political export for Adorno, Horkheimer and Critical Theory at large. It is, as Horkheimer wrote in his 1969 letter to Otto O. Herz, the negative "roots" of Critical Theory.

Having been greatly influenced by his older friends Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, Adorno often invokes an "inverse theology" within his otherwise secular philosophy (Ott, 2014: 44; Buck-Morss, 1977: 136-150). Although, as we have seen, he saw no future in any return to traditional religion, he nevertheless recognized some elements within theology that protest and resist the structures of domination that prevail in modern society, and had this recognition as early as his postdoctoral thesis on Kierkegaard, which he wrote under the direction of the socialist, existentialist and Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (Adorno, 1994; Jäger, 2004: 68-69). The possibility of theology, which pushes against the confines of the actual, and offers up vistas of a world that is substantively different from the world of unnecessary suffering, as well as its ability to articulate the unfulfilled longing of humanity to transcend the realm of the given, leads Adorno towards a more positive evaluation of the nature of theology post-Enlightenment. That is not to say that Adorno has become forgetful in regards to the role that theology – and theologians – have played in the history of the world, often being the source of legitimation for some of the greatest crimes.[16] The theology of *Deus Vult* (it is God's will) and *Gott mit uns* (God with us) serve as reminders that theology has more often than not allied itself with the abusers, the dictators, and the murderers. Nevertheless, a utopian vision for a more peaceful and reconciled world, or even the end of death, although not expressed positively, has been preserved not only within art, but also in theology, and for that reason alone Adorno sees something worth rescuing in it.

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[16] Although he certainly didn't require theological legitimation for the advancement of the Third Reich, Hitler did however find support for his work in many German theologians, who supported him for a variety of reasons, including his anti-communism stance. See Robert P. Ericksen's *Theologians Under Hitler* (1985) and Kyle Jantzen's *Faith and Fatherland: Parish Politics in Hitler's Germany* (2008).

Yet we must ask why Adorno chooses to rescue the *Bilderverbot* from Jewish theology. When we understand what the *Bilderverbot* means to him, we can understand how he expands it "far beyond what [it] once originally meant" (Adorno, 1998: 142).

It is clear from Adorno's writings that he is not particularly interested in a traditional theological discussion of what God *is*, or more importantly what God is *not*. Although it is true that he develops a certain form of "inverse theology" in his work, it is not a conventional academic theological discourse (Brittain, 2010: 83-113). He has no interest in becoming a traditional cataphatic theologian, but rather is interested in how to enlist certain negative/critical aspects of theology – the apophatic – into dialectical materialism, or more precisely Critical Theory. In other words, he wants to translate the negativity of the *Bilderverbot* into liberation and emancipatory philosophy, which takes as its subject not the Divine per se, but the world, history, and nature, most especially the horror, misery and suffering of the finite mortal individual.

According to Christopher Craig Brittain, without becoming himself a theologian, Adorno associates a certain strand of theology with critical thinking, which challenges our predilection towards identity thought, our foreclosure of the possible for the existing, and our conflation of truth with untruth – the reality of suffering with the claim of its social necessity (Brittain, 2010: 83). For Habermas, Adorno sees the prohibition against images as a rejection of reification, as "reification is deification; the distortion of something conditioned into the Unconditioned," which "intends to rescue the non-identical in things, which otherwise are violated by their own abstractions (Habermas, 2002: 158). With this in mind, we can determine that Adorno sees some transcendent quality within theology that sustains an *adversus mundum* relationship with the status quo, social statics and the collapse of the non-identical into a monopolizing identity. The

207

nature of such an inverse theology is such that, unlike Positivism, it does not falsely confine itself to the given.[17] It does not conflate "truth with untruth." It does not reject the abstract notion of the *ought* in favor of a collapse of reality into the *is.* It does not bracket out metaphysics as mere speculation in favor of an affirmation of mere appearances. Rather it takes a stance against all that would augment itself into an absolute. If positivism is the *metaphysics of what-is-the-case*, inverse theology is the *metaphysical possibility of what ought-to-be-the-case* in light of its revelation of *what ought-not-to-be-the-case*. This uncompromising distance between the already existing material realities, which includes the political, social and economic, and the possibility of an alternative way-of-being outside of those already existing coordinates, is rooted in the absolute negativity of the *Bilderverbot,* which comes into agreement with historical materialism in opposition to the unjust world as it is. In their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Horkheimer and Adorno highlight the basis of this metaphysical negativity rooted in the imageless divine by saying,

> The Jewish religion brooks no word which might bring solace to the despair of all mortality. It places all hope in the prohibition on invoking falsity as God, the finite as the infinite, the lie as truth. The pledge of salvation lies in the rejection of any faith which claims to depict it, knowledge in the denunciation of illusion (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 17).

As the Jewish religion refused to collapse the "wholly transcendent" Divinity into the wholly tangible, manufactured, and untrue, so too does Adorno and Horkheimer refuse to collapse their philosophy into mere positivism, for positivism remains silent on what *ought* to be the case, but rather concerns itself entirely with what *is* the case: lies as truth – mere appearances as reality. From the religious perspective, what Horkheimer and Adorno are pointing to is the Jewish notion of salvation, which cannot be found in any "faith" that purports to "depict" salvation, or access to

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[17] Horkheimer and Adorno write, "objectified thought cannot even pose the question of the existence of God (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 19). In other words, positivism is confined to that which can be *positively* measured, from which God and all other "metaphysics" escape.

the Truth via the untrue. The principal defect in ideologies, such as positivism or even positive religion, is in the fact that they make identical *that-which-is* with the truth, thus foreclosing the possibility of reality as fundamentally different from the presently existing conditions. As they wrote above, this non-identical alternative is rooted in the negativity of the Jewish *Bilderverbot.* As they write, "the right of the image is recued in the faithful observance of its prohibition" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 18). The "image" that they invoke in this passage can be read as *that which ought to be*, Truth, which is not positively articulated due to the ban itself, but nevertheless has a pervasive existence as the elusive yet *not-yet* present Other. In other words, the non-articulation of another more reconciled, nonalienated and peaceful reality contra the already existing is preserved within the apophatic nature of the image ban itself.

Yet, if this *other-than-what-is-the-case,* this fundamentally different condition, cannot be positively identified and/or articulated, and only remains in the imageless negative, how then can *it* (being a thing) be translated into philosophy? When language is translated it moves from one form of positivity to another. When sacred space is profanated its concreteness doesn't change, only its status as sacred and/or profane. Therefore, what is transformed when the *Bilderverbot* is translated? What is preserved and what is negated? Adorno gives us an idea in his *Negative Dialectics.*

In his discussion of "materialism imageless," Adorno briefly explains the relationship between the theological ban on images and materialism. He writes, "materialism brought that ban [the *Bilderverbot*] into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology" (Adorno, 1999: 207).[18] There are two issues to focus on in this passage. First, the idea

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[18] According to Simon Jarvis, utopia is a central to Adorno's concept of being a materialist. Jarvis writes, "For Adorno himself, wanting to be a materialist means starting from, not a set of fixed metaphysical or methodological

that materialism somehow translated the *Bilderverbot* "into secular form," and second, that the notion of "utopia" somehow shares similar qualities as the Divine – for it too cannot be "positively pictured" (Adorno, 1999: 207). We can explain the first issue by remembering Agamben's notion of "profanation," by which a concept is "profaned" by being removed from the realm of the Divine and placed in the realm of men for their "free use and commerce," thus making the ban on depicting the Divine into a ban on depicting utopia (Agamben, 2007: 73). While the substance of the concept is determinately negated, the now translated form remains (without its inherent religious authority), while still remaining identifiable as having once been "sacred" (*sacrare*).[19] With this in mind, it appears that Adorno is arguing that materialism, "at its most materialistic," is the secular translation of the prohibition on images, for it "comes to agree with theology" that the negative, whether it is God or utopia, cannot be depicted/articulated (Adorno, 1999: 207). In this sense, materialism serves the same function as the *Bilderverbot*; it denies "invoking falsity as God, the finite as the infinite, the lie as truth" – it does not allow the *world-as-it-is* to be made identical with utopia, the *world-as-it-should-be* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 17). While the principle is the same, it has moved from the realm of the theological to the realm of the social-political.

Neither Horkheimer nor Adorno totally flesh out their concept of utopia, yet it remains, I argue, a foundational concern within their translation of religion into secular philosophy. In the next section, I will highlight why the "imageless God," situated in the realm of theology, is translated into "utopia," which is situated in the realm of the secular social and political, and

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commitments, but something which could more accurately be named an impulse: the utopian wish for undiluted happiness, including bodily pleasure, the wish for an end to suffering" (Jarvis in Huhn, 2004: 80).
[19] On the loss of "inherent authority" due to the translation/secularization process, Adorno writes, "with the decay of religion and its palpable philosophical secularizations, restrictive prohibitions lost their inherent authority, their substantiality" (Adorno, 2005: 96).

demonstrate how utopia augments the *Bilderverbot* "far beyond what this once originally meant" (Adorno, 1998: 142).

Utopia as the Unarticulated Totally Other

The word "utopia" was coined by Thomas More (1478-1535 CE), a humanist philosopher and teacher of King Henry VIII, who served as the king's councilor, his Lord High Chancellor, and was later executed by the king after he refused the oath to accept the monarch's supreme authority over the church of England (Ackroyd, 1998). Thomas More's book, *Utopia*, written in Latin and published in 1516, one year before the start of Luther's Protestant Reformation, was published by the humanist philosopher Erasmus, and was originally entitled *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu* (The Best Condition of Society) (Ackroyd, 1998: 170-171). The book detailed a fictional island wherein More articulates his vision of what an ideal society would entail. Tacitly, this "ideal" society was a means to reveal the deficiencies of Tudor England – a critical function that will be preserved in Adorno's use of the term.

Throughout the book, More describes in precise detail aspects of this ideal society, including their work habits, their social and business relations, issues of trade and travel, money, their moral philosophy, their education, their class structure, and issues of slaves (More, 1992). Yet, however much the author positively envisions this island society, he nevertheless chose to give it a name that is entirely negative: "Utopia." The term "utopia" is a compound Greek word that consists of "*topos*" (place) and a negative prefix "*ou*," thus creating a word meaning "no place" (More, 1998: 3). Some have suggested that More may have intentionally used the homophonic "utopia" to mean "eutopia," which means "happy place," which would

211

transubstantiate the meaning of the term from the negative "no place" to the positive "happy place." Nevertheless, since More often used the Latin equivalent *nasquam* (nowhere) to describe his island, we can be assured that the negative option, or what Adorno calls the "ineffable part of the utopia," is the one More preferred (More, 1998: 3; Adorno, 1999: 11).

Why is this term important for Adorno? It seems to me, from reading his *Negative Dialectics,* that "utopia" is the social-political translation − or equivalent − of the theological negativity of the *Bilderverbot*, which also has "no place," i.e. no positive articulation. Through his determinate negation via profanation, Adorno recognized that the negativity of the *Bilderverbot* has been translated into the negativity of the social realm via materialism, thus preserving the negative principle originating in theology while negating its original religious form.[20] In his *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno attests to this migration of apophatic theology into materialist utopian thought, writing,

> The materialist longs to grasp the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. *Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology.* (Adorno, 1999: 207).[21]

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[20] In his article, *Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory,* Richard Wolin categorically cities Judaism and its "eschatological hopes for a better life" as one of two sources for Critical Theory's "utopian longings" and "messianic inspiration," remarking that, "if we try to imagine the work of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Hebert Marcuse stripped of this dimension of utopian longing, it seems divested of its *most fundamental impulse* (Wolin, 1990: 33). The second source was their "existential antipathy towards capitalist modernity" (Wolin, 1990: 34). However, following Löwenthal observation, Wolin goes on to remark that it may have been Habermas' insistence on integrating "Critical Theory with contemporary developments in social science and philosophy of language," i.e. his "linguistic turn," which suspended the Jewish "speculative-utopian tendencies" that animated the first generation of Critical Theorists (Wolin, 1990: 33-34).

[21] Emphasis added. In the original German, Adorno writes, "*Die materialistiche Sehnsucht, die Sache zu begreifen, will das Gegenteil: nur bilderlos wäre das volle Objekt zu denken. Solche Bilderlosigkeit konvergiert mit dem theologischen Bilderverbot. Der Materialismus säkularisierte es, indem er nicht gestattete, die Utopie positive auszumalen; das ist der Gehalt seiner Negativität. Mit der Theologie kommt er dort überein, wo er am materialistischesten ist. Seine Sehnsucht wäre die Auferstehung des Fleisches; dem Idealismus, dem Reich des absoluten Geistes, ist sie ganz fremd*" (Adorno, 2003b: 207).

Again, from this passage we can see Adorno's explicit connection of the negativity of the image ban with a materialist conception of utopia; neither utopia nor the divine can be "conceived" via positive articulations, only through their "absence of images" can they be "grasped." Thus, when historical materialism is pushed its extreme, when it is at its "most materialistic," it converges (*konvergiert*) – or "concurs" – with the theological ban on images, which *it brought* into secular terms (*säkularisierte*) via materialism (Adorno, 1999: 207; Adorno, 2003: 207). Thus, Moses and Marx converge in the migration of the negativity of the *Bilderverbot* into utopia. In his secular philosophy, rooted in Marx's already very Jewish imageless conception, "utopia" becomes that which is imageless and unarticulatable – escaping the dominating concept – and therefore incapable of being integrated within the already given. Because of its Jewish and Marxist antecedents, Richard Wolin refers to the *Bilderverbot* as being "Judeo-Marxian" (Wolin, 1990: 41).[22]

Additionally, according to Michael R. Ott, it was Ernst Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia* that reintroduced the notion back into "academic and political discourse amidst the first world war, as it combined a defiant philosophic, Messianic theological, and transcendental poetic proclamation of utopic hope in the midst of the latency of the revolutionary 'not-yet' that is located in the darkness of the present" (Ott, 2014: 43-44). Following Bloch's inherently critical notion of utopia, as that which is "not-yet," Adorno rejects the details of Thomas More's *positively articulated* vision of a utopian society, as he would any other positive utopian schema, as to

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[22] In fact, Wolin accuses Adorno of coming "close to violating" the "Judeo-Marxian Bilderverbot" by nearly concretely depicting utopia in his *Aesthetic Theory* (Wolin, 1990: 41). However, we should be clear, Adorno does not become a theologian or a devout Jew with this move; he remains fundamentally a Historical Materialist, but one that has preserved the negativity of the *Bilderverbot* within the conception of utopia. Thus, his philosophy is "other" than theology but also equally "other" than conventional Historical Materialism. It is, as Wolin describes it, "Judeo-Marxian."

picture utopia in positive terms returns it back to the world of the given.[23] He would later even

come to reject Bloch's attempt to picture utopia in a positive way. According to Stefan Müller-

Doohm, in 1964, in Baden-Baden, Adorno and Bloch met on a radio show in order to debate the

theme "Something Missing… On the Contradictions of Utopia Yearnings" (2005: 421). As both

were determined to prevent the "devaluation of utopian thinking," they both spoke to the need to

think beyond the appearances of the given (Müller-Doohm, 2005: 421). However, Adorno

resisted Bloch's later attempt to positively articulate a blueprint for utopian existence. Rather,

Adorno argued, for preservation of utopia in its full negativity, it was an imperative to *not make*

an image of it. He said, for "utopia is to be found essentially in the determinate negation… of

what is, since, by demonstrating that what is takes concrete form as something false, it always at

the same time points to what should exist" (Müller-Doohm, 2005: 421).[24]

As he is critical of the utopias of the past, Adorno is equally not optimistic about the

current state of utopian thinking; he does not think that an ideal society – or "perfect society" –

that has been promised by a variety of political groups, including the Marxists, is on the horizon

in the West, but rather that utopia remains blocked by its very potential, which appears "abstract

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[23] We should not underestimate the influence Bloch had on the much younger Adorno, especially on the topic of religion and what Bloch called his "concrete utopia." Adorno says that he read Bloch's work as if "written by Nostradamus himself" (Müller-Doohm, 2005: 37). On Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia,* he writes "I had the feeling that here philosophy had escaped the curse of being official… Bloch's was a philosophy that could hold its head high before the most advanced literature; a philosophy that was not calibrated to the abominable resignation of methodology… the book… seemed to me to be one prolonged rebellion against the renunciation within thought that extends even into its purely formal character" (Müller-Doohm, 2005: 37).

[24] We should make a distinction here between whether it is *possible* to construct an image of utopia and whether an image *should* be constructed. To my thinking, which seems to follow Adorno's, utopias can always be imagined positively, but they will, by nature of the concept of utopia itself – as being that which has "no-place," always be false. In this sense, one *should* not create a false-image of utopia precisely because a true-utopia, by definition, is impossible to articulate in positive language. Additionally, utopia as a positively pictured possibility comes to dominate the possible, thus closing the door on the possibility of a near-utopia. Nevertheless, the *notion* of utopia, as the conceptual *sum of all oughts,* remains a postulate by which the given can be interrogated based on the longing for that which *ought* to be. This logic follows the thought of apophatic theology's negative conception the Divine as well as Kant's notion of God, freedom and immortality as postulates of reason.

in midst of extant things" (Adorno, 1999: 57).[25] If such a historical fulfillment of utopia reveals itself as a real possibility, then at the present moment it could only be presented as a "promise" – yet to be fulfilled (Adorno, 2000: 251).[26] However, he does accept More's paradox of calling *an ideal place* a "no place." Why? The importance of the term resides in the sheer negativity of the concept itself; it cannot be integrated within the overall prevailing conditions of the already existing society precisely because it cannot be made identical to anything that already exists, but yet paradoxically points to what ought to exist. The inherent negativity of the term "utopia," like the *Bilderverbot,* banishes any attempt at positive articulation, the logic being that any place, society, or political philosophy, that claims itself to have established the utopian ideal, is by definition not a utopia, for by definition utopias have "no place" – no existence outside of the potential. Nevertheless, the utopian longing, which Judaism provided to the first generation of Critical Theorist, reaches out for that which cannot be made manifest (Löwenthal, 1987: 245-246).

Utopia as Ideology and Ideology Critique

Utopia can be conceived as the *sum of all oughts* expressed in the negative as that which is not, and by definition it cannot exist, as the "perfect image" always remains beyond the given,

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[25] In his *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno writes that "to want substance in cognition is to want a utopia. It is this consciousness of possibility that sticks to the concrete, the undisfigured. Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why is seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending – however negatively – to that which is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its color is caught" (Adorno, 1999: 56-57).

[26] In Adorno's discussion of "ideology and truth" in his essay entitled *Autonomy and Art,* he makes a remark about the utopian potential with the "non-existent." He says, "but what has no being none the less represents a promise, if it has the ability to appear. The relation between the existent and non-existent is the Utopian figure of art" (Adorno, 2006: 251). Habermas briefly echoes the "critical function" of Adorno's "promissory" nature of utopia, invoking Ernst Bloch's "walking tall" as a formulaic example of a utopian image that serves to orient social movements. See Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy & Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas.* Ed. Peter Dews. (New York: Verso, 1992), 144.

or if we can follow Adorno's "negative theology" and conceptualize utopia as the obverse of the present conditions, whose telos is reconciliation, then no society or state can claim to have actualized perfection or realized reconciliation; no political philosophy or individual can bring about the perfect society nor perfect reconciliation; no ruler can rule over a society without flaws, etc. (Wolin, 1990: 45-46). In other words, no idol (false absolute) can be made of a state, nation, political philosophy or leader. In this way, utopia serves as comprehensive ideology critique; in the name of the perfect – the superlative – it critiques the sullied, the untrue, the imperfect. In the name of reconciliation is interrogates the unreconciled conditions of capitalist modernity, which fails to reconcile "man with nature, existence and essence, thought and being… subject and object" (Wolin, 1990: 45-46). The conditions that can bring about such reconciliation, in Adorno's view, are utopian.

Consequently, those who remain faithful to the negativity of utopia, just like those who remain faithful to the negativity of the *Bilderverbot*, cannot be entirely assimilated or integrated into a given society, for they reject the ideology that attempts to integrate them in the name of the negative principle; this orientation strives beyond the existing coordinates of society for the better, the more ideal. The function of utopia as ideology critique is extremely important to Critical Theory precisely because authorities that do exorcise power over others in the name of the perfect society, whether it is the Third Reich, Soviet Union or liberal America, often legitimate their power and/or repression in the name of the perfect, the ideal and the unblemished, i.e. the racial, economic or political utopia. These authorities also translate religion into secular utopias; just as many monarchs and religious regimes have legitimated their domination through theological claims, such as the *divine right of kings*, modern secular regimes have often legitimated their authoritarianism through the claims to represent the secular utopian

future, which appears to the critical eye as another false idol. They present the ideal as the actual and the actual as the ideal. Such a false idol demands submission as if it were the Absolute or the totally actualized utopian society. Through the invocation of utopia, just as the *divine right of kings,* opposition is banished. By this logic, since their perfected society is without flaw, it is then undeserving of being opposed, just as in the case of the Absolute. Questioning the status quo is inherently about fixing a real or perceived problem, a flaw, an imperfection, or a broken, unfair and unjust system, which is in service to the quest to bring forth a better or more ideal society. However, from the perspective of an official ideology, if the society is already "perfected," in other words the society is already a "utopia," then there is no need for fixing such imaginary problems, for the entity is seemingly without flaw (or contains within itself mechanisms by which all "perceived" flaws autocorrect), thus strengthening the idea of an already realized utopia. In this sense, "utopia" becomes a perverse tool of authoritarian ideology as opposed to ideology critique – it is functionalized to present the status quo as being the ideal and having the authority of the Absolute, thus rendering all alternatives as faulty and/or illegitimately rebellious.[27]

The utopian critique of Adorno and the Frankfurt School de-legitimate any claims that "utopia" is, or was, actually existing or can be achieved, as it was often portrayed by nationalist regimes in the first half of the 20th century. Through their reclamation of utopia from these false ideologies, they have liberated utopia from the faux-utopians, thus turning the concept against those who would functionalize it for their own social-political purposes. From this perspective, the concept of utopia doesn't legitimate the already existing societies, but rather remains the

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[27] Adorno levels a similar critique at certain forms of art, including Jazz. He claims that Jazz presents itself as a democratic and liberational form of music, a sanctuary from the horrifying schemas of mass culture, while merely reflecting the "world as it is." In other words, it serves as an affirmative tool of the status quo's prevailing ideology. Thus it suppresses the utopian impulse within music. He writes, "instead of utopia becoming reality it disappears from the picture" (Adorno, 2006: 279).

grand inquisitor of all societies that would attempt to make identical their society or political-economic system with the perfect image.[28] Thus utopia, like the unarticulatable nature of the imageless God, cannot be made identical with anything that exists, but rather always stands clearly differentiated from the non-utopian object. To be sure, that is why Adorno writes in his *Negative Dialectics* that "materialism *brought that* [theological] *ban into secular form* by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity" (Adorno, 1999: 207).[29] To restate, Adorno makes clear here that materialism has translated ("brought... into secular form) via determinate negation the *Bilderverbot's* theological negativity into the negativity of utopia, which like the Divine, cannot be "positively pictured," and thus resists all attempts to make it identical with any society, state or political entity, i.e. a false idol, a false positive articulation (Adorno, 1999: 207).

The absence of images of the Divine and the ideal society also limits the project of Critical Theory, which itself will not offer any comprehensive "blueprints" for a better and more reconciled future society beyond articulating generic impulses and desires for happiness and the end of suffering and tragedy. In his *Eclipse of Reason,* Horkheimer writes of philosophy's inability to offer such a blueprint. He writes,

> Philosophy is neither a tool nor a blueprint. It can only foreshadow the path of progress as it is marked out by logical and factual necessities; in doing so it can anticipate the reaction of horror and resistance that will be evoked by the triumphal march of modern man (Horkheimer, 2004: 112).[30]

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[28] In addition, Adorno says that utopia "pass[es] judgment on the species" of man (Adorno, 2006: 327).
[29] Emphasis added.
[30] The idea that critical philosophy can offer no blueprint for a future reconciled society can also be found in Marx's 1843 letter, *For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,* wherein he states that it experiences the stress of the battle but plants no dogmatic flag. He states that through revolutionary class struggle we "find the new world only through criticism of the old" (Marx & Engels, 1978: 13). Some scholars, including Dominic Erdozain, attribute the similarity between the negativity of Judaism and Marx's dialectical materialism to be rooted in Marx's own familiarity with Judaism and/or appropriation of Judaism's utopia-Messianism. See Dominic Erdozain, *The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 221-261. Additionally, while discussing the problem of socialism and imageless utopia, Habermas stated, "utopias are often depicted forms of life. In other words, they are outlines of totalities. As such, they cannot be theoretically retrieved. I

A design for such a reconciled society is never premanufactured; therefore, how the world arrives at such a utopian realization remains without expression. As Horkheimer writes, philosophy "holds a mirror up to the world" but shows no way to a new heaven (Horkheimer, 1978: 148). In this sense, it offers no systematic program to overcome the inherent antagonisms within the already existing society, but rather, as Martin Jay as written, remains the "gadfly of other systems," expressing itself only through the negative (Jay, 1996: 41). Their aversions to closed systems, especially in the realm of the social-political, stems from the reality that advocates of these systems present their thought as totalizing solutions to the problems of society, i.e. they prey on the longing for the utopian promise – that the world of suffering comes to an end – and make their own promise to deliver such a society. Because of its totalizing coordinates, the closed system itself, whether it is secular or religious, becomes a legitimation for the oppression, suppression or murder of those who oppose and resist the system, those who cannot conform to the system, and those whose identity cannot be reconciled with the system: the non-identical (Adorno, 1999: 5; Fromm, 1981: 41-57). In light of the failure and/or destructiveness of modern utopias, Adorno wrote in his *Negative Dialectics,* "…the destruction of nonidentity is ideologically lurking. Absolute negativity is in plain sight and has ceased to surprise anyone" (Adorno, 1999: 362).

According to Adorno's February 1965 letter to Horkheimer, Critical Theory's form of materialism itself is an embodiment of the negative principle founds both within the *Bilderverbot*

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do not believe there are any theoretically-based utopias. Whenever one portrays totalities, whole forms of life, whole life-histories, whole areas of life in their concretion, and suggests that these can be directly politically realized, the result can easily be the kind of consequences which our neo-conservative friends have indicated. This is why, in the socialist tradition, a certain abstinence has been practiced with regard to the depiction of concrete forms of life. One should only speak of socialism in the sense of an attempt, in the historical conditions in which one finds oneself, to indicate the necessary conditions which would have to be fulfilled in order for emancipated life-forms to emerge – whatever they may be. Totalities only appear in the plural, and this pluralism cannot be anticipated in theory" (Habermas, 1992: 145).

and the concept of utopia. Adorno writes, "the materialism that you developed in the great essays in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* is not positive; it embodies no established scientific method, scarcely even philosophy – if it had been positive, it would succumb to the negative judgment on totalizing, self-gratifying thought that is not the least of the motive forces behind materialism itself" (Adorno in Claussen, 2008: 359-360). Through his interdisciplinary approach and his commitment to negative thought – that refuses to construct positive philosophical and sociological edifies – Horkheimer, according to Adorno, "emancipated materialism from the realm of the apocryphal, the inferior, which it kept lapsing into," while at the same time he attacked "idealist and positivist tendencies, as well as materialist dogmatism" (Adorno in Claussen, 2008: 360). In general, according to Jacob Klapwijk, critical theorists "are reluctant to map out the future of humankind and society" not only because of the "practical problems" that arise, but because the "more the realistic such a utopia… the more deceptive they are" (Klapwijk, 2010: 46). Following Adorno's critique of Marcuse's designs for a future society, which he spelled out in his book *Eros and Civilization,* Klapwijk writes, the more you "visualize humans and their future potential on the basis of the current circumstances and prevailing concepts," the more you identify, and consequently create a past-determined conceptual prison, which "sabotages" the potential for a future society to develop its own ways of overcoming entrenched antagonisms that are unforeseeable to previous analyses (Klapwijk, 2010: 46). In light of the past's potential to unjustly impose itself on the future, Horkheimer and Adorno's "Critical Theory" constructs no false absolutes, no false promises of a utopian future, but rather continues to deconstruct the ideologies that do promise to actualize the longing for a future reconciled society, and exposes the lies and untruths they propagate. Furthermore, it undermines the falseness of philosophies that build imposing and totalizing systems into which the non-

220

identical is forced to assimilate and integrate. In this sense, Critical Theory refuses to adjust to the prevailing conditions of the world and the ideologies that justify it, all in the name of the un-nameable, the unimaginable, the negative.

In the end, utopia, like *Bilderverbot,* refuses to allow the Truth to be articulated in positive form. Only through the negative, that which "is not," or what in theology is called *via negativa,* or negative theology, can we express that which Truth is theologically and/or in utopian way. In other words, as God is not…, so utopia is not…. The negativity of the *Bilderverbot* has been translated by Critical Theory's form of materialism into the negative concept of utopia; the purely theological has been made social-political through the profanation of apophatic theology into critical social theory, and as such the once theological critique of the cataphatic collapse of divinity with temporality becomes a form of social-political ideology critique.

Although utopia cannot be positively articulated lest it fall into a definitional contradiction, that dynamic nevertheless does not reveal the impulse that gives birth to the longing for utopia: the longing for the absence of the horror and terror of nature and history that dominates the finite individual. Such a longing will be articulated elsewhere and in other ways, both religious and secular: the "Kingdom of God" or even the "Classless Society."

Bilderverbot and the Atheist as True Believer

In the closing pages of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics,* he once again returns to the theme of the *Bilderverbot,* this time giving expression to its development within the "present state." Adorno begins with a critique of the spiritualization of salvational eschatology. He observes that

221

the once substantive hope for a real and tangible heaven and hell – both of which have been now drained of their physicality and are now "simple archaicisms" – have relegated the idea of "immortality to one of spirits, lending it a spectral and unreal character that mocks its own concept" (Adorno, 1999: 401). He continues,

> Christian dogmatics, in which the souls were conceived as awakening simultaneously with the resurrection of the flesh, was metaphysically more consistent – more enlightened, if you will – than speculative metaphysics, just as hope means a physical resurrection and feels defrauded of the best part of its spiritualization. With that, however, the imposition of metaphysical speculation wax intolerably. Cognition weighs heavily in the scale of absolute mortality – something speculation cannot bear, something that makes it a matter of absolute indifference to itself (Adorno, 1999: 401).

The collapse of this concrete longing for, and expectation of, a real and tangible other existence in favor of a mere spiritualized eschatological consolation, which is already a weak compromise with modern epistemology and metaphysics, has had an export upon the nature of the *Bilderverbot* in modern society. Adorno leads his reader to the apex of that paradoxical development: atheism as true belief. He writes,

> The idea of truth is supreme among the metaphysical ideas, and this is where it takes us. It is why one who believes in God cannot believe in God, why the possibility of the divine name is maintained, rather, by him who does not believe. Once upon a time the image ban extended to pronouncing the name; now the ban itself has in that form come to evoke suspicions of superstition. The ban has been exacerbated: the mere thought of hope is a transgression against it, an act of working against it (Adorno, 1999: 401-402).

I read Adorno's argument to mean that the "superstitious" nature of the image ban, that somehow that Divine wrath will be invoked if the Divine is positively depicted – or named – has become passé due to the modern demythologization process, and has thus been rendered mere superstition. It is seen as just as much myth as the sordid tales of the Greek pantheon. Although the ban, in its present "form" has become "exacerbated," as Adorno claims, it nevertheless remains true. But "hope," as the longing to negate what is the case, i.e. the horror, terror and

222

suffering produced by the antagonisms within modern society, Golgotha history – the slaughterbench of history, and now Auschwitz and Hiroshima, force thinking to picture an exit door leading to something opposed to that reality, which once came in the form of "heaven and hell," but now has to be pictured otherwise if it is to be real and tangible (Adorno, 1999: 401).[31] Dialectically the forcefulness of this barbaric reality, which impinges upon the individual at every moment, produces the conditions for the depiction of a reality in opposition to the given, thus leading the individual to "transgress" the ban, or even "work against it" (Adorno, 1999: 402).

He ends this line of thought writing,

Thus deeply embedded is the history of metaphysical truth – of the truth that vainly denies history, which is progressive demythologization. Yet demythologization devours itself, as the mythological gods like to devour their children. Leaving behind nothing but what merely is, demythologization recoils into the mythus; for the mythus is nothing else than the closed system of immanence, of that which is. This contradiction is what metaphysic has now coalesced into. To a thinking that tries to remove the contradiction, untruth threatens here and there (Adorno, 1999: 402).

For Adorno, demythologization has left behind "nothing but what merely is." There is no alternative, no concrete heaven or hell, no transcendental reality, no God. Although demythologization, as an Enlightenment project, had aimed at "liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters," it nevertheless delivered them to a "closed system of immanence," which blocks any attempt at metaphysics beyond what is the case (Adorno, 1999: 402; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 1). The "closed system of immanence" itself becomes "sacred" and totalizing "story" (mythos). To be an enlightened believer therefore is to remain silent (*favete linguis*) on God, i.e. to be an atheist, for only the atheist, in his "nonbelief," both

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[31] "Hope," as understood by Eduardo Mendieta's reading of the Frankfurt School, means "the yearning after the possibility of that which would totally transform the present." It "renders reality incomplete and inconclusive" and it "is the guarantee of truth precisely because hope unmasks the givenness of reality." "Truth is beyond the now. Hence, 'the whole is the untrue'" (Mendieta in Habermas, 2002: 10).

upholds the ban on divine images and simultaneously longs for the utopian society that once was envisioned as a concrete heaven and hell, but now can no longer be depicted.[32]

Horkheimer and the Longing for the Totally Other

As was stated before, there is a considerable amount of overlap between Adorno and Horkheimer's critical analysis of society, capitalism, war, religion and theology, etc. Having co-authored many books and articles, they often came to the same or very similar conclusions over the course of their long friendship. In a letter addressed to Adorno in September of 1968, Horkheimer, commenting on Adorno's corpus of work, even wrote, "everyone who is seriously interested in my own work knows that it is permeated by your expertise" (Horkheimer, 1996: 349). Additionally, Horkheimer claims as much in the preface to his book *Eclipse of Reason*, wherein he writes of Adorno that "it would be difficult to say which of the ideas originated in his mind and which in my own; our philosophy is one" (Horkheimer, 2004: vi). There is no doubt that Adorno would have agreed with Horkheimer's assessment. However, whereas Adorno often invokes the *Bilderverbot* either by its German name or simply by referring to it as the "image ban," Horkheimer takes his preservation of religious semantics and semiotics in a slightly different way. He often invokes the "longing for the totally Other" (*Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*) as a way of expressing the inexpressible relationship between the individual and otherness, something Adorno rarely did unless when commenting on Horkheimer. Yet, like Adorno's use of the *Bilderverbot,* Horkheimer's invocation of the "totally Other" is another way

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[32] According to Stefan Müller-Doohm, "all utopias were at heart a desire for eternal life, and thus arise from the provocation of death" (2005: 481). He quotes Adorno's remark on death and utopia, "Where the threshold of death is not implied in the idea, there really is no utopia" (2005: 481). "This is why," according to Müller-Doohm, "utopia cannot be depicted; indeed, for its own sake we must not form an image of it" (2005: 481).

of speaking of an absolute that cannot be articulated in finite or positive language, which aligns Horkheimer with the Decalogue's command not to create a false image of the divine.[33] Despite the differences, Horkheimer's philosophy of religion is just as rooted in *apophatic* theology as Adorno's, maybe even more so, as he is often times more willing to opening invoke religion and religious concepts than his collaborators – using their semantic output to animate his own thoughts on reason, society, capitalism, positivism, etc. In the end, my argument for Horkheimer is the same as it is for Adorno: there is a deep vein of theology that serves as a *co-determining* force within his work.

What is Religion?

Between 1957 and 1958, Horkheimer ruminated over a definition of religion that would take account of its dialectical nature. Understanding it to be an internally contradictive phenomenon, wherein it contains inherent and mutually exclusive tensions, having both affirmative and its resistant qualities, he tried to articulate both sides, writing,

> What is religion in the good sense? To sustain, not to let reality stifle, the impulse for change, the desire that the spell be broken, that things take the right turn. We have religion where life down to its every gesture is marked by this resolve. What is religion in the bad sense? It is this same impulse but in its perverted form, as affirmation, prophecy, that gilds reality in the very act of castigating it. It is the lie that some earthly or heavenly future gives evil, suffering, horror, a meaning. The lie does not need the cross, it already lives in the ontological concept of transcendence. Where the impulse is honest, it needs no apology. No reason for it can be advanced (Horkheimer, 1978: 163).

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[33] The Latin phrase "*totaliter aliter*" (totally other) derives from a medieval narrative wherein two monks imagine what the afterlife in paradise would look like. After the death of one of the monks, he returned to the dream of the other stating that life beyond this world was "*totaliter aliter*," totally different from what they imagined. In accordance with the *Bilderverbot*, both the German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann and the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth elevated the concept beyond the realm of eschatology and into the realm of theology. For them, as it would be for the Jewish Horkheimer, it was more appropriate to say "*Deus totaliter aliter*," "*God* is totally other." See Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1987; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics.* London, T & T Clark, 1994.

In this short thesis, Horkheimer attempts to highlight the reason why religion needs to be rescued from itself, from its own falsity, its own positivity, as religion in the bourgeois age threatens to collapse into a monopoly of the bad. Against the predecessors who only saw religion as something harmful in the history of man, or a mere epiphenomenon of man's consciousness or social conditions, Horkheimer argues that "good religion" attempts to "sustain… the impulse for change" and to "not… let reality stifle" that impulse. Thus, religion's aetiology was not the primary issue. Rather the understanding that religion *in the good sense* sustains the "desire that the spell be broken" and that "things take a right turn," was necessary to comprehend if religion was to be determinately negated (Horkheimer, 1978: 163). Thus, this "impulse" or "desire" that Horkheimer invokes is spelled out more concretely when he writes that it is "the longing for the other compared to which this world showed itself as the evil it was" (Horkheimer, 1978: 184). These series of statements suggest that there is an element within religion that can contribute to man's overcoming of his history of suffering, war, violence, misery, etc., that somehow religion maintains an unfulfilled desire – even within the face of history which overwhelms the believer with its totality of ugliness, that religion somehow refuses to acquiesce to the totality of ugliness, and reluctantly continues to point to an alternative. This impulse for change is preserved within hope, desire, and the longing for something other than what is. In other words, the *negativity* of religion – its *adversus mundum* nature – is the basis for what Horkheimer calls "good religion." Yet this side of its nature is not the full telling of the story.

On the other hand, there is "bad religion," which, according to Horkheimer, shares in the same impulse for change, but rather transforms that impulse into an affirmation of the world-as-it-is by imbuing meaning into "evil, suffering," and "horror," which paradoxically affirms the status quo even when it "castigates it" (Horkheimer, 1978: 163). Horkheimer suggests that "bad

religion" creates an illusion of an alternative while simultaneously fortifying the status quo. In other words, it betrays the impulse for change in the name of the impulse for change, and it promises transcendence while affirming the immanent.[34] As such, "bad religion" is a "lie," as it functionalizes the honest yet insatiate impulse for change against the true fulfillment of that very "honest" impulse for change. In the bad sense, religion is mere false consciousness that ensnares the non-conformist into the already existing society. It is hypocrisy, false comfort and affirmation. In the good sense, it aspires to real liberation and grants no retreat in the face of opposition.

In his *Notizen*, which served as a *flaschenpost,* Horkheimer also gives us another angle by which we can understand religion as a dialectical phenomenon.[35] Casting it in the language of "positive" and "negative aspects" of religion, he writes,

> In its symbols, religion places an apparatus at the disposal of tortured men through which they express their suffering and their hope. This is one of its most important functions. A respectable psychology of religion would have to distinguish between its positive and negative aspects, it would have to separate proper human feelings and ideas from an ideological form which falsifies them but which is also partly their product (Horkheimer, 1978: 58).

He continues this line of thought with a critique of those who would *abstractly negate* religion as if it were singularly determined by its "negative aspect," especially those who argue that religion serves as a way of subduing the impulse for change and falsely reconciling the alienated individual to his alienated conditions, as one has in certain readings of Marx. This process of

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[34] Horkheimer writes that religion, Christianity in particular, has for the most part lost its "progressive element," and now serves the function of integrating heterodox and/or non-conforming entities and individuals into the "monopolistic reality," for which it has to "compete with fascist and nationalist ideologies which do that job equally well, or better" (Horkheimer, 1978: 169). Nevertheless, this form of Christianity, which is distorted by the demands of "monopolistic capitalism," still contains within itself the germ of resistance that must be rescued.

[35] First articulated by Adorno, according to Rudolf J. Siebert, such *flaschenpost* are a kind of "letter in a bottle" sent to sea by an individual in distress or adrift (Ott, 2001: 19). They are meant to be brief but revelatory critiques of bourgeois society and the distortions it imposes on humanity. Additionally, Leo Löwenthal wrote that "the symbol of the message in a bottle and its esoteric message arose, after all, out of the feeling that one could contribute to change, that the message would get through to the right people, that possibilities would once again arise" (Löwenthal, 1987: 241).

abstract negation discards what he calls a "propulsive concept" that is buried deep within religion, because it, in a blind fashion, abstractly negates all that is good in addition to all that is bad. Therefore, such a comprehensive negation should be opposed on the basis that the religious "propulsive concept" has an ability to "unmask" ideology; it can serve as a powerful "criterion to judge the powers that be." Horkheimer writes,

> Historically, the religious machinery did not always serve to distract from earthly practice; in part, it itself developed the energies which today unmask these distractions. The idea of a justice which is absolutely impartial toward the things of this world is contained in the belief in the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment. If those ideas were to be discarded along with the myth, mankind would be deprived of a propulsive concept which, though certainly not as a belief, might today be applied as a criterion to judge the powers that be, and the church in particular (Horkheimer, 1978: 58).

Horkheimer clearly agrees with a robust critique of religion, especially when it reveals religion as "mere ideology." In other words, a dialectical critique of religion should demonstrate what the hollow bourgeois critique of religion refuses to admit; it should disclose that the genuine impulses within religion, for instance the "dissatisfaction with the order on earth," can be and are translated into a "different form," i.e. the life of today's secular "revolutionary" (Horkheimer, 1978: 58). Such a dialectical critique demonstrates that the "propulsive concept" is a constitutional element within religion, and furthermore can migrate from the depth of the religion to secular theory and praxis, thus demonstrating that an abstract negation of the religion – or a "bourgeois negation" of religion – goes too far; it deprives the modern man access to the emancipatory and liberational potentials within prophetic religion which can, and should, aid in the liberation of all.[36]

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[36] Horkheimer argues that the bourgeois critique of religion is abstract in nature precisely because the propulsive element within religion would be bad for profits. If religion, especially Christianity, cannot be entirely negated in favor of the "economic motive," then it must be transfigured into ideology: "These days," Horkheimer writes, "Christianity is not primarily used as a religion but as a crude transfiguration of existing conditions" (Horkheimer, 1978: 59).

In light of Horkheimer's duel condemnation and positive evaluation of religion, it becomes clear that he cannot follow his predecessors Feuerbach, Marx, Lenin, Freud and Nietzsche into an *abstract negation* of religion, as it would forfeit the "good religion" and the "propulsive concept" that sustains the impulse for change. Rather, Horkheimer wants to rescue those liberational and emancipatory elements within "good religion" that can, and do, contribute to freedom *within* history. Like Adorno, he argues, on a *broad level,* for a *determinate negation* of religion, one that would rescue the non-integrative and non-conforming elements (*adversus mundum*) and negate the positive and affirmative (*pro mundum*) element in religion, so that those positive/affirmative elements can no longer serve to slow down, arrest or cancel the drive for emancipatory change, and the negative elements can contribute to a *liberationem mundum* (world liberation).

If the claim that Horkheimer translates certain religious semantics and semiotics into Critical Theory is true, we must ask what *specific* elements are to be rescued and what are they once they are translated into post-metaphysical thought? In other words, what particular aspects of "good religion" migrate from their traditional religious form into their secular form in Critical Theory?

On God and the Bilderverbot

In Horkheimer's *Notizen,* between 1950 and 1955, he ruminates on the relation between God and the conditions of a godless time and its export to philosophy. He writes,

> "If there is no God, I need take nothing seriously," the theologian argues. The horror I commit, the suffering I do nothing to stop will, once they have occurred, survive only in the remembering human consciousness and die with it. To say that they continue to be true after that is meaningless. They no longer exist, they are

229

no longer true: the two are the same. Unless they be preserved – in God. Can one admit this and still lead a godless life? That is the question philosophy raises (Horkheimer, 1978: 120).[37]

In this short paragraph, Horkheimer brings up numerous moral dilemmas that have plagued a society post-death of god: the problem of moral relativity, the drift into meaninglessness, the inherent limitations of earthly justice, and the acquiescence to the immanent. The logic is as follows: if there is no divine being, no guarantor of ultimate justice, then there is no remembrance of the suffering of the innocent and finite individual beyond the death of the consciousness that currently remembers. And if there is no ultimate justice, then there is no real justice, for there is very little justice in the given world. In other words, the unjust and the unnecessary suffering imposed on individuals, in every micrological moment, are forgotten when those who briefly remember are no longer living to remember, consequently rendering their suffering meaningless and forgotten. In this sense, the injustice that once stood triumphantly in a moment of history is now augmented to the level of metaphysical reality. If there is no God, nothing transcendent of the given, then such injustice has no real punishment, and if there is no ultimate reckoning, no judgment day, then the murderer *shall ultimately triumph over the innocent victim*. Reality as pervasive horror and terror is confirmed within the atheistic condition. Sensing this, Horkheimer asks, "can one admit this and still lead a godless life" (Horkheimer, 1978: 120). How else can one resist this fall into Schopenhauerian metaphysical pessimism, absolute meaninglessness and relentless despair in the face of barbaric history than to remain open to the idea of God: the only rescue for the hope that the murderer will not *ultimately* triumph over the innocent victim? But how can one return to a God without a substantive return

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[37] Habermas specifically pointed out this passage as being evident of the late Horkheimer's belief that religion was the only agency that "would permit distinguishing between truth and falsity, morality and immorality," if "it could only command assent." Furthermore, according to Habermas, Horkheimer believed that religion "alone could still grant life a meaning that transcends mere self-preservation" (Habermas in Benhabib et al, 1993: 60). Theology, not "mere philosophy" or even "negative dialectics," was the only "alternative to desolate positivism" (Ibid., pg. 60).

to religion, or even a positive articulation of the Divine as the *guarantor of justice*? To do so would seem to contradict everything that Horkheimer and Adorno have argued against: a false return to religion based on the *need* for consolation in the face of history (Adorno, 1998: 137; Horkheimer, 1978: 1977).[38]

Although the immensity of history as barbarity tempts many to assign positive qualities to the divine, Horkheimer remains faithful to the *Bilderverbot;* he recalcitrantly refuses to assign any such qualities to the divine, even ones that would give comfort to the innocent victims. In a 1970 interview entitled *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen: Ein Interview mit Kommentar von Helmut Gumnior,* he was asked the following question,

> …you spoke of the term the infinite one, which preserves the consciousness of finalness. Some years ago you wrote in an essay on Schopenhauer, "without thoughts of the truth and thus to what guarantees it, no knowledge is around of its opposite, which is the abandonment of humans. For this reason true philosophy is critical and pessimistic. Without mourning, there is no happiness. Does that mean that because we know that we are finite natures – that we must die, we know also that there is an infinite, that God exists? (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970).[39]

Horkheimer replied,

> No, this cannot be said. We cannot prove the existence of God. The consciousness of our abandonment, our finiteness, is not proof for the existence of God, but it can bring out only *hope that there is a positive absolute*. In view of the suffering in this world, in view of injustice, it is nevertheless impossible to believe in the dogma of the existence of an all-powerful and all-good-natured God. Expressly said, the knowledge around the abandonment of humans is *only possible by the thought of God*, but not by the absolute certainty of God (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970).[40]

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[38] In the section entitled "The Truth of Religion," Horkheimer writes, "Someone wrote about Tolstoi that he became devout when he was too old to enjoy life. But religion as consolation means more than might occur to a minister. It is not the truth of religion that dawns on the person in need, it is the need that constitutes its truth, not only individual, but social need as well" (Horkheimer, 1978: 177). Additionally, Adorno spells out why individual and social needs drive people into the comforting arms of religion in his essay *Reason and Revelation.*

[39] This interview has not been published in English; therefore, the above translation is my own.

[40] Emphasis added.

Rather, Horkheimer, in his brief essay *Thoughts on Religion,* remembers what the "concept of God" once meant for the believers before it was coopted by bourgeois society. Horkheimer claims that,

> The concept of God was for a long time the place where the idea was kept alive that there are other norms besides those to which nature and society give expression in their operation. Dissatisfaction with earthly destiny is the strongest motive for acceptance of a transcendental being. If justice resides with God, then it is not to be found in the same measure in the world. Religion is the record of the wishes, desires, and accusations of countless generations (Horkheimer, 2002: 129).

If we look at these two passages, we can identify two specific issues. First, that God's existence cannot be "proven" by any means available to humans; because of their epistemological limitations, neither reason, science, intuition, or mystical experience can provide unequivocal and/or unconditional proof of a divine being – nor can it prove the non-existence of a divine being. Secondly, God nevertheless remains an unprovable "thought" that expresses mankind's "earthly dissatisfaction," his utopian longings. The concept of God maintains the idea that the given is not all there is, that there is, or could be, something other than the horror and terror of nature and history. In other words, the concept of God is the crystallization of earthy desires for an alternative – another way-of-being that cancels "human suffering" and "injustice" and is replaced by what *ought* to be. As long as that "concept of God" remained, the possibility of another way-of-existence maintained itself as a "propulsive concept" which served not only as motivation for earthly change, but also as a forceful criterion against the status quo. As long as God conserved the *adversus mundum* nature of "earthly dissatisfaction," God was on the side of the victims of the given dominating order. However, once the concept of God was reconciled with the "events in the world," the concept lost it oppositional nature and became *affirmative* (Horkheimer, 2002: 129). This affirmative God, this god expressed in the positive, having been

232

made identical with the world order, became an idol – a *false absolute*. Horkheimer wished to refrain from this false affirmation of God and man's world order by maintaining the *Bilderverbot,* both theologically and sociologically. This is evidenced in his 1969 letter to Heinz Friedrich of Munich, in which he writes, "It's true that, according to Critical Theory, whatever is purely good, that is, the absolute positive, can't be represented. On the other hand, we've always explained that what is bad, what is to be changed and improved, can be described in the most diverse fields" (Horkheimer, 2007: 362).

As one reads Horkheimer's theological discussions, it becomes apparent that he holds true to the 2nd and 3rd Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue, and shares with Adorno the desire that it be expanded beyond its original intent: from the theological to the social, political, economic and cultural spheres of life. But yet there always seems to be something nagging Horkheimer, some desire that the negativity of the Bilderverbot itself be expressed through language beyond simply invoking the "image ban," which, for Horkheimer, doesn't seem to adequately express the humanistic concern of the ban itself – the phrase itself somehow misses the *corporal* point: the brutish reality of human suffering and the unfulfilled longing to transcend it. This has to be expressed in something other than the traditional phrase "image ban" while at the same time remaining faithful to the negativity of the image ban.

God and the idea of Truth

In his essay *Theism and Atheism,* Horkheimer makes a metaphysical statement about the nature of Truth without the existence of God. He writes, "truth – eternal truth outlasting human error – cannot as such be separated from theism. The only alternative is positivism, with which

233

the latest theology is in accord irrespective of contradictions" (Horkheimer, 1974: 47). Here Horkheimer seems to follow Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism, which follows his theodicy, that life is without absolute truth if life is without an absolute guarantor of Truth. Without such an absolute, by which all other absolute truths are made absolute through their concordance with the absolutivity of the divine, including the goodness of altruism, selflessness and solidarity, all knowledge and morality becomes relative, and in many cases the end result of mere taste, preference and capricious decision making. In this godless situation, positivism, which limits itself to the measurement of the mere given, is for Horkheimer the "only alternative" (Horkheimer, 1974: 47). A situation like this hands over the suffering of all finite beings to hopelessness – there is nothing outside of the given by which they can long for, by which they can appeal for meaning. As Horkheimer writes, "without God one will try in vain to preserve absolute meaning" (Horkheimer, 1974: 47). "The death of God" he emphatically states, "is also the death of eternal truth" (Horkheimer, 1974: 48). In this nihilistic godlessness, there is no real meaning and there is no absolute Truth, only mere correspondent correctness and subjectivity. Although Nietzsche praised this nihilistic condition, and thought it a necessary development for a world "beyond good and evil," Horkheimer remains with Schopenhauer in his pessimism, and sees religious attempts to overcome this situation as futile and/or hopelessly "abstract" (Horkheimer, 1974: 48). Nevertheless, he does see some possibility in rescuing both meaning and truth through some form of translation of the religious impulse: the longing for the "something other than the world, something over which the fixed rules of nature… have no dominion" (Horkheimer, 1974: 50). Or, as Habermas has written, Horkheimer thought the "critical task of philosophy consisted essentially in salvaging the truth of religion in the spirit of

234

the Enlightenment" (Habermas, 2002: 95-96). In this salvaging of religion one may find one way of both rescuing truth and resisting a metaphysical collapse into the world-as-it-is.

Faith Idea

In a number of works, Horkheimer attests to his deep admiration for the Protestant Theologian Paul Tillich, whom together they approved of Adorno's 1931 Habilitation on Kierkegaard, which was rooted in a "theologically inspired form of materialism."[41] Horkheimer understood Tillich's similar attempt to remain faithful to the *Bilderverbot* in his voluminous works, including his writings on socialism (Horkheimer, 2007: 367-368; Wiggershaus, 1994: 91)*.* But like Horkheimer, Tillich was also nagged by the sheer negativity of the absolutivity of the image ban and sought to develop ways in which the divine could be expressed without creating a false absolute. For Tillich, thinking directly about what God *is* was problematic – such a thing was not only rightly condemned by the 2nd and 3rd Commandment of the Decalogue, but after Kant's philosophy of religion demonstrated reason's inability to penetrate the *thing-in-itself*, such positive expressions were no longer even possible. Moses and Kant seemed to be in agreement, at least theologically.[42] Besides *via negativa,* the only possible way to speak of the

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[41] According to the prominent historian of the Frankfurt School, Rolf Wiggershaus, Paul Tillich's arrival as chair of the philosophy department in Frankfurt, replacing Max Scheler, was an opportune time for Adorno to bring the "theologically inspired materialism of his friends [particularly Benjamin and Kracauer] to bear, not just on music, but on philosophy as well, and to make the academic world accessible to it" (Wiggershaus, 1994: 91). Wiggershaus explains that Adorno's work attempted to "'complete' Kierkegaard's philosophy, which he classified as a late form of Idealism, within the outlines of a materialist and theological theory" (Wiggershaus, 1994: 91-93).

[42] By demonstrating the inability to reason to penetrate the *thing-in-itself*, Kant limits the ability of the theologians to engage in *cataphatic* theology. In other words, the *Bilderverbot* of the Jewish Decalogue is strengthened by Kant's philosophy – no conceptual and/or linguistic image, rooted in reason, can grasp the divine. In this sense, it is purely an epistemological ban on imaging the divine, not a religious one.

Divine was *indirectly*, through ideograms and symbols (Tillich, 1965).[43] To Tillich's symbolic

theology, Horkheimer writes in his 1971 letter to Renate Albrecht, that, "I completely agree. This

demand corresponds to a commandment that is to be unconditionally kept: Thou shalt make no

image of God" (Horkheimer, 2007: 368). Yet, however much he agrees Tillich's attempt to

remain true to the *Bilderverbot* by way of speaking of the Divine without speaking directly of the

Divine, he nevertheless rejected it as being insufficient because when taken to its logical

conclusion, it lacks any the determinacy that would provide meaning. He writes, "I can only

speak symbolically when I know what the symbol stands for. A symbol about which one has no

notion of what it symbolizes lacks what is most important, mainly meaning" (Horkheimer, 2007:

368). In his *Critique of Instrumental Reason,* Horkheimer returns to his critique of Tillich's

"liberal outlook," his theological symbolism, stating,

> What is a symbol whose symbolic meaning no one knows? What is a flag, if it
> may signify a country or perhaps something entirely different – but a piece of
> cloth and a pole? If symbolic content can be the object of thought, then it can be
> expressed; otherwise a symbol becomes a sign of everything and therefore of
> nothing. Symbolic interpretation is an escape route which the despairing take
> without admitting their despair to themselves (Horkheimer, 1974: 154).[44]

In other words, Tillich's symbols are signifiers that signify the unknown – or that which cannot

be signified due to its complete lack of positive determinacy. Any symbolic signifiers of the

Divine are empty and meaningless because it attempts to grasp – albeit indirectly – that which

escapes all symbolic representation. If the symbol cannot grasp the *thing-in-itself*, it is then

grasping something other than what was meant to be signified. It therefore fails at its primary

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[43]   In addition to "ideograms and symbols," I would also include poetry, especially mystic poetry, as it attempts to
indicate the divine without direct reference to the divine. It too is aware of language's inability to articulate that
which cannot be articulated, thus is retreats to mystic symbolism to convey a reality *close to* what is thought of as
the reality of the divine. This phenomenon can be found in all three Abrahamic faiths.

[44] On the duel attempts to rescue God from modernity, Horkheimer states "the liberal outlook which inclines to
symbolic interpretation as a way of rescuing the idea of eternal truth (an idea which science has long since dispensed
with) is opposed by the conservative outlook which clings to the old and traditional in the most literal fashion
(Horkheimer, 1974: 155).

task – to speak in such a way about God that one can at least grasp a semblance of meaning without imposing a false conception upon the divine. If there is no way to symbolize that which defies all symbolism, then the symbols symbolize nothing but false positives, and therefore is false itself. Consequently, Horkheimer concludes that he "would therefore rather not go as far as Tillich and make symbolic statements about God" (Horkheimer, 2007: 368).

Nevertheless, Horkheimer is not satisfied with this. He does not abandon his own attempt to express the divine beyond the radically negative image ban. Instead, he returns to a theme that he believes simultaneously adheres to the *Bilderverbot* but also expresses the humanistic desire of otherness – the "impulse" that births religions. He writes,

> I can only speak of a yearning for the basis of the world to be "all-good" and "all-powerful" and that the horror of this world is not the final word. And I agree with Tillich that we seek to justify our actions on the basis of this final desire, although we actually may not speak of an "all-good and all-powerful being." It seems impermissible for me to say more about this (Horkheimer, 2007: 368).

In this section of his letter, Horkheimer makes two things very clear. First, he cannot speak of an "all-good and all-powerful being," in light of the barbaric nature of history – the issue of theodicy will not allow it without imbuing absurd meaning to meaningless suffering – and secondly, the *Bilderverbot,* which he unapologetically wishes to maintain as a *basis* of Critical Theory, does not allow for such positive articulations of what is "all-good," for that which is perfect is unarticulatable. Nevertheless, in his *Notizen,* Horkheimer expands on the theme of this "yearning" and gives us a clearer understanding of what he means by it. Under the title of *The Difference Between Critical Theory and the Idea of Faith,* he writes,

> Faced with the sciences and the entire present situation, my idea of expressing the concept of an omnipotent and benevolent Being no longer as dogma but as a longing that unites all men so that the horrible events, the injustice of history so far would not be permitted to be the final, ultimate fate of the victims, seems to come close to the solution of the problem: the role of faith becomes central (Horkheimer, 1978: 239).

Again, Horkheimer returns to the inability to express the Divine in a positive articulation due to "the sciences," (natural and positivist sciences, Kantian epistemology) and the "entire present situation," i.e. history of unnecessary suffering, especially post-Auschwitz and Hiroshima; neither of which allow for the kind of optimistic, or naïve, theology that the traditional religions casually engage in. Instead, Horkheimer translates the "impulse" for the Other, the impulse that doesn't disappear after traditional religion is no longer viable, and which continues to express the humanistic desire for a different world, from traditional theology, into a "longing that unites all men." God loses its traditional positive descriptions and is collapsed by Horkheimer into the "faith idea," that God is no longer a dogma, but an expression of a "longing… that the horrible events, the injustice of history so far would not be permitted to be the final, ultimate fate of the victims" (Horkheimer, 1978: 239). This longing *is* akin to "faith," and it is "central" to Critical Theory, but it is a kind of *universal faith* that is not burdened by particular dogmas and beliefs, which, according to Horkheimer, "are difficult to accept," especially in light of modern science (Horkheimer, 1978: 239; Siebert in Ott, 2014: 34-35). Later in his interview with Gumnior, Horkheimer will express that true theology is no longer the "science of God," in the traditional sense, but rather is an "expression of a longing, a longing after the fact that the murderer may not triumph over the innocent victim" (Horkheimer with Helmut Gumnior, 1970).

But the full measure of Horkheimer's translation is not readily apparent in his brief note. If Horkheimer translates the traditional conception of "God" into "the longing that unites all men," then theology – the science of the divine – is also translated. It becomes the "science of that longing." In other words, Horkheimer views Critical Theory as the new theology that is "appropriate" to the "age," for it is through Critical Theory that the suffering of man is articulated in an explicitly secular way while at the same time preserving the theological

sensitivities towards that suffering.[45] The "difference," as Horkheimer called it, between Critical Theory and the Christian idea of faith, is that Critical Theory posits no dogmas that are "difficult to accept" as dogmas, but preserves the humanistic longing that the "injustice of history… would not be permitted to be the… ultimate fate of the victims" that previously was the domain of traditional theology.[46] In other words, Horkheimer's Critical Theory *determinately negates* traditional theology, and rescues its humanistic core as well as the longing for a reconciled and peaceful otherness that it once expressed, while at the same time cancels its cumbersome and indefensible dogmas. To make his point clear, Horkheimer gives his post-translation definition of theology to Helmut Gumnior. He explains it as such,

> In no case does theology stands here for the science of the Divine or for the science of God. Theology means here the consciousness that the world is appearance, that it is not the absolute truth. Theology is – I consciously press myself carefully – hope that it does not remain with this injustice; that the world characterized by injustice may not be the last word (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970).

Totally Other

In his letter to the historian Martin Jay, dated December 1971, Horkheimer uses an explicit theological category when discussing his understanding of the *Bilderverbot* when it's coupled with the humanistic desire for something other than this world. He uses the phrase "the totally Other" (*ein ganz Anderes*) to express the idea of a Divine beyond traditional positive

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[45] In his critique of conservative attempts to rescue God by fortifying themselves in traditional dogmas and literalism, he writes, "if [religion] is to have its original meaning, the traditional must ever anew take a form that is geared to the age and appropriate to it while also contradicting it" (Horkheimer, 1974: 156). In other words, religion will have to be translated in a way that it is made comprehensible to post-metaphysical thought but simultaneously must resist integration – and thus neutralization – into the dominant social, political and economic coordinates – it must retain its non-conformist *geist* while speaking the language of the modern.
[46] In his interview with Helmut Gumnior, Horkheimer speaks of the impossibility of believing in God as a dogma in this way: "In view of suffering in this world, in view of injustice, it is nevertheless impossible to believe in the dogma of the existence of an all-powerful and all-good-natured God" (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970).

theology – un-capturable by any conceptualization – while connecting it to the "appeal" or "longing" of those who are the victims of this world. He wrote,

> The appeal to an entirely other (*ein ganz Anderes*) than this world had primarily social-philosophical impetus. It led finally to a more positive evaluation of certain metaphysical trends, because the empirical "whole is the untrue" (Adorno). The hope that earthly horror does not possess the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish (Horkheimer in Jay, 1996: xxvi).

This passage, written less than two years before his death 1973, reminds us of the notion of the "totally Other" (sometimes phrased "wholly Other") which he first articulated in his interview with Helmut Gumnior, published in *Der Spiegel* in January of 1970 (Klapwijk, 2010: 79). This phrase, which serves as the indicator of what is longed for, was first developed by the German neo-Kantian and Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto and later the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, both of whom attempted to go beyond the sheer negativity of the *Bilderverbot* by giving some expression to the God that exists beyond the God of positive theology, and the God that cannot be made identical with its creation – either in whole or in part (Siebert, 2010: 87-88). For Otto, the "numinous consciousness," that part of the mind that reaches beyond the phenomenal, is directed towards the "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans,*" that which is unknown yet sparks awe, a feeling of being overpowered (*majestas*), and a sense of urgency (Otto, 1958: 12-24). Regardless of the feelings this *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* provokes, it is unapproachable in positive language, as it "cannot be rendered explicit in conceptual terms." However, and in many ways prefiguring Tillich's symbolic theology, Otto argues that it can be indirectly spoken of, at least through ideograms, by which he doesn't mean pictorial representations of something – like Chinese characters – but rather negative phrases that by analogy render the ineffable positive in an effable negative conception (Otto, 1958: 26). In explaining how this linguistic turn relates to the problem of God and its ineffability, he writes,

> Taken in the religious sense, that which is 'mysterious' is – to give it perhaps the most striking expression – the 'wholly other'… that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment (Otto, 1958: 26).

The meaning of the phrase "totally Other," or "wholly Other" is twofold: first it maintains the *Bilderverbot's* ban on any positive articulation of the divine, and second, it expresses the concrete Otherness – as in *another way-of-being* – that is longed for by those who suffer from the horror and misery of finite life. Horkheimer appropriates Otto's apophatic phrase as a way of speaking of the humanistic "longing" for God – or what God represents: a life worthy of living – without falling into the falsity of speaking of God positively. Indeed, he reminds us that at the heart of this longing, one does not find science – "he hopes that earthly horror does not posse the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish" – rather it is a theological and philosophical one. But it is not a traditional theological one, not in the sense that Horkheimer believes in a messianic figure that will usher in an apocalypse and put an end to the misery of earthly existence. For sure he does not believe in such dogmatic things. Rather he seems to think that the "longing for the totally Other" expresses his *materialist* notion of theology, which he defined in his interview with Gumnior as being "consciousness that the world is appearance, that it is not the absolute truth," and "theology is… hope… that the world characterized by injustice" is not the "last word" (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970).[47] If by "God" Horkheimer uses the phrase the *totally Other*, and if he redefines theology as no longer the "science of the divine," but rather an awareness that the world is only appearance, and that theology preserves the longing that "unites all men" and resists the world of appearances, then Horkheimer has effectively distilled the once traditional theological notion of man's desire for salvation beyond the realm of the world to a

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[47] In this essay *Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism,* Horkheimer even translates the traditional title of Jesus of Nazareth, "Christ," into a material concept. He writes, "the oppressed said 'Christ' and have always meant an existence worthy of human beings" (Horkheimer, 1993: 283).

materialist longing for a world that would reflect the perfected world of the beyond. This is the main reason why this "longing" cannot be understood as simply "nostalgia" for the past as Klapwijk thinks (Klapwijk, 2010: 81). Although nostalgia may be informative, maybe even substantively revealing, "longing," in the way Horkheimer writes of it, is not uniquely tied to the past, to a time of religious holisticism, or a time before modernity destroyed the possibility of an integrated religious life, as Klapwijk suggests. Horkheimer's "longing" does not take on counter-revolutionary characteristics that are so often tied to Romanticism.[48] Rather Horkheimer's "longing" is wholly future-oriented; it is an irrepressible desire that the future will escape the condemnatory conditions of the past, for even in the holistic religious past the murderer triumphed over the innocent victim. This being the case, that which is longed for cannot be found in the past, but can only be longed for in the future. The good of the past may be incorporated into the critique of the present, but it is always future-oriented – for in the future, it is hoped, the good is fulfilled. To make this point clear, when Horkheimer uses the "shall ultimately," as in the "longing that the murderer *shall ultimately* not triumph over the innocent victim," he is speaking about the history to come, the "not yet," or even the end of history, as the language he uses is unequivocally future tense. Nevertheless, in accordance with the negativity of both the *Bilderverbot* and notion of utopia, he refuses to identify this longing/hope in a positive manner – neither through the lenses of traditional religious eschatology, Marxist historical materialism or anything similar.[49]

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[48] This is not to say that all forms of Romanticism are counter-revolutionary or retrograde. Some forms, as Michael Löwy has suggested, "*detour* through the past on the way to a utopian future" (Löwy, 2005: 5).

[49] While discussing Horkheimer's conception of the "totally other" with Martin Lüdke in 1980, Leo Löwenthal attests to the future-oriented nature of this concept. Löwenthal writes, "Horkheimer once told me – and I believe *we were all in complete agreement with him on this* – that the Jewish article of faith that one may not pronounce the name of God [3rd Commandment] *is very decisive*. The unattainable, the unapproachable, the unnameable, which nonetheless contains a sense of longing that one may finally reach the goal, may ultimately speak its name. This conception is certainly very Jewish; *it is a motif in our thought even today*" (Löwenthal, 1987: 245). Emphasis added.

In his 1970 interview with Gumnior, Horkheimer said "while for me the main thing remained that God is not representable, yet however this non-representable is the subject of our longing" (Horkheimer and Gumnior, 1970). If we so chose, we can read these kinds of statements in a few different ways. First, Horkheimer is longing for the Divine in a more traditional way – as an eschatological end to the world as it is and the beginning of a new world – a "parousia," or "God with us."[50] Or second, he thinks of an *apocatastasis*; an intervention by the divine wherein the "original condition" of man's relationship to the divine and other men is "restored."[51] Of these two, the first is *progressive* and the second *restorative*. There is a third option: a development *within* history that brings into existence a more reconciled, peaceful and non-alienated society. In all three options, the spell of evil is broken and an existence beyond all that which damages the life of the individual is alleviated. But it all happens *in the future*.

Yet the *mysterium* of what is longed for remains. Since Horkheimer insists on using the phrase "totally Other," which brings with it no determining adjectives – as "it" is not even a noun to which adjectives can be attached – it is impossible to say without equivocation what exactly Horkheimer is longing for in any positive sense. Since the "totally Other" seems to represent the "purely good" – the opposite of what is – and the purely good cannot be represented according to Horkheimer, we are left with the purely negative: a void that can only be understood through negative semantics (Horkheimer, 2007: 362). The "totally Other" is not this; not even a semantic semblance is acceptable.[52] Yet that doesn't mean we cannot say anything about the divine,

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[50] Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28.
[51] Malachi 4:6; Acts 3:19-21.
[52] Not even the concepts of "perfect justice" or "unconditional love" are *ultimately* allowed as semblances, for "perfect justice" implies the possibility of "imperfect justice," or even the need for justice, which is predicated on a world wherein wrongs call for punishment, retribution, and/or prevention. Also, "unconditional love" is predicated on the reality of "conditional love," the imperfect form love. The invocation of perfect justice and unconditional love are only means by which we get a sense of what the reality of the totally Other entails; they are however not the reality itself. The reality of the totally Other wipes clean the need to have such notions of love and justice, etc.

merely that what we can say without constructing false-positives must be said only through the phrase "God is not…" His negative theology makes clear that whatever "it" – the "totally Other" – is, it is not the world of appearances, i.e. history as horror, terror and suffering, metaphysical materialism, the world of alienation, the administered society, the world of war and terrorism, meaningless consumption and hatred. As it is not the world of appearances, nor the falseness of positive theology, the "totally Other" seem to me, at best, to be a postulate: The God that remains after the God of theology is dead. Such a God was believed in by Horkheimer, but only as a postulate – as in "knowing there is no God, … nevertheless beliv[ing] in him" (Habermas on Horkheimer, 2003: 113).[53]

The Atheism that Preserves Theism

In 1965, Horkheimer wrote in his essay *Threats to Freedom,* the following prepositional phrase: "in Judaism, the religion I myself confess." What exactly he confesses, remarked Roland Boer, is "uncertain," because he "maintained a critical-Marxist perspective on religion until his death in 1973" (Boer, 2012: 14). However, Boer seems to be half right. As we have demonstrated, Horkheimer maintained a *dialectical perspective* on religion, in which some aspects of religion would *intentionally* be preserved, unlike in Marx, wherein bourgeois religion is called to be abstractly negated (Ott, 2001: 81-101). Like Adorno, this preservation of religious semantics and semiotics within his philosophy did not deliver him back to a conventional faith position, but it would be equally incorrect to say he was a proponent of "positive atheism."[54] As

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[53] "Sie Weiß, dass es keinen Gott gibt, und doch glaubt sie an ihn."
[54] Atheism can be conceived in two ways: *positive atheism*, sometimes called "hard atheism," and *negative atheism*, also known as "soft atheism." In positive atheism, the claimant states positively that there has not been, is not now, and never will be a divine being. A negative atheist would not make such claims; rather they simply state they have

we've already demonstrated, certainly Horkheimer identified with Judaism, but not in a traditional way, at least not in a way that any casual observer would recognize him outwardly as being a devout Jew. Rather Horkheimer, like Adorno, seemed to take their adherence to the most fundamental of theological statements in Judaism to their limits; adherence as the most "*extreme ascesis toward any type of revealed faith,* an *extreme loyalty to the prohibition of images, far beyond what this once originally meant*," which carried the *Bilderverbot* into many spheres outside of mere theology (Adorno, 2005: 142).[55] In this extreme religious discipline against any form of idolatry, they preserved within their methodological atheism a genuine negative theism, which maintained the possibility of the Divine while abandoning the cumbersome dogmas of traditional Jewish and Christian religion. As Adorno attested to in his *Negative Dialectics*, "the idea of truth is supreme among the metaphysical ideas, and this is where it takes us. It is why one who believes in God cannot believe in God, why the possibility represented by the divine name is maintained, rather, by him who does not believe" (Adorno, 1999: 401-402). In this sense, the negative atheist is the true adherent, for in his theological negativity – or even silence, it is only he who resists creating false images of that which is imageless and unarticulatable. Additionally, recall Horkheimer's definition of "good religion," wherein he answers the question "what is religion in a good sense," writing, "to sustain, not to let reality stifle, the impulse for change, the desire that the spell be broken, that things take the right turn. *We have religion where life down to its every gesture is marked by this resolve*" (Horkheimer, 1978: 163). With this definition, which is not anchored in a belief in a historical religion, nor even within belief in a positively articulated/imagined Divine being, even an atheist can be a true believer, as long as the life of the

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a *lack of belief* in a divine being (as it is so articulated). Thus the negativity of their claim takes the shape a *void of a positive belief*, silence on the issue of God, as to believe a divine being doesn't exist is still a positive statement about reality as it puts forward a positively articulated truth claim.

[55] Emphasis added.

individual is thoroughly saturated – *down to its every gesture* – with the resolve to change the miserable world-as-it-is. From this a-theological perspective, the negative atheist is the keeper of the "impulse for change, the desire that the spell be broken," whereas many traditional believers succumb to the false-reconciliation of prophetic religion with the prevailing conditions of domination and oppression that mark the given society and world. Thus, when the *adversus mundum* negativity of the unimaginable and unarticulatable God is sacrificed by the traditional believer for the *pro mundum* positive of the status quo, it is with the non-conforming atheist that the spirit of resistance – and therefore "good religion" – takes refuge. This was echoed by Jacob Klapwijk, when he wrote, "religion equals a hunger for complete justice," which might take on the form of an "atheistic religion in a right-wing dictatorship or theistic religion in a left-wing bureaucracy" (Klapwijk, 2010: 82).

This non-traditional belief in God, this longing for the totally Other, if only as a postulate, is etched in stone on Horkheimer's grave in the form of Psalm 91.[56] It reads, "*Denn du Ewiger bist meine Zuversicht*" (Because you, eternal one, are my confidence).[57] Surely a dogmatic positive atheist would not have allowed such a deeply religious statement to be engraved on their final resting place. However, the atheist that was a true adherent of "good religion" may have consented, or even wished it to be. In this sense, the last of Horkheimer's translations of theology was his translation of the *Bilderverbot* into apparent negative atheism – the most "extreme

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[56] Horkheimer once translated Psalm 91 and wrote a commentary to it. See Michael R. Ott's translation of Horkheimer's Psalm 91 piece in *Marx, Critical Theory and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice,* edited by Warren S. Goldstein. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 115-120.

[57] Horkheimer was buried in the same Jewish cemetery in Bern, Switzerland, as were his parents. In a 1955 letter to Eugene Weill-Strauss, he wrote of his wish to be buried there. "My wife and I have the sincere desire also to be buried in this same cemetery. I don't know if the fact that my wife, who was raised a Protestant (she was born in England), never officially converted to Judaism is an obstacle to this. Yet we have been together for more than three decades, and she has shared my Jewish fate in every respect, and it is now her serious intent to rest in peace with me in the cemetery in Bern" (Horkheimer, 2007: 296). It is a matter of record that Maidon Horkheimer did eventually convert to Judaism.

ascesis" – only through such atheism could the Divine be rescued from false and therefore ideological articulations.

Secularized Religious Longing as Social Force

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Horkheimer and Adorno highlighted the controversial idea that morality has not only been divorced from religion, it could no longer be seriously argued that it is tied to reason, a reality that the "dark" Bourgeois writers were prepared to admit (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 92). They write, "while the light-bringing writers protected the indissoluble alliance of reason and atrocity, bourgeois society and power, by denying that alliance, the bearers of darker messages pitilessly expressed the shocking truth," for they "did not hush up the impossibility of deriving from reason a fundamental argument against murder, but proclaimed it from the rooftops" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 92).[58] Yet for Horkheimer, who, like Kant, seems to view morality as an "essential substance of religion" according to Habermas, is not prepared to abandon it if its content cannot be born of formal reason (Habermas, 2002: 96).[59] For him, especially in light of his skepticism of such formalistic reason, the only possible recourse to rescue morality may be through an appeal to religion, but a return to positive religion is no longer possible after reason has dethroned the gods (Horkheimer, 2004: 3-39). Yet if religion makes available the morality that formal reason has abandoned and therefore no longer has access to, ought a second-look not be entertained, especially in such a "totally dark

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[58] Habermas refutes Horkheimer's central claim in his essay *Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer,* writing that "the idea that it is vain to strive for unconditional meaning without God betrays not just a metaphysical need; the remark is itself an instance of the metaphysics that not only philosophers but even theologians themselves must today get along without" (Habermas, 2002: 96).

[59] In a letter to Hans Reiner of Freiburg, dated December 2, 1969, Horkheimer wrote the following: "the human being is just as much predisposed to hatred and horror. The higher value attributed to morality depends, in the final analysis, on theological ideas. I don't see how the meaning you describe can be asserted independently of religion" (Horkheimer, 2007: 363).

world" (Horkheimer, 1978: 124)? If something were salvageable from religion, it would have to be translated into post-metaphysical reason for it to be both adequate and appropriate to the task at hand (Horkheimer, 2004).[60] However, such secularized terms would have to both be understandable to public reasoning and escape the reified domination of reason itself. In other words, the critical nature of religion, which establishes moral norms, and therefore inculcates its *adversus mundum* nature into praxis, would have to pass from the "good religion" into a critical theory of society, which should "reveal specific injustices" that formal reason fails to uncover, all without succumbing to reason's domination (Habermas, 2002: 97; Horkheimer, 1978: 163; Horkheimer, 2004). That is, it must retain its transcendent, i.e. theological, nature, lest it be colonized and therefore remythologized along with reason itself (Horkheimer, 2004).

For Horkheimer, "mankind loses his religion as it moves through history," but nevertheless it leaves a stubborn remainder (Horkheimer, 2002: 129). The "image of perfect justice," which once served as the basis to criticize the status quo, cannot be forgotten despite the increasing secularity of the age (Horkheimer, 2002: 129). As *particular instances* of exploitation, oppression, degradation and alienation have past, the *general conditions* have remained, and call out for a standard by which they can be judged. The diminishment of religion has not affected the reality that mankind lives within antagonistic conditions which produce unnecessary suffering, nor has it alleviated existential suffering. The standard that once took shape as the "heavenly judge," is no longer viable, as such a transcendent judge cannot be found within a post-metaphysical and post-religion world. Nevertheless, the illusionary – or "religious" – quality of this unsatisfied longing of "perfect justice," for Horkheimer, can be exposed as an

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[60] Horkheimer claims religious forms of expression to be "inappropriate" since the rise of bourgeois society, writing, "the more a superior, rational form of human organization becomes visible with the evolution of bourgeois society and emerges as a conscious objective of social groups, the more inappropriate the religious form of expression becomes for these progressive historical tendencies" (Horkheimer, 1993: 284).

"impotent revolt against reality," but it cannot be "entirely banished," for it still reveals the entrenched desire for ultimate justice – that the murderer shall not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately. However, such a desire itself does not allow the victim to return to religion; he cannot return to his religious illusions about a divinely directed "elimination of the present disorder" – he cannot simply hope for such divine intervention (Horkheimer, 2002: 130). However, just as he cannot expect the divine to break into history, he just as forcefully cannot submit to his earthly fate. He must live within the tension between the barbaric nature of history and his desire for the "perfect image of justice," that is the negation of that history. Being caught between these two conflicting states, he, according to Horkheimer, chooses to follow the propulsive impulse, rooted in the dissatisfaction with earthly reality – which used to be articulated in religion – and act against the status quo. Horkheimer writes in his brief essay *Thoughts on Religion,* that

> Good will, solidarity with wretchedness, and the struggle for a better world have now thrown off their religious garb. The attitude of today's martyrs is no longer patience but action; their goal is no longer their own immortality in the afterlife but the happiness of men who come after them and for whom they know how to die (Horkheimer, 2002: 130).

Here, Horkheimer seems to think that the language of religion is no longer adequate or appropriate to the conditions of modern secular society, as "a purely spiritual resistance" only seems to solidify its own opposition, the "totalitarian state" (Horkheimer, 2002: 130). What is needed is that the impulse that once took a religious form as the "image of perfect justice," which serves as the grand inquisitor of the given and therefore brooks no reverence for the status quo, be translated into a secular social force; that is be translated into a post-metaphysical language that is both adequate and appropriate for the secular age, so that it might lead to a transformation of the existing society. Speaking of the present moment, Horkheimer writes that "part of the

drives and desires which religious belief preserved and kept alive are detached from the inhibiting religious form and become productive forces in social practice" (Horkheimer, 2002: 131). In other words, the religious resistance to the world as-it-is, with all of its death, destruction, oppression and alienation, has migrated from the depth of the religious tradition into a secular praxis which resists and acts against the world as-it-is now. Thus, for Habermas, Horkheimer's translation takes the form of philosophy "re-express[ing] what it learns from religion in a discourse that is independent of revealed truth" (Habermas, 2002: 164). It is religious *contra mundum* translated to, and preserved within, secular *contra mundum*.

What should be clear about Horkheimer's brief essay on religion is that he is not claiming that the longing to transform the given has its genesis *in religion,* it is not unique to it, but rather that religion *gives expression to the longing by way of the image of perfect justice.* In other words, religion is the language by which the finitude of humanity can express its dissatisfaction and an image by which to compare the misery of the given to the possibility of otherness. The desire for change, to negate the unjust, to find justice, to alleviate alienation, is forced upon humanity due to the miserable conditions of society and history that impede mankind's *entelechy.* On the social-political level, religion, which is secondary, or the result of this impediment to human actualization, only expresses the "wishes, desires, and accusation of countless generations," which even without religion, are still being produced due to the horrible conditions that determine human existence (Horkheimer, 2002: 129; Otto, 1958: 26-27).[61] For Horkheimer, those impulses, desires, and longings must lose their "inhibiting religious form" and find expression in secular language, if they are to become "today's martyrs," for today's martyrs

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[61] Just months before the death of Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse reminded him about how horrifying the world was. In a letter Marcuse wrote, "No Max – we're not getting more and more stupid, but this world is terrible and is becoming ever more terrible, 'beyond our capacity to image'" (Horkheimer, 2007: 374).

are not interested in individual salvation, but rather the "happiness of men" (Horkheimer, 2002: 130-131).[62]

Walter Benjamin's Materialistic "Transliteration" of Jewish Messianism

Similar to Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin's writings on religion and theology are scattered throughout his corpus of work. Nevertheless, as this study is not entirely dedicated to the work of Benjamin, but rather it seeks to identify and chart the religious and theological elements residing deep within Critical Theory as a whole, of which Walter Benjamin is an important part, I will focus on two of his works that, according to the language of the *Arcades Project,* are most "saturated" by religion and/or theology, and thus play a determining factor within his overall philosophy: his *Theological-Political Fragment*, and lastly his *Theses on the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 1999: 471).[63] In my view, these two pieces are the most revealing of his works that touch on religion, theology, and most importantly, political Messianism, and betray a similar theological consistency despite that the first was written at the beginning of his academic career and the later was the last thing he is known to have written (Ott, 2016: 28; Scholem, 2012: 198-199). Additionally, both essays represent important moments in the development of his philosophy. The *Theological-Political Fragment* was written between 1920–

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[62] On modern martyrs, Horkheimer writes in his *Eclipse of Reason,* "the real individual of our time are the martyrs who have gone through infernos of suffering and degradation in their resistance to conquest and oppression, not the inflated personalities of popular culture, the conventional dignitaries. These unsung heroes consciously exposed their existence as individuals to the terroristic annihilation that others undergo unconsciously through the social process. The anonymous martyrs of the concentration camps are the symbols of the humanity that is striving to be born. *The task of philosophy is to translate what they have done into language that will be heard, even though their finite voices have been silenced by tyranny*" (Horkheimer, 2004: 109). Emphasis added.

[63] Some translations of Benjamin's *Thesen "Uber den Begriff der Geschichte"* have chosen to translate the German word "begriff" into the English word "philosophy," including the volume edited by Benjamin's distant cousin Hannah Arendt. Regardless, as the word "begriff" is closer to the English word "concept" or "term," I have chosen to use the word concept, as it seems closer to what Benjamin is trying to say about history in the *Thesen.*

1921 (published posthumously), before Bloch suggested he read Lukác's *History and Class Consciousness*, which introduced him to Marxist terminology, and the *Theses on the Concept of History* (*Thesen "Uber den Begriff der Geschichte"*), wherein he brings together the fullness of his form of redemptive historical materialism, which is infused with German Romanticism and Jewish Messianism (Eiland and Jennings, 2014: 128; Löwy, 2005: 8).

Benjamin's interest in philosophy of history and philosophy of religion did not begin late in life, but rather, as Scholem records, began at least as early as 1916, wherein discussing his philosophy of history, Benjamin declared, "if I ever have a philosophy of my own," "it somehow will be a philosophy of Judaism" (Scholem, 1981: 32). These two themes, the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion, are, according to Michael R. Ott, *red threads* that snake through his entire corpus of work (Ott, 2016).

In addition to these two works, there is a considerable amount of theological and Messianic themes within Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which I will cite when it provides illumination on the two primary essays in question. In fact, I claim, following Michael Löwy's position, that the *Arcades Project* shines important light on the *Thesen,* and without it, Benjamin's last opus is much more difficult to understand, for it is in the *Arcades Project* that Benjamin starts to gather the materials through which his thoughts on history will later crystalize in the *Thesen* (Löwy, 2005). Adorno himself attested to the importance of the theological element with Benjamin's *Arcades.* In a letter dated 17 December 1934, Adorno wrote,

> Since I always insisted on such a position, before entering into your Arcades, it seems to me doubly important that the image of theology, into which I would gladly see our thoughts dissolve, is none other than the very one which sustains your thoughts here – it could indeed be called an 'inverse' theology. This position, directed against natural and supernatural interpretations alike, first formulated here as it is with total precision, strikes me as utterly identical with my own – indeed my Kierkegaard study was concerned with nothing else (Adorno and Benjamin, 1999: 66-67).

Yet, when reading Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment* and his *Theses on the Concept of History,* we witness that Benjamin's engagement with religion often lacks an explicit dialectical critique that is most prevalent in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer, and even Fromm and Marcuse. Outside of his essay *Capitalism as Religion,* in which one still has to infer his critique of religion by recognizing how capitalism takes on a religious function, one will not often find him explicitly criticizing the "worlding" of Christianity, the unfortunate functionalization of it by the Bourgeoisie, or a consolatory opium critique similar to Kant, Hegel, Marx and Lenin (Benjamin, 2004: 288-291).[64] Neither will he be found psychologizing religion much like Feuerbach and Freud. Rather his negation of religion is *implicit* within the majority of his writings. It is only in his preservation of certain religious elements can one identify that which he is negating. However, his lack of an explicit critique of certain forms of religion, religious praxis, religious history, etc., does *not* make his method *fundamentally* different than that of Horkheimer and Adorno's, rather it is *expressively* different. It is a different kind of articulation of the same dialectical method in dealing with a dialectical phenomenon, such that religion is. Along with both Adorno and Horkheimer, who learned much from his thoughts on religion, Benjamin discards those aspects of religion and theology that appear to him as being oppressive, on the side of unjust earthly power, or affirmative of the way the world is (*pro mundum*), while he preserves the emancipatory, liberational and negative (*contra mundum*) aspects of religion that can still contribute to man's search for a different and more reconciled, peace-filled and

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[64] The most powerful statement in this essay can be read both as a critique of capitalism and religion. Benjamin states that, "capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction. It is the expansion of despair, until despair becomes a religious state of the world in the hope that this will lead to salvation. God's transcendence is at an end. But he is not dead; he has been incorporated into human existence (Benjamin, 2004: 289). Like religion, Benjamin believes that capitalism systematically rationalizes and advances the social and historical terrorization and brutalization of people, while at the same time it has the capacity to console, alleviate their terror and therefore reintegrate them back into the capitalist system (Ott, 2016: 44).

unalienated way-of-being (Wolin, 1982: 266). This comes through his work most powerfully in the form of his thoughts on political Messianism, which takes a variety of forms throughout both the essays we'll examine. This political Messianism, which was inspired both by Judaism, the Kabbalah and Gershom Scholem, as well as Historical Materialism, especially through the Marxist writer Bertolt Brecht, will be the primary focus of our critical analysis of Benjamin's philosophy of religion (Buck-Morss, 1979: 136-146; Scholem, 1981; Wizisla, 2009).

"Transliteration" not "Translation"

It may have escaped the reader that this section on Walter Benjamin is entitled "Walter Benjamin's Materialistic *Transliteration* of Jewish Messianism," and not "Walter Benjamin's Materialistic *Translation* of Jewish Messianism." There is a subtle but important difference between a transliteration and a translation that makes the former term more appropriate for what Benjamin is doing with religion and theology in his political philosophy, and that subtle but important difference calls for a clarification.

The work of the conventional translator includes the transforming of the *meaning material* (semantics) from one language to another, by which the original language – its original medium of expression – is negated. The meaning of what was expressed through the original language migrates from that original language and finds a new home in a new medium, the second language, and is therefore transformed into something other. The job of the translator is to accurately express the *meaning* of the text as closely to the original as possible in the second language, all the while understanding that some subtle nuances, implicit meanings, dialectical tensions, musicality, etc., within the original language will be irretrievably lost in the

transformation. Therefore, that which migrates, i.e. that which is preserved, is the *meaning*, while the original carrier of the meaning – its original language – is left behind. In the new language, the meaning that was once carried by the original language continues its life, albeit slightly modified. Yet, in its new exterior the old remains recognizable. In other words, it is not completely new, but has been *determinately negated*. The meaning has a new façade, a new public face, a new vehicle for expression, which carries the meaning of the old façade as much as it can. I argue that this is what essentially Adorno and Horkheimer have done to the concept of *Bilderverbot*, the negativity of religious concepts is translated into the secular concepts of either utopia or the "longing for the totally Other" – a longing that unites *all* men (including the secular). The "religious language," its original vehicle, is replaced by a "secular language," which carries on its negative intent – its "meaning" in the translation analogy. In some instances, Benjamin seems to follow this method of translation, but in most instances, he simply does not, thus my abandonment of the term "translation" for Benjamin's work on religion. Clearly there is some form of transformation occurring, but one that doesn't seem to follow the same pattern, as one would expect from the sort of translation we saw in Adorno and Horkheimer. There seems to be another process afoot in Benjamin's philosophy of religion.

In addition to the few instances of translation, Benjamin also *transliterates* religious and theological material. In language, a *transliteration* is the changing of a written script by which an idea is expressed. For example, if we were to take Arabic words out of the Arabic script and write them with Latin letters, we would have *transliterated* the words. We would not have translated them. Neither the meaning nor the sound of the words change; only the medium that visually represents the sound and meaning (the alphabetic symbols that form the written word) changes. How then is this process reflected in Benjamin's philosophy of religion?

255

The religious notions, ideas, thoughts, and concepts that Benjamin deploys do not necessarily migrate from the religious to the secular through this transformation – but rather the medium by which the religious notions are expressed change – religious concepts *appear* philosophical while *remaining* essentially religious. In other words, the content is not translated, it remains the same, but is expressed in a form that is different from its original form: religion accompanies, or even "cohabitates" with philosophy, but it does not *become* philosophy – it seems to keep its critical distance while at the same time it operates *in conjunction* with philosophy. In this case, the form that births many of Benjamin's ideas is Judaism, but the vehicle that advances those same religious ideas in Benjamin's thought is critical philosophy. The religious nature of the concepts, such as the notion of the Messiah, redemption, *apocatastasis,* etc., are not translated into something other than what they are in Judaism; they retain their religious nature. Certainly he has wrenched such concepts out of their original Jewish context and has delivered them to secular philosophy, and thus appear awkward at times. Nevertheless, in my analysis, most of these concepts remain faithfully religious, as they were first conceived. Therefore, they have not been "translated" into something secular – which by its profane nature is other than sacred and/or holy. For Benjamin, the "sacred" is "enlisted" into the project of secular philosophy. Jewish concepts are used to enhance, invigorate and radicalize even further the concepts of Historical Materialism – as if the Historical Materialist is peering through the red lenses of the Messianic, whereby he witnesses the world in an even more radically non-conformist way. In this way, Messianism will augment the already liberational qualities of Historical Materialism; it will give it an even more piercing perception of the struggle ahead and how it pertains to the struggles of the past. In doing so, such religious concepts don't necessarily *become* indistinguishable from Historical Materialism, but rather

assist in its liberational cause. We will see this phenomenon most clearly in Benjamin's first thesis, where the ugly and small "hunchback dwarf" (theology") is "enlisted" to aid Historical Materialism without being sublated into it.

This "transliteration" process instead of the "translation" process does not fundamentally affect the *determinate negation* of religion. Both Horkheimer and Adorno, on one hand, and Benjamin on the other, abandon, reject and/or negate certain aspects of religion while preserving others. The method of preserving certain semantic and semiotic materials is where there is a difference; one translates the religious into the secular while the other "enlists" the religious, and therefore allows the religious to remain religious, but transliterates its outward appearance, i.e. it works upon the world through philosophy. That which isn't transliterated, is also negated if it cannot contribute to – or simply resist – a breaking from the continuum of violence, suffering and despair, i.e. history as Golgotha.

A key component in the "enlistment" of theology for Benjamin is that Judaism makes even more prophetic the non-conformist and *contra mundum* nature of Historical Materialism by relieving it of its materialist near-sightedness and its lack of a Janus-faced consciousness. It does this by infusing it with a *future-oriented remembrance* of past suffering – an anamnestic solidarity with the innocent victim which pierces into the deep and dark chasms of the anterior – in which lay the putrefying bodies of millions of unredeemed dead waiting for their day in court – which the positivistic sciences and crass materialists have cut themselves off from. Theology, in this sense, gives Historical Materialism the ability to engage the future by remembering the catastrophe that history's own reality attests to, and in doing so partially redeems the past via its potential transformation of the present and the future.

Written at the time that Benjamin was still wrestling with the implications in Ernst Bloch's 1918 *Geist der Utopie* (The Spirit of Utopia), which he found to be "not totally without merit" but still "facile and overdone," his *Theological-Political Fragment* was an attempt to erect a clear division between profane history and the messianic (Eiland and Jennings, 2014: 128-129).[65] While keeping the purely religious notion of the Messiah away from any profane conception of history, especially history as "progress," Benjamin writes,

> Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic. Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the *telos* of the historical dynamic; it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history it is not the goal, but the end. Therefore the order of the profane cannot be built up on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and therefore theocracy has no political, but only a religious meaning. To have repudiated with utmost vehemence the political significance of theocracy is the cardinal merit of Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (Benjamin, 1978: 312)*.

In this opening paragraph, Benjamin maintains that any so-called utopian existence brought about by any processes in history cannot be made identical with the "Kingdom of God" (*Reich Gottes*) for only the Messiah ushers in the "Kingdom of God," which is the state of absolute justice, equality and the end of suffering, which no earthly order can achieve – neither for the dead nor for the living (Scholem, 1971: 10). Theocracy, or the idea that God's rule has been attained *within* history is false; it falsely augments man's rule to that of the Divine. Like utopia, history cannot *by definition* bring itself to such a conclusion. Yet claims to such a theocratic kingdom parasitically feed off man's desire to transcend the inescapable givenness of his cruel fate. Because mankind longs for a utopian Kingdom of God, wherein there will be no more

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[65] It is estimated that Benjamin wrote his *Theological-Political Fragment* between 1920 and 1921. The name of the essay, three short three paragraphs really, was given to it by Adorno.

suffering, he is willing to believe in a Kingdom of God created by his own hands, which promises the end of suffering, at least unnecessary suffering. Yet, according to Richard Wolin, such a conflation of the profane with the divine is "manifestly incompatible with Benjamin's conception of the mutually exclusive relation between these two orders" (Wolin, 1982: 57). *Complete* redemption, a requisite feature of the Kingdom of God, cannot be found within profane history – only a Messianic leap outside of history, i.e. history's termination, can bring such an exhaustive redemption. Fifty years after Benjamin wrote his *Fragment*, Gershom Scholem highlighted the same apocalyptic point, writing,

> It is precisely the lack of transition between history and the redemption which is always stressed by the prophets and apocalyptists. The Bible and the apocalyptic writers know of no progress in history leading to the redemption. The redemption is not the product of immanent developments such as we find it in modern Western reinterpretations of Messianism since the Enlightenment where, secularized as the belief in progress, Messianism still displayed unbroken and immense vigor. It is rather transcendence breaking in upon history, an intrusion in which history itself perishes, transformed in its ruin because it is struck by a beam of light shining into it from an outside source (Scholem, 1971: 10).

Drawing upon this form of Jewish apocalypticism, Benjamin posits that the Messiah is the only force that can "consummate all history," in which he "redeems, completes, creates" (Scholem, 1971: 1-36). In other words, history only points to more history and the working out of freedom; the Messiah points to the end of history (redemption) – the end of the human condition as we presently know it, and it redeems fully the innocent victims of man's brutal past. Therefore, similar to Adorno's notion of utopia, which as we saw was predicated on the negativity of the *Bilderverbot*, no earthly order can justly claim to have brought into existence the "Kingdom of God," for such a Kingdom can only materialize with the concrete negation of history by the Messiah. Therefore, history lacks the requisite tools to bring itself to its own conclusion. In other words, whatever is historical fails to obtain the status of absolute justice, equality, peace and/or

redemption. If such a transcendent role is exclusive to the Messianic, what then is the *telos* that should be assigned to humanity's labor?

In the second paragraph of Benjamin's fragment, we see (1) the *telos* of profane life: the "search for happiness" (*glückssuchen*), and (2) the dialectical effect that profane life has upon the idea of the Messianic. He writes,

> The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the Messianic is one of the essential teaching of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, containing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal towards which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of Messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the Messianic direction; but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. *The profane, therefore, although not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a decisive category of its quietest approach*. For in happiness all that is earthy seeks its downfall, and only in good fortune is its downfall destined to find it (Benjamin, 1978: 312).

In this text, Benjamin seems to suggest that the profane order of life plays a role in bringing about the entirely religious "Kingdom of God," as the "profane" is "not itself a category of this Kingdom" but nevertheless aids in its coming. This is as if to say, the more the telos of happiness is fulfilled within profane life, an equal amount of intensity is exerted upon the "coming of the Messianic Kingdom." There seems to be a subtle contradiction in Benjamin's thought, as he first announced that nothing within history can bring about the Messiah, i.e. that the Messianic remains wholly distinguishable from history and history cannot force the emergence of the Messiah, for he, as Scholem writes, "comes suddenly, unannounced, and precisely when he is least expected or when hope has long been abandoned" (Benjamin, 1978: 312; Scholem, 1971: 11). But now Benjamin says that history, i.e. profane history in search of happiness, somehow "assists" in the coming of the Messiah, which brings forth a negation of history. This is done so

because "in happiness all that is earthly seeks its downfall, and only in good fortune is its downfall destined to find it" (Benjamin, 1978: 312-313). Clearly, from a Marxian perspective, the happiness of the many is sacrificed at the altar of the given, as the happiness of the few over the masses has remained normative throughout history. In Benjamin's apocalyptic Messianism, such earthly happiness, which the profane world seeks, carries within itself an intense dialectic: the potential for its own destruction through its own realization. The Messiah for Benjamin seems to represent the opposing element that is created as history moves closer to the maximization of profane happiness for all people. It is a similar dialectic one finds in Marx's analysis of capitalism; the more capitalism grows, the more it sows the seeds for its own destruction because it creates more and more alienated workers. According to the Walter Benjamin scholar Eric Jacobson, the profane order, in search of earthly happiness, which largely consists of "proprietary and consumptive happiness," stands in "distinct relation to the idea of evil," as it opposes a redemptive happiness – which is revealed via the perspective of a "spiritual *restitution in integrum*" – which can only be expressed through Messianic redemption (Benjamin, 1978: 313; Jacobson, 2003: 36). "Free humanity," which seeks true happiness, doesn't seek the same consumptive happiness of the victors of history, but rather the negative happiness that arises from the termination of history – the Messianic break of the historic continuum: the world of *tikkun* (Scholem, 1971: 1-48). Therefore, the goal of the profane order, the realization of "happiness" for all, forces into being its own opposition: the opposite of history – the Messiah – the realization of redemption and the end to the unjust misery and suffering that mark the state of earthly history.

This Messianic dynamic has an export for the political: the false identification of theocracy – the conflation of the order of the divine with the order of the earthly – only hinders

the true coming of the "Kingdom of God," and therefore should be avoided at all costs, for in theocracy "happiness" is not the true telos, rather theocracy confuses the Kingdom of God with earthly rule while attempting to embody a righteous totality. Happiness, for Benjamin, should remain the true north star of profane existence, for only it can create the conditions by which the Messiah enters into and breaks history, ushering in the Kingdom of heaven on earth – the true resolution of the contradictory relations between the sacred and the profane (Goldstein, 2001: 248).

This is a truly pessimistic outlook for world history, but one that Benjamin shares with other messianic thinkers throughout Jewish history. According to Scholem, Benjamin and other apocalyptists share an uncommon hope; they do not anticipate "what history will bring forth, but to that which will arise in its ruin, free at last and undisguised" (Scholem, 1971: 10). Echoing Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism, which he shared with Buddhism, history is presented as something other than substantive happiness, fulfillment, flourishing – an alienated life of unconditional love, solidarity and acceptance of the other. For this, history gives no comfort that it will change course, no matter the amount of "progress" that it supposedly evidences. Such a "heaven on earth" must be brought into existence from outside of the terror conditions of history.

Benjamin's disdain for the optimism of his age, which is rooted in the Enlightenment, Hegel's philosophy of history, bourgeois and Social Democracy, and even "scientific" Historical Materialism, all which posited a similar idea that "progress" in history was inevitable, and that history is directed in a linear ever-perfecting trajectory, will return once again to his most "saturated" of theological writings, his *Thesen on the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 1969: 253-264; Löwy, 2005: 9; Scholem, 1971: 26). In order to resist such illusionary-optimism, which ignores the reality of the world behind the world of appearances – that is a long history of ugly

and unnecessary suffering, destruction and despair, alienation and meaninglessness – Benjamin will employ both the tools of Historical Materialism and theology, revolution and Messiah.

The Theological within Benjamin's Concept of History

According to Michael Löwy, Walter Benjamin's *Thesen on the Concept of History* "constitutes one of the most important philosophical and political texts of the twentieth century" and forms a single "fire alarm" that warns us of the "imminent dangers" and "catastrophes looming on the horizon" (Löwy, 2005: 4, 16). Written in 1940, after the rise of Italian and German fascism, after Stalin took ahold of the Soviet state, after the catastrophe of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and almost immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War in September of 1939, and shortly before his attempt to escape Vichy France, the feeling of an imminent apocalyptic calamity pervaded Benjamin's being (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 192-196). Additionally, according to Adorno, Benjamin wrote his *Thesen* with thoughts of his own death on his mind. Indeed, much of the *Thesen* seem to prefigure the ultimate catastrophes of the 20th century – the cold systematic murder of Auschwitz, the mechanized warfare of World War II, and the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nevertheless, Benjamin's pessimism – which, like theology, saturates his *Thesen* – is ameliorated only by the possibility that such history as barbarity can be transcended, either by the Messiah or by revolution – both of which nourish the potential for overcoming history as perpetual catastrophe. He is not optimistic about such potentials, but he does recognize – or at least *long for* – an exit door to history as slaughterbench.[66]

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[66] In Rolf Tiedemann's language, despite the increasingly hopelessness of the historical situation, "the arrival at a political alternative is demonstrably Benjamin's hidden intent in the theses" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 192).

Although he gave copies of the work to both Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno, in a letter written to Gretel Adorno on 22 February, 1940, Benjamin made clear that he did not want his *Thesen on the Concept of History* to be published because he thought it would "throw wide open the doors to enthusiastic incomprehension," due to its enigmatic mixture of Marxism and Messianic theology (Löwy, 2005: 17). Indeed, the *Thesen* have been the subject of countless commentaries, interpretations, denunciations and even augmentations to near scriptural status, or "Holy Writ" in Scholem's language, to the point where Benjamin's own concerns about the "enthusiastic incomprehension" seem to be an understatement (Scholem, 2012: 198). The cryptic nature of this series of theses, which draws upon German Romanticism, Jewish Messianism and Marxism – an odd combination for any romantic, theologian, or Marxist – lends itself to open speculation concerning the true meaning of Benjamin's thought (Löwy, 2005: 4). There is no consensus, but rather three distinct schools of thought that have developed concerning his true intent: The *materialist school*, which sees Benjamin primarily as a Marxist who shrouds his Marxism within theological language. This was the position of Bertolt Brecht (Wizisla, 2009). Second, the *theological school* suggested that Benjamin was a Jewish theologian more than a historical materialist; they often claimed he clumsily incorporated vulgar Marxism into his work while under the influence of Brecht. This "theologian" perspective was the position of Gershom Scholem but was rejected by Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1968: 156; Scholem, 2012: 198-236). Lastly, there is the *school of contradiction*, wherein Benjamin is said to have tried to "reconcile" materialism with Messianism but ultimately failed to do so due to their inherent irreconcilability. This is the line thought shared by Rolf Tiedemann and Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1993: 129-163; Löwy, 2005: 20; Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 187-189). Michael Löwy offers another possibility, which is shared by Susan Buck-Morss (Buck-Morss, 1991: 216-252; Löwy, 2005). In

this analysis, which my own reading has led me to agree with, Walter Benjamin is *both* a Marxist

(secular philosopher) and a theologian (or "theologist" as Habermas' writes) and alloys the two

without collapsing one into the other, i.e. without sublating religion into Historical Materialism

or vice versa. As stated before, I do not follow the idea that Benjamin merely secularized the

theological and/or Jewish Messianic elements by translating it into profane terms, nor do I think

he's attempting to "reconcile" the irreconcilable sacred and profane, as both Marxist and

theological terms are often deployed simultaneously while maintaining their own original

meaning; but rather the theological is "transliterated," i.e. it remains religious but is given a new

medium by which it works upon the world: critical philosophy. According to Susan Buck-Morss,

Adorno supported Benjamin's foray into theology, but balked at his resistance against alloying

theology and Marxism (Buck-Morss, 1979: 140-141). "The difficulty," she writes, "was that, [for

Adorno] instead of really integrating the two poles of theology and Marxism, Benjamin's

writings tended to present them side by side" (Buck-Morss, 1979: 141). In this way, theology

would "assist" Historical Materialism in the critique of modernity, capitalism, nationalism,

authoritarianism, positivism and the *world-as-it-is,* but in no way did Historical Materialism and

theology become identical – or alloyed – in Benjamin's thought. On this point I agree with

Tiedemann's interpretation of Benjamin's use of theology – the two spheres remain separated

(but complimentary), i.e. irreconcilable (but cooperative) (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 189).[67] Or,

as Michael Löwy has suggested, the sacred and the profane engage each other within Benjamin's

"German-Jewish thought" in a "mutual relationship that links the two spheres without

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[67] Where I disagree with Tiedemann is in his claim that Benjamin actively tries to reconcile theology and Historical
Materialism, but ultimately failed to do so. Habermas has advances this position as well, stating that "my thesis is
that Benjamin did not resolve his intention to unite Enlightenment and mysticism, because the theologist in him was
not able to understand how to make the Messianic theory of experience serviceable for historical materialism
(Habermas, 1972: 207). I disagree; it seems to me that Benjamin didn't fail to reconcile them because he seems to
never really attempted to reconcile them. Rather theology and Historical Materialism are presented by Benjamin in
complimentary positions – side by side; they *cohabitated* in the same project, but remained distinguishable –
differentiated, not sublimated, and thus complimentary.

suppressing either one" (Löwy, 1991: 22-23). The evidence for this claim can be found

throughout the seventeen theses that comprise Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History* as

well as their lesser known variants, but this is especially poignant in Benjamin's opening thesis,

as we'll see.[68]

Walter Benjamin begins his 1940 collections of theses with the following enigmatic

image:

> There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could
> respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure
> the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in
> its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors
> created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a
> hunchbacked dwarf – a master at chess – sat inside and guided the puppet's
> hands by means of strings. One can image a philosophic counterpart to this
> apparatus. The puppet, called 'historical materialism,' is to win all the time. It
> can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which
> today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight (Löwy, 2005:
> 23)[69] Benjamin, 1969: 253).

Wolfgang von Kempelen's "Chess Turk" (*Schachtürke*), which became familiar to Benjamin via

Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's story "Maelzel's Chess Player," is an image of a

Turkish automaton who appears to have the skills of a master chess player, defeating any and all

opponents (Löwy, 2005: 25). To those who play against this machine, it is a mystery as to how

the seemingly inanimate object has acquired the skills to win a complex game of chess. What has

given it this ability? How does a mindless "automaton" defeat the animate in a game of skill,

foresight and anticipation? The secret to Kempelen's *Schachtürke* is the "hunchback" who hides

within the table upon which the chessboard sits. This "hunchback" is a master chess player and

he, through the use of a system of strings, pulleys and mirrors, controls the inanimate Turk's

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[68] Michael Löwy has included the "variants" of the theses in his 2005 book *Fire Alarm,* wherein Benjamin's own
French translations of the original German are often referred to for clarification.
[69] An alternative translation of Benjamin's thesis can be found in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, which was
edited by Hannah Arendt. I prefer Löwy's translation, as it appears to be closer to the original German of Benjamin.

every move, unbeknownst to the opponent. Nevertheless, the secret is never revealed; the hunchback, whose deformity requires him to remain hidden, keeps within the box, satisfied to win over those who would ridicule and mock him in public.[70] Thus, it is only an illusion that the *Schachtürke* itself has won the game.

As Benjamin wrote, with this enigmatic image he sees a "counterpart" to Historical Materialism's relationship to theology. In his mind, the Turkish "automaton" represents Historical Materialism, and the crafty "hunchback dwarf" represents theology. They are not one in the same, but remain separate with differentiated roles. At face value, it seems to appear that theology controls Historical Materialism, since it pulls the strings. This would seem to give theology a superior role in the struggle against the world-as-it-is, for it is the ugly but wise hunchback that truly defeats the opponent. The inanimate Turk, i.e. Historical Materialism, is the agentless façade through which theology acts upon the world. In this interpretation, philosophy is returned to its historic position, as *ancilla theologiae* (servant of theology), as it was in medieval Scholasticism. Nevertheless, the façade is a necessity for theology. The "hunchback" or "dwarf" cannot make itself openly present in a world in which God is dead; theology is thoroughly discredited, associated with cultural backwardness and clerical abuse, and is viewed as unscientific and therefore epistemologically unjustifiable. As Michael Löwy has written, "Theology, like the dwarf in the allegory, can act today only in a concealed fashion in the interior of historical materialism. In a rationalist and unbelieving age, it is 'wizened and disreputable' (to quote Benjamin's French translation) and has to hide itself away" (2005: 26-27).

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[70] According to Hannah Arendt, Benjamin appropriated the image of the "little hunchback" (*bucklicht Männlein*) from the German Fairy-tale *Des Knaben Wunderhorn.* Often in Benjamin's youth, his mother told him that this little hunchback was responsible for all his calamities. *"Ungeschickt lässt grüssen"* (Mr. Bungle sends his regards) she would tell him, as did so many other German mothers in this time period (Arendt, 1968: 158).

Nevertheless, theology has a long history, and has learned much about humanity along the way. Part of its ugliness we can surmise is not only that it is epistemologically "disreputable" in a scientific age, as Löwy suggests, but also that it has so often betrayed its own *contra mundum* and prophetic nature and its own moral code; it has too often capitulated to unjust power and legitimated and justified the ruling classes' domination throughout history. In other words, theology is more than partly responsible for its own deformity, its own ugliness, for it is self-mutilated. As such, it is partially responsible for its own need to stay hidden. On the other hand, Benjamin's overall positive judgment of theology, especially its liberational potentials, lead us to surmise that the still preserved but often hidden negativity of theology can be "enlisted" in the struggle against history as barbarity and catastrophe. Why? Theology, as we have already stated, at its most prophetic refuses to be collapsed into the miserable imminence of the given, it points outside the bounds of the dominating status quo, it remembers the unjust murders of the innocent victims that populate the past like decomposing corpses in an overburdened cemetery, it views history from the outsider perspective of the Messianic – not from the perspective of the rulers, powerful or wealthy, or even from the optimistic standpoint of inevitable progress. Lastly, theology is not bound to the positivist reduction of reality merely to that which can be measured. If positivism is the *metaphysics of that which is the case*, then theology is that which escapes such confinement by measurement and rather points to what *ought to be the case*.

However, the idea that theology has a superior position to Historical Materialism in Benjamin's analogy overlooks an important phrase within the thesis itself; Benjamin writes that Historical Materialism "enlists the services of theology," giving us the impression that it is not theology at all that is in charge, but rather that Historical Materialism somehow employs

theology to do *its* bidding. In this reading, Historical Materialism remains master and theology its *ancilla* (servant), reversing the prior interpretation that positioned theology in a superior role. There seems to be a paradox here. This is the position of Rolf Tiedemann, who writes that Historical Materialism "is in control… theology is the servant who must do the work – who must take care of the thinking" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 190). But in my opinion, this position is simply untenable; other than the short phrase about Historical Materialism's *enlistment* of theology, the whole rest of the image seems to suggest that theology – which is pulling the strings that inevitably defeat the opponent – is in control of the inanimate puppet. This leaves us in a perplexed position: the image suggests that Historical Materialism has enough agency to "enlist" theology in its cause, but theology seems to do all the *heavy lifting* – or "thinking" – in the struggle. If we take both claims seriously, then we are forced to accept that we have two different agents working together in some form of an alliance, neither one is "superior" per se. What then are their roles in Benjamin's conception?

If we read carefully, we may discover that it is possible that there is no master/servant relationship between the two, but rather one of cooperation, wherein one or the other become the public face of the social force when in a given religious and/or secular society. In other words, when religion is the predominant language through which society experiences the world, then religion becomes the public face, as it is the language that is recognized and understood by the society, while philosophy pulls the strings. When society has become thoroughly secularized, as in Benjamin's time, the secular face, in this case Historical Materialism, become the public face for the movement, and theology continues to be the hidden animating force. As history can attest, in religious times, secularity can be revolutionary; in secular times, religion can be revolutionary. However, taking Benjamin's analogy as a given, both contain *revolutionary potentials*; if they

269

didn't, Benjamin would not have enlisted them both to win the fight against history as perpetual barbarity.

If this reading has merit, we can surmise that Benjamin is not trying to collapse religious semantic and semiotic materials into secular philosophy, as Brecht would have it, nor is Benjamin disguising theology within Marxian terms as Scholem would think, nor is he somehow harmonizing or reconciling the secularity of Historical Materialism with theology, as Habermas would advance, but rather they have formed a strategic alliance.[71] This alliance would sure to be uneasy at times, but if it is to "win all the time," it is clear that Benjamin thinks that both revolutionary forms of thought must be involved equally in the task. Without theology, Historical Materialism too easily falls victim to scientism and positivism, or a Soviet style triumphalism that betrays the negativity of Marx's critique of history and society; and without the class consciousness of Historical Materialism, theology too often is diabolically transformed into part of the ruling ideology of the ruling classes. As Tiedemann has written, "just as true theology points towards materialism, so it is only true materialism that first brings theology home. At times historical materialism has to learn from theology that there is no redemption, unless it is complete" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 204).

The Angel of History

The IX thesis in Walter Benjamin's series is probably the most famous, for it seems the most enigmatic and otherworldly of the theses. In this image, Benjamin invokes a small oil

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[71] Rolf Tiedemann does not follow Habermas' claim that Benjamin failed to reconcile Historical Materialism and theology, as Löwy suggests, rather Tiedemann is very clear: Benjamin wasn't trying to reconciled them, at least not in Theses I. Tiedemann writes, "Benjamin seeks a form of cooperation between historical materialism and theology in which they can do more than take up the struggle, they can win" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 190-191).

painting of a non-traditional looking angel by Paul Klee, entitled *Angelus Novus* (New Angel), which Benjamin acquired in his youth and often used as a meditative focal point (Scholem, 2012: 198-236; Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 178). At first sight, the angel looks to be no more than a rudimentary sketch of what seems to be a bird with a human head, standing aghast, with its mouth open, and with eyes affixed to something outside of the picture. However, for Benjamin, this image represents something much more sinister than an odd looking angel. There is something apocalyptic, eschatological, and imminent about it. He interprets Klee's image in this way,

> There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus.* It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at its feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows towards the sky. What we call progress is this storm (Benjamin in Löwy, 2005: 62).

In this image, Benjamin takes the position of the third-person narrator who witnesses something outside of the normal human view of history. He witnesses the witness of history. In other words, he's watching the angel as the angel watches history. Through the eyes of the Angel, who stands beyond the realm of human perceptions, and with his back to the future, he can see history in its entirety; he witnesses the false appearance of history as "progress," and sees history for what it really is: *one single catastrophe.*[72] In taking the theological perspective of the *Angelus Novus*, the ideology of continual betterment, that history is on an inevitable trajectory towards its own perfection, is seen for what it is – a false claim that intentionally forgets history's victims as it

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[72] Hannah Arendt likens Benjamin's Angel of History to the *flâneur* in his *Arcades Project,* wherein he alone experiences the secret meaning of mundane things and experiences (Arendt, 1968: 164-165).

blindly marches forward like a violent storm. "Hell is not something that awaits us" Benjamin writes in his *Arcades Project,* but rather is "this life here and now," and that is predicated on a *single* history of hellish existence (Benjamin, 1999: 473; Ott, 2016: 35). In this sense, there is no negative that produces the positive; there is only the negative. In his *Arcades Project,* Benjamin elaborates on this hellish nature of modern sameness, writing,

> Modernity, the time of hell. The punishments of hell are always the newest thing going in this domain. What is at issue is not that "the same thing happens over and over" (much less is it a question here of eternal return), but rather that the face of the world, the colossal head, precisely in what is newest never alters – that this "newest" remains, in every respect, the same. This constitutes the eternity of hell and the sadist's delight in innovation. To determine the totality of traits which define this "modernity" is to represent hell (Benjamin, 1999: 842-843).

Because this angel has a messianic vantage point, it can see this hell clearly. It can see the victims that have been long forgotten by humanity. It witnesses to the unjustness of their fate, and it wishes to "wake" them and "make whole what has been smashed," but nevertheless it cannot, for two reasons. First, the angel is powerless when caught up within the storm of "progress," which uncontrollably sweeps it towards the future, and second, Messianic restoration is the role of the Messiah alone; the Angel cannot usurp this uniquely appointed role (Benjamin in Löwy, 2005: 62; Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 178).

As seen from the perspective of the angel of history, humankind shares the fate of Sisyphus, who was condemned to an infernal life of catastrophic repetition – *Immergleich* (always the same) – the "mythic, homogenous, empty time" of the eternal return (Wolin, 1982: 48).[73] Because history is presented as a chain of events, we experience calamity as momentary, periodic, or episodic, but not permanent. The serene moments in between the times of immediate horror and terror give us reasons to believe that the human condition is not inherently or

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[73] Habermas describes this "single catastrophe" as the "permanence of the unbearable" and "progress" as the "eternal return of catastrophe" (Habermas, 1983: 136).

completely horrifying, brutal, or cruel, but rather the continuum of progress is only *interrupted* by moments of calamity, but always remains tethered to the telos of progress. In other words, the storm of progress might slow down, experience turbulence, but it is always moving forward towards something better. Thus history is *fluctuat nec mergitur.*[74] Benjamin doesn't see it this way at all. He wrote in the notes for his Baudelaire essay, that "the fact that 'everything just keeps on going' is the catastrophe" (Benjamin in Habermas, 1983: 137). Additionally, from the theological vantage point of the *Angelus Novus*, the vantage point that his pessimism has brought him to, history gives no reason to be optimistic, as "catastrophe" is not simply an "ever-present possibility," but rather that "what in each case is given" (Benjamin, 1999: 473).

Benjamin uses this angelic/Messianic perspective to articulate a vision of history that runs counter to the dominant positivistic, scientistic and even Hegelian and Marxist optimism – i.e. Enlightenment optimism – that conjures the positive advance of history within the continuum of calamities (Wolin, 1982: 269). The common historical notion that the past merely sheds light on how well the present is and how even better the future will be since "progress" is continuously advancing, is not acceptable for Benjamin. Nor does he find acceptable the idea that historical progress is birthed by historical catastrophe, as it is often expressed in Iranaean forms of theology and later by Hegel.[75] From his Kabbalist perspective, such a callous forgetting of past suffering and revolutionary praxis, born of unwarranted optimism, is unforgiveable (Buck-Morss, 1991: 249-252). Rather remembrance has to rescue moments of past revolutionary praxis, forgotten dreams and lost opportunities, as well as reconstruct the erasure of past suffering, all of which never make it into the footnotes of the positivist historians. Such memories have to be delivered to the present in order to "render them productive again in our

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[74] "Tossed but not sunk."
[75] Saint Irenaeus was a second century Christian theologian who was immensely influential in the development of core Christian theological claims.

own striving and action" (Haker in Dickinson and Symons, 2016: 297). For in remembrance redemption is possible, even if limited. Active forgetting, i.e. intentional forgetting, or a forgetting via negligence, forgoes redemption altogether: the victims are no longer present in the reality of the living. For Benjamin, the Historical Materialist historian understands this and takes his task of remembering the innocent victim seriously.

Yet it is hard to disagree with the positivist concerning the finality of history without falling back into some *longing for* a redemptive form of mysticism. For the positivist, the past is irretrievably gone, the dead are dead, and nothing can be done about it. Even Horkheimer, in a letter dated March 16, 1937, mournfully attested to the finality of the dead, writing to Benjamin that, "the determination of incompleteness is idealistic if completeness is not compromised within it. Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain… if one takes the lack of closure entirely seriously, one must believe in the Last Judgment" (Horkheimer in Benjamin, 1999: 471). According to Rolf Tiedemann, Benjamin's *Thesen* can be seen as a continuation of this discussion between himself and Horkheimer, wherein Benjamin attempts to "justify the theological moments" of his thinking "in the face of Horkheimer's pronounced," and rather pessimistic, form of "materialism" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 183). Such a theological "concept of history" can be found, for example, in his *Arcades Project,* wherein he argues against a positivistic or "scientific" method of history in favor of one that is theological.[76] He writes,

> The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance (*Eingedenken*). What science has "determined," remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in

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[76] Although it was never technically finished, the *Arcades Project* was written between 1927 and 1940, the later year being the same year that Benjamin wrote his *Theses on the Concept of History*. This chronological closeness helps explain the spillover of content and critique between the two works.

remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts (Benjamin, 1999: 471).

Seeing history as "complete," the finality of the past being absolute, the single role of the positivist historian is then to accurately record what has happened to the best of their ability. However, as Benjamin knows, those who dominate within history construct the official history that dominates our memory of that history, which, from the perspective of the victims and the angelic/Messianic, is unimaginable, just as it is unjust. In writing about the positivist historian who inherently empathizes with the victors of history, Benjamin reminds us of the barbarity within the victors "cultural" achievements. He writes,

> Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called "cultural treasures," and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case, these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. *There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism* (Benjamin in Löwy, 2005: 47).

What we see as great cultural achievements, Benjamin, from the perspective of the *Angelus Novus,* sees the barbaric lineage that created it. From the workers, serfs, and artisans who built the castles and cathedrals, to the slaves and soldiers who fought and died to build empires for their masters, no "document" of historical importance is free from such suffering and barbarity. All are predicated on the suffering of the many at the hands of the few. Nevertheless, the positivist historians, who exclusively focuses on the imminent greatness of the achievement itself, bleaches out the pain and suffering that made them possible and now lies flattened underneath the apparent *greatness* of the cultural "documents" itself. Nevertheless, such pain and suffering recalcitrantly remain imbedded within those cultural achievements, which is made

identifiable when the Historical Materialist historian takes on the perspective of the messianic, the perspective of the *Angelus Novus*.

In Marxist terms, with history being the unrelenting continuum of class warfare, the recording of history should also be seen as an integral part of that warfare. The victors' triumphal deeds are faithfully recorded while the lives and deeds of their victims are forgotten, as Horkheimer wrote, once the consciousness of those who remember expires. Even when the victims were the true creators of the cultural achievements, their due remembrance is never given by the positivist historian. For Benjamin, the critical historian, influenced by Historical Materialism, must adopt the theological perspective of the *Angelus Novus* if he does not want to commit the same injustices of the positivist historian: the systematic *apologia for unjust and cruel power.* According to Benjamin, such forgetting is "meant to cover up the revolutionary moments in the occurrence of history" (Benjamin, 1999: 474). The history of unjust suffering, nor the history of revolutionary attempts to break the historical continuum, i.e. history *brushed against the grain*, cannot be remembered for the positivist historian – it is not in their interest to do so. For in remembrance, the contemporary age is called upon by the past to realize its own "weak messianic power," which may redeem the past by engaging in its own future-oriented remembrance translated into revolutionary praxis (Benjamin in Löwy, 2005: 30).[77] Redemption (*Erlösung*) for the dead may be found, even if only in a weak form, via revolutionary activity that negates the historical continuum of class warfare, and in doing so finds "reparation for the

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[77] Löwy understands the qualifier "weak" as meaning "anything but assured" or "merely a slim possibility" (Löwy, 2005: 32). However, I think this misses the point. Remembering Benjamin's *Theological-Political Fragment,* in which he states that "only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic," I suggest the Benjamin's use of the term "weak" to mean "similar to," as in the revolutionary potential within the present has similar redemptive qualities in terms of what it can do for past victims. However, "weak" indicates that it is limited, although it is similar in quality. Therefore, revolution itself does not have the ability to "complete" such a messianic project. That alone is the task of the Messiah, as stated in Benjamin's *Fragment.* In that sense, revolution can *aid* in the consummation of history and the redemption of the dead through its actions, but only in a limited sense since it cannot raise the dead and right the wrongs of the past. Consequently, it cannot replace the Messiah itself; it can only act on its behalf.

despair and desolation (*Trostlosigkeit, Verlassenheit*) of the past" (Löwy, 2005: 30). According to Thesis XIV, bringing the remembrance of the lost and forgotten to the present contributes to the possibility of *Jetztzeit* (now-time), the time pregnant with revolutionary potential that is detached from the normal time continuum of catastrophe – the "homogenous empty time" of the ruling class.[78] Revolutionaries engages in "tiger leaps" into the past to draw from it resources by which the revolution of the present can come to fruition (Benjamin, 1969: 261; Scholem, 2012: 233-235).[79]

According to Rolf Tiedemann, the "paradise" from which the "wind blows" is a significant factor in Benjamin's interpretation of the Klee's image. The memory of a "lost paradise," the propulsive impulse that unites all mankind – the longing for the "totally Other," from whom the angel is sent – "still propels humanity onward" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 179). "This utopian strength is an impulse," Tiedemann writes, "which has not yet expired. Clearly religion has done much to preserve it, especially Judaism. *This impulse has found its way into philosophy* in general and even lives on in the Marxian hope of an empire of freedom. It *can* only live on as an impulse, as a promise which does not fetishize what it promises" (Tiedemann in Smith, 1989: 179).[80] Yet philosophy, although it can share in some qualities of the Messiah,

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[78] *Jetztzeit* is understood not as *gegenwart,* the "present," but rather as to the mystical *nunc stans,* akin to a "eternal now," wherein eternity stands still within the present. One can think of it this way: if eternity stands still within a given time, the accumulation of injustices, unnecessary suffering, class domination, etc. are also present with that moment, pushing against that which restrains it. In fact, if all of history is class warfare, or catastrophe "piling wreckage upon wreckage," then eternity as history of injustice is concentrated within a small timeframe: *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin, 1969: 257, 261). For Benjamin, the revolutionary classes are aware that they are about to explode the historical continuum by giving voice to the eternity of past injury.

[79] Scholem is reticent to say whether he believes *Jetztzeit* is the work of revolutionaries or the Messiah (Scholem, 2012: 235). From the look of the historical examples Benjamin cites in this particular thesis, Robespierre and Marx, as well as its opposition, the "ruling class," it would seem to suggest that Benjamin understand the ability to substantiate *Jetztzeit* to be a trait of the "weak messianic power" that humanity possesses, as opposed to belonging to the total redeeming power of the Messiah, who would even end *Jetztzeit* along with the normal time continuum, i.e. history as catastrophe.

[80] Emphasis added. Although Tiedemann advances the idea that the utopian impulse of religion has migrated into philosophy, which both Adorno and Benjamin would consent to, Habermas is not so sure that such an impulse can even survive there. In his essay on Walter Benjamin, in the book *Philosophical-Political Profiles,* Habermas writes,

i.e. it can be *messianic,* like the Angel itself, it nevertheless cannot usurp the role of the *Messiah.* Because it is only an approximation, its Messiah-like power is *weak* and cannot bring about a total redemption.

In taking this perspective, the historical materialist historian must stand within the vantage point of the *Angelus Novus* – of the theological – to witness and remember the suffering embedded within all great cultural achievements, if he wants to enlist the past in the present struggle (Benjamin in Löwy, 2005: 47). This sort of theologically infused historian plays a key role in future redemption of the dead; he is the "herald who invites the dead to the table," for he is not limited to the positivistic methodology, which serves as an apologia for the hellish status quo, but can retrieve the dead, and in doing so, lead "the past to bring the present into a critical state" (Benjamin, 1999: 471, 473, 481).

Through the critical historian, both theology and Historical Materialism are in service to the coming of *apocatastasis* and *tikkun* – the "redemption of all things to their primal state" – a "universal salvation" – "the messianic restoration and repair which mends and restores the original being of things, and of history as well, after they have been smashed and corrupted" (Löwy, 2005: 35; Eiland and Jennings, 2014: 659; Scholem, 2012: 233-234). For Benjamin, the Historical Materialist historian plays a pivotal role in the contemporary struggle for human emancipation, as his work is an integral part of class struggle. Understanding history from within a theological perspective, he keeps alive the utopian promise, this impulse-towards-something-

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that "today not even religion is a private matter, but with the atheism of the masses the utopian content of the tradition has gone under as well. Philosophy has been stripped of its metaphysical claim, but within the dominant scientism even the constructions before which a wretched reality was supposed to justify itself have disintegrated." Nevertheless, Habermas continues to see some validity in the theological-cum-philosophical work of Adorno and Benjamin. He writes, "In opposition to the false overcoming of religion, Adorno – like Benjamin an atheist, if not in the same way – proposes bringing in utopian contents as the ferment for an uncompromisingly critical thought, but precisely not in the form of a universalized secular illumination. In opposition to the false overcoming of philosophy, Adorno – an antipositivist, like Benjamin – proposes bringing a transcendent impetus into a critique that is in a certain way self-sufficient, but does not penetrate into the positive sciences in order to become universal in the form of a self-reflection of the sciences" (Habermas, 1983: 141-142).

other. And as such, this historian was Benjamin's vehicle for *tikkun,* and the image of the angel was the transfiguration of that historian from collector of tales to revolutionary actor (Tiedemann, 1989: 181).

At the very end of Adorno's long and torturous book *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life,* wherein he reflects on the brokenness of existence, he puts a literary exclamation point that could easily have come at the end of Benjamin's *Thesen,* as it confirms the necessity of viewing history from the perspective of the Messianic, or the *Angelus Novus,* from the "standpoint of redemption." Adorno writes,

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters (Adorno, 2005: 247).

Escaping Hopeless Metaphysics: Habermas' rejection of Benjamin's Pessimism

If Benjamin is right, and history is but one "single catastrophe" piling wreckage upon wreckage, which he presents as being essentially inescapable without the entrance of the

Messianic, which is the only entity that can raise the dead and therefore *complete* redemption, are then we not sliding into a fatalistic metaphysics, wherein the historical developments that have led to civilizational advances, in the realm of universal ethics, international law, medicine and scientific knowledge, are hereafter ignored? Are they not universally beneficial developments made *within* history? Even if these good developments cannot be universalized in terms of all history as progress, do they not at minimum point to some modicum of "progress" within a forward moving trajectory? If all of history stands condemned to vacuous meaninglessness, non-fulfillment, the eternal return of what was already witnessed and experienced yesterday, how then have we not lapsed – or even failed to escape – the deepest darkness of the barbarous Middle Ages? Has Benjamin's entrenched pessimism left us with such hypercritical lenses that Critical Theory – or at least Benjamin himself – constitutionally cannot recognize the moments of good and genuine progress, even if merely incremental or fleeting, in history? Even in the *good* are we to only witness the *not good*? How does solidarity with the oppressed, downtrodden, marginalized and forgotten translate into something better – a future society of reconciliation and peace – if we already reject the possibility that history, in and of itself, can bring about such a development? Does this not lead us into defeatist metaphysical worldview whereby we abandon all hope of assisting the finite individual in their moments of despair, misery and suffering, for nothing ever gets better? In other words, does the messianic vantage point, which the *Angelus Novus* witnesses history from, condemn us to the eternal return? Does then the angel represent perpetual defeat, if from its vantage point we see that everything is catastrophe? If so, why then attempt to change it? If there is no redemption *outside* of history, if there is no redemption *within* history, why then fight history – for there is no exit door from history as perpetual barbarity and suffering.

This type of retreat into political paralysis on the basis of a defeatist metaphysics has been Jürgen Habermas' critique of both Benjamin and Adorno's historical-philosophical outlook (Habermas, 1976). Although he recognizes that their work was conditioned by the horror and terror of fascism, the betrayal of the Soviet Union, and, at least for Adorno, the absolute catastrophe of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Habermas is not ready to submit to such collapsed defeatism: the "eternal return of catastrophe" (Habermas, 1983: 136). Rather, he is prepared to recognize the small achievements of liberal/bourgeois society, even while critiquing its inherent and all the time imminent shortcomings. While Habermas' rejection of their radical negativity towards the *world-as-it-is*, has in many ways contributed to the "domestication of Critical Theory," it has nonetheless contributed in many ways to positive *reforms* within the present post-secular society (Thompson, 2016).[81]

Into the Post-Secular Society

In one such way, the Frankfurt School's attempts to translate religion into secular philosophy, has provided a similar template for religious communities to do the same in their struggle for recognition as equal members of modern secular-enlightened societies. In other words, religious communities may learn a lot from a philosophy that is open to religion, open to its unique contributions to human emancipation, open to its systems of interpretation, while remaining dedicated to autonomous reason and the primacy of the material existence, so much so

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[81] Terry Eagleton counts himself as one who wishes not to retreat from the first generation of the Frankfurt School's radical negativity towards bourgeois society. He believes that Benjamin's anti-historicism must be reloaded in the present moment. Because of the "reformist mythology" that threatens to diminish the drive towards a real revolutionary breakout of global capitalism – a permanent revolution ala Trotsky – he writes, "it is more than ever necessary to blast Benjamin's work out of its historical continuum, so that it may fertilize the present" (Eagleton, 2009: 179).

that it may help certain religious communities, especially religious minorities in Europe, to integrate and assimilate into their host countries while maintaining their religious identities.

In the next chapter, I will ask the question whether or not the process of translating religion into post-metaphysical language, which served as a basis for much of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, can be applied to Islam in the post-secular society. In other words, can the religious immigrant communities of Europe, especially the Muslims, learn from Critical Theory, from the atheistic (not atheist) leftist non-conformist Jews of the early and mid-twentieth century, and translate their deeply held religious views into secular philosophy?

Chapter 6: Religion Needs New Translators:
Habermas, the Post-Secular Society, Islam, and the Limits of the Translation Proviso

*Only those that are able to introduce into the secular domain the
essential contents of their religious traditions which point beyond
the merely human realm will also be able to rescue the substance
of the human.*[1]

~ Jürgen Habermas

Since the September 11th terrorist attack on New York and Washington D.C., the "capitalist citadels of western society," the second generation Critical Theorist Jürgen Habermas has increasingly returned to his interest in the role of religion in modern society (Habermas, 2003: 101; Müller-Doohm, 2016: 384).[2] This interest has led him to reflect on the nature of the Enlightenment's critique of religion, the *abstract negation* of which began most forcefully with whom I've called the "predecessors," and his immediate forbearers in the Frankfurt School and their *determinate negation* of religion, which, as we've seen, attempted to rescue certain elements within religion by sublating them into secular philosophy. Understanding the evolving conditions of western society since the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, Habermas reformed the first generation of Critical Theorists practice of sublating religious concepts into critical dialectical philosophy in light of the needs of the pluralistic post-secular society. While he may have "suspended" the utopian motif of the first generation, which was rooted in Judaism, especially in the *Bilderverbot*, he nevertheless continued to see some value in

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[1] Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing,* 5. Originally in Jürgen Habermas, *Politik, Kunst, Religion: Essays über zeitgenössische Philosophen.* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978), 142.

[2] According to Habermas' biographer, Stefan Müller-Doohm, "Habermas' interest in questions concerning the philosophy and sociology of religion [is] already evident in his early work and [does] not signal a new turn in his late work" (2016: 384). For his latest interest in religion, especially in light of September 11th, 2001, see Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 25-43; Jürgen Habermas et al, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age.* Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010; Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature.* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), 101-115; Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West.* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 3-25.

the idea of translating religion into reasoning accessible to all members of the political community (Löwenthal, 1987: 244-246). Religious citizens, he argued, needed to translate their deeply held convictions into *post-metaphysical thinking,* through which those insights and intuitions could vacate their closed semantic universe and enter into the public use of reasoning via public discourse (Habermas, 1992). But as we'll see in this chapter, when Habermas speaks of translating religion into post-metaphysical thinking he has a different purpose in mind that what Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin intended with their sublation of religion and theology. Habermas not only looks to religion as a possible resistant entity to the triumph of naturalism and/or scientism, he also looks to the potential of religion to *integrate* the faithful into the already existing society, whereas his forbearers looked to religion for its *non-integrative* elements on the basis of which society could be transformed. In other words, the utopian element, its *contra mundum* quality, had to be suspended so that religion could help weave the recalcitrantly faithful into a secular society. While the act of translating the rational content of religion into secular language may be similar, to what *end* it is translated is different than the generation of Critical Theorists that preceded him.

For Habermas, this change in direction is especially important in light of the increasingly multicultural nature of society in the West, and particularly as to how such a democratic and pluralist society relates to the presence of the "new enemy," i.e. Islam (Chérif, 2008: 20). Historically, this multicultural situation was only in its infancy during the post-WWII years of Adorno and Horkheimer, and therefore they did not adequately address the growing situation before their deaths. However, their sublation of religion did lay the foundation for Habermas' own work on the need for religion, especially Islam, to be transformed into post-metaphysical reason.

The ultimate purpose of this last chapter is to demonstrate that the Frankfurt School's *determinate negation* of religion – it's negation and preservation (*aufheben*) – continues on from the first generation of Critical Theorists through Jürgen Habermas' late work, with the addition that Habermas modifies their original determinate negation by changing the *purpose* of such a process – religion is to be "translated" into language accessible to all, which does not necessary imply the *negation* of religion (in any way) for the believer. Additionally, I will demonstrate that Habermas recognizes (1) philosophy's debt to religion, as it has a long history of translating semantics and semiotics into post-metaphysical reasoning, including in the work of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, (2) he demonstrates how it can be done, using the Judeo-Christian idea of the *Imago Dei* (image of God), and (3) he argues that Muslims should also engage in an active translation of their *moral-practical reasoning* into post-metaphysical reasoning so that those potentials may migrate into a robust discourse within the democratic public sphere. However, from my analysis, point three is most crucial to understanding where Habermas' translation project is underdeveloped. Habermas actively encourages Muslims to translate certain *moral-practical* potentials from Islam into language accessible outside of its traditional semantics, and while that may serve as a method of *investing* Muslims into the Western status quo, he fails to see the potential within Islam that I think is its most important: its *utopian* element, which it inherited from both Judaism and Christianity. It is not merely in what Islam can offer to the already existing society by way of moral insights and intuitions, but rather in its radical *negativity* – its *adversus mundum geist*, that could most fertilize the post-secular society. Preserving and sublating into Critical Theory such negativity of Judaism was a core concern for Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin's philosophy of religion, so much so that at least Horkheimer and Löwenthal claimed it to be the *basis* of Critical Theory. Indeed, as I've argued in the

285

previous chapter, such religious negativity – especially the *Bilderverbot* – was *co-determinate* in Critical Theory; it "arises from" such radical religious notions (Horkheimer in Claussen, 2008: 365; Löwenthal, 1987; 112). Yet just as Habermas "suspended," or even more accurately *abandoned* the religiously-rooted utopian motif of the first generation, as Löwenthal asserts, he seems to have also abandoned (or failed to recognize) the religious-rooted utopian element within Islam in favor of the immediate needs of the pluralistic post-secular society, i.e. its need for pragmatic answers to the systemic problems of multiculturalism (Löwenthal, 1987: 244-246).

It is also possible that he thinks it inappropriate or unfeasible for the negativity of Islam to be translated within the conditions of the post-secular society. This could be for two possible reasons: first, the temptation to collapse such negativity into *reactionary-negativity*, i.e. the geist of fundamentalist faith, at the expense of *progressive-negativity,* the *geist* of democratic-revolutionary faith, is too palpable, as it would only augment the already existing corpus of fundamentalist Islam. This temptation is especially poignant in light of the intensity of the false binary that pits the West against Islam – *Jihād vs. McWorld* – which often forces individuals to falsely choose between two seemingly exclusive options. Second, the Enlightenment fundamentalists may reject the effort of Muslims to enter into the public discourse via their translated arguments as a superficial Trojan Horse, understanding that critique of the West, even if it is legitimate critique, is not the prerogative of the "other" (Buruma, 2006). Either way, he does not go as far with religion as his Jewish predecessors in the Frankfurt School, and this I think is the most poignant deficiency in Habermas' philosophy of religion.

Because of the growing frequency of terrorist attacks, Habermas' work on translating Islam into publically accessible reasoning has taken on a new sense of urgency. This urgency, I think, is another factor that has led him to emphasize merely the *integrative* potentials of religion

at the expense of the *non-integrative*. Personal investment in the future of Europe, the integration of Muslim communities, as well as the integration of their ideas within the democratic public sphere, are all seen as way of answering the threat of religious fundamentalism and terrorism while respecting the fundamental rights of religious citizens and their secular counterparts (Habermas, 2008: 251-352). However, as I will argue, this focus on translating the integrative semantics and semiotics of Islam at the expense of Islam's inherent *negativity*, which it shares with Judaism and Christianity, is too limiting – but mirrors the same pivot away from the first generation of Critical Theorists when his "theoretical realism" "uncoupled" the *contra mundum* utopian motif from Critical Theory, thus "domesticating" Critical Theory within the confines of post-metaphysics, i.e. language acceptable within "social science and philosophy of language" (Löwenthal, 1987: 245; Thompson, 2016; Wolin, 1990: 33-34). From my perspective, the very resources he should seek are not merely in the *moral-practical rationality* of Islam, but also its *prophetic negativity* – especially in regards to its possible contribution to liberational and emancipatory causes, not to mention the current struggle against religious fundamentalism and religiously inspired terrorism. As I will argue, Islam's moral code alone will only go so far in solving the difficulties of multiculturalism, especially considering its moral code is so similar to Christianity's, which is already, within the conditions of secularity and liberalism, been so thoroughly forgotten and/or discredited, despite its weak residuals within the modern ethical life. Rather it is the prophetic resolve to see the *world-as-it-is* be replaced by the *world-as-it-should-be*, which is born out of Islam's own propulsive utopian impulse, that provides the resources for Islam to contribute to modern Europe in a meaningful way. Such a contribution is beyond the isolated moral insights and intuitions that Habermas currently seeks, especially if the goal is

287

peace – which implies the desire for peace's perpetuity – and not simply an armistice between the religious and the secular (Derrida in Chérif, 2008: 59-60).

In order to demonstrate the comprehensive social forces that impelled Habermas' to "suspend" or even abandon the *determinate negation* of religion's most radical potentials, ala Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin, I must explain what exactly the "post-secular" society is, what are its defining coordinates, and how it relates to religion, so that we can thoroughly understand why Habermas thinks his theory of religions' translation is more appropriate, and therefore more adequate, to the nature of the multicultural post-secular society of Europe. From this vantage point, we can begin to critique his "translation proviso" and its deficiencies in the face of the present situation in comparison to his Jewish predecessors' sublation of religion into Critical Theory.

Laying out the Geography: What is the "Post-Secular Society"?

Turning his attention to the affluent "secular" societies of the West, i.e. Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Habermas notes that while the population maintains a "more or less universal… awareness of belonging to a secularized society," this awareness nonetheless has not "changed sufficiently" the "religious habits and convictions of the local populations" (Habermas, 2009: 59). In other words, secularity has not fully replaced the religious way of life, as many once thought it would. Taking stock of this situation, Habermas contends that we're now living in what he describes as a "post-secular society," wherein the reality of such a situation has consequently produced a *change in consciousness*: a reevaluation of religion and opening up to religious voices within the conditions of secular modernity. The post-secular society is

288

characterized by two defining conditions: First, these societies are thoroughly secular in their political-economics, i.e. religion has been divorced from state and economic power. Second, despite such civil secularity, there remains within society a substantial degree of religiosity among a sizeable part of the population. When these two conditions are met, he feels confident in describing such a society as being "post-secular." To be clear, the prefix "post" in this sense does not indicate a death of secularity, and/or somehow a return to religion. There is nothing in Habermas' theory what would indicate to the religious believer that secularity's triumph over religion has come to an end, and that western society is somehow moving behind the Enlightenment. Rather, the term "post-secular" refers to a shift in our understanding of the nature of modern secularity, one in which religion recalcitrantly refuses to completely vacate history as it was once expected to do by traditional secularization theory, such as you find it in the works of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Rodney Stark and Peter Berger. It was once confidently argued that religion would eventually evaporate within western societies due to (1) the "progress of science and technology" and the subsequent "disenchantment" of the world, (2) the privatization of religion, wherein it became divorced from civic institutions and political power, and (3) the "development from agrarian to industrial and post-industrial societies," wherein levels of income, welfare and social securities increased, thus leaving the citizen with less existential and material insecurity and therefore less need for the comforts and consolations offered by religion (Habermas, 2009: 60). Religion, however, has defied such hypotheses and religious citizens have remained an integral part of the West's social life. No western nation, including those in Scandinavia, which has the highest number of committed atheists, has been able to exorcise religion completely. Additionally, with the influx of religious migrants from

non-western nations, it appears to many that religiosity within these secular societies may actually be increasing (Habermas, 2009: 60-61).

According to Habermas, there is a corresponding perception that posits a "resurgence of religion" *globally*, which undermines the certitude in traditional secularization theory even further. Such a perception is due to the following factors: first, the "missionary expansion" of the major world religions, especially Catholicism and Islam, which he thinks are mainly conservative movements. As for Catholicism specifically, their dogmatic and doctrinal recalcitrance, as well as their transnational nature, in the face of an ever-expanding secularity helps them to resist the corrosive effects of modernity better than the more liberal National Protestant denomination, which, since they are more open to modernity, have collapsed under the weight of that same modernity (Habermas, 2009: 61; Müller-Doohm, 2016: 380). In this sense, *compromise* with modernity is the open flank, which weakens the denominations' ability to resist the astringent effects of modern epistemology, autonomous reason, multiculturalism, relativism and secular worldviews and lifestyles. The second factor is the rise of "fundamentalism," which "combat[s] the modern world" or "withdraw[s] from it," and insists on a return to the "exclusivity of premodern religious attitudes" (Habermas, 2009: 61; Habermas, 2002: 151). As the capitalist globalization (*mondialisation*) process expands its long reach into traditional societies, it dialectically engenders a fundamentalist and neophobic withdraw from the affected part of society as a way of defending traditional culture, which has become infected by systems that may be "economically advanced" but are also "ethically debilitated," what Habermas calls the "Social Darwinism of world politics" (Habermas in Müller-Doohm, 2016: 392; Pope Francis, 2013b: 32). Fundamentalism, in this sense, is not offensive, but rather inherently defensive. It is the "repression of cognitive dissonances" that occur when the believer is faced with the reality

that their exclusivist truths-claim cannot be upheld in a "universe of discourse shared with other religions and constrained by secular scientific knowledge," which the traditional society becomes increasingly exposed to through globalization (Habermas, 2006: 10-11).[3] Last, Habermas sees the "desecularization" of the Middle East, i.e. the resurrection of a more political form of Islam that expresses itself either through state control, i.e. Iran, or through terrorism, al-Qa'eda, contributes to the perception that religion is once again reloaded (Habermas, 2009: 62; 2010: 19-20).[4] We can now add the *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria* (ISIS) to the last factor, as it has since 2014 occupied large parts of the upper Fertile Crescent, governing it through its own bitterly harsh interpretation of Islam and *shari'a* law, and has engaged in international terrorism against western targets. These religiously-inspired symbolic earthquakes include the January 2015 attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and the *Hypercacher Kosher* market in Paris; the subsequent November 2015 "Bataclan" attack on Paris; the attack on Brussels in March of 2016; the cargo truck attack in Nice, France, on Bastille day, 2016; the execution of a 65-year-old French Priest, Jacques Hamel in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, in July of 2016; the cargo truck attack on the Christmas market in Berlin in December, 2016; the attack on the Istanbul nightclub on New Year's day, 2017, the Westminster attack in February of 2017, the attack on the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, in May of 2017, the London Bridge/Southwark attack in June of 2017, and the attack in Barcelona in August of 2017. All of these attacks contributed to the western perceptions that "religion" is not only not going away, it is engaged in a violent

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[3] For Habermas, the link between *modern* fundamentalism and *pre-modern* fundamentalism is the defensive stance it takes against the "disruption of traditional ways of life" (Habermas, 2006: 11).

[4] Rather ironically from a western perspective, *de-secularization* has often resulted in greater democracy, as secularity has often been imposed by despots and dictators. Undoubtedly, the Islamic Republic of Iran is more democratic than the rule of the Shah (as Habermas found out when he visited Iran in 2002), despite its current illiberal policies on a variety of issues. In the Arab world, democracy only existed for a year in Egypt, and that was under the governance of the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (Muslim Brotherhood) and their leader, President Mohammed Morsi. Morsi was later overthrown in a 2013 coup d'état by the secular general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and dictatorship was restored.

resurgence against those forces which have attempted to silence it, i.e. secularism, and therefore the West in general.[5]

Despite the increasing global integration and secularization of culture, politics, and economics through the advancement of the neo-liberal order, the above religious developments suggest to Habermas that it is really Europe, or even western society, that is on a *Sonderweg* (deviant path) with its "occidental rationalism," which was once meant to "serve as a model for the rest of the world," but now is now perceived to threaten much of the world (Habermas, 2008: 116; Habermas, 2009: 61; Habermas, 1984: 157-185).[6] In other words, it appears to many observers that secular Europe and the West in general are increasingly becoming secluded islands in a world that is rapidly embracing religion, or at least stubbornly holding on to it. This development has given rise to the idea that there may be *multiple modernities*, many of which will include religion as an integral facet of such modernities (Habermas, 2008: 115). As Habermas writes, "The West's own image of modernity seems to be undergoing a gestalt switch as if in a psychological experiment: what was assumed to be the normal model for the future of all other cultures is suddenly becoming the exception" (Habermas, 2008: 117).

But are these growing perceptions of a "gestalt switch" actually true? Habermas does not necessarily think so. He accepts the sociologists' overall analysis that lends support to the basic claim of traditional secularization theory – that as the world continues to be challenged by what

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[5] In the case of the assassinated priest Jacques Hamel, the assailants believed Christianity to be the accomplice to secularism, acting on the behalf of the West's secular imperialistic militarism.

[6] According to Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, such "occidental rationalism" is one of the main prisms by which the Muslim world perceives the problems that emanate from the secular West. From the perspective of many non-western Muslims, they write, "to be equipped with the mind of the West is like being an idiot savant, mentally defective but with a special gift for making arithmetic calculations. It is a mind without a soul, efficient, like a calculator, but hopeless at doing what is humanly important. The mind of the West is capable of great economic success, to be sure, and of developing and promoting advanced technology, but cannot grasp the higher things in life, for it lacks spirituality and understanding of human suffering" (Buruma and Margalit, 2004: 75). Indeed, the neo-colonization of the Muslim world by "occidental rationalism" is one of the main veins of resentment towards the West. Muslims are often cognizant of how such rationalism undermined the epistemological and moral foundations of Christianity and want to spare Islam the same fate.

Jacques Derrida calls the *triptych* (scientism, laicism and capitalism). As such, socio-political *attachment* to religion is dissipating globally, but religious attachments have yet to disappear among individuals (Habermas, 2008: 117; Habermas, 2009: 63; Derrida in Chérif, 2008: 49-54). Despite the multiple modernities theory, Habermas writes, "my impression is that the data collected globally still provide[s] surprisingly robust support for the defenders of the secularization thesis" (Habermas, 2009: 62). In light of this, we can suggest that the increased visibility of religious revivalism may be in part due to the secularizing pressures upon those traditionally religious societies; the more such societies are secularizing the more a public response is made visible, high-profile acts of terrorism being one form of response, along with new political-theologies and religiously-based political parties.

In an earlier age, religion provided a comprehensive interpretation of reality and an orientation of action, and through that it gave an inherent meaning to life. Yet in the modern period, religion is being replaced by secular ways-of-being that do not rely on traditional comprehensive religious worldviews to determine reality, truth, or lifestyle, etc. This basic paradigm has not veered course even though it often *appears* to have done so. In other words, there is a both a powerful *perception* of religion's resurgence on the world stage and a concrete *reality* of its decline. Thus, the West continues to *export secularity* while it *imports religion* via immigration. This seemingly explosive dynamic, this confluence of religion and the secular, can be witnessed most poignantly within those western nations that are secular, democratic and multicultural, and yet open to the political participation of religious citizens. These nations are composed of both religious and non-religious citizens who, being equally enfranchised citizens, contest their ideas in the *public sphere*, i.e. the realm of the rational-critical, where matters of public good are debated. It is in this situation that religion stubbornly remains a social factor

within secular society, and consequently a cause for conflict. In other words, Habermas writes, "today the description 'post-secular society' can be applied to public consciousness in Europe in so far as *for the time being* it has to 'adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment'" (Habermas, 2009: 63).[7] As such, the "post-secular society" is the secular society that recognizes – if not the permanent – at least the remaining degree to which religion continues to influence, guide and/or determine the lives of many individuals and groups within a pluralistic citizenry. As such, the recognition of such a condition calls upon the citizenry towards a friendly living together, wherein their various worldviews interpenetrate through a free and open discourse in the public sphere, which, according to the sociologist Nilüfer Göle, results in the reshaping of "dividing lines" and creates the "possibility of new configuration of both the secular and the religious" (Göle, 2015: 2). In other words, both the religious and the secular learn from each other, which can either be a positive process or can contribute to the ossification of already antagonistic positions.

This particular social-political and cultural situation has been accompanied by a *change in consciousness,* which Habermas suggests is an understanding that religion remains an integral component in the lives of individual citizens in the West despite the evaporation of religion within the public sphere and within public institutions. Additionally, the *change of consciousness* realizes the continual importance of religion within societies other than the West despite the fact of the secularization of their public institutions. Thus it implies that if secular citizens wish to maintain a pluralistic democratic society, there will have to be some reasonable accommodations for religious voices within the public sphere, who, even though they may maintain "premodern" worldviews, are nevertheless equal citizens and have the equal right to introduce their thoughts

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[7] Emphasis added. In his 2001 Peace Prize speech, *Faith and Knowledge* (*Glauben und Wissen*), Habermas describes the "post-secular society" as such; it is a society that "adapts to the fact that religious communities continue to exist in a context of ongoing secularization" (Habermas, 2003: 104).

into public discourse. Within western society, the reality of this *religion-that-remains* condition must be thoroughly understood if such a society wishes to remain fair, inclusive and democratic, without which the reality of coexistence will become increasingly tense and potentially violent.

What has brought on this *change in consciousness*? As Habermas begins to discuss the issues of Muslims in Europe, he explains that there are three aetiological factors responsible for the realization of this new *post-secular* condition. First, Habermas claims that the media has a role in "transform[ing] public consciousness," due in part because the "media-generated perception of the global conflicts... are often presented as hinging on religious strife" (Habermas, 2009: 63). Whether these conflicts are truly motivated by religion is not the issue. The *perception* of such a motivation leads many westerners to realize the relative nature of their secular mentality. In other words, perceptions disclose the idea that western secularity is not at the present moment the global norm, neither is it wished to be by many outside of the West. Even further, Habermas claims that, "this circumstance shakes the secular*istic* confidence that religion is *destined to disappear* and inoculates the secular understanding of the world against triumphalism" (Habermas, 2009: 63-64).[8] No longer can those living within a secular western society assume that cultural and social modernization entails the inevitable abandonment of religion. Confidence, or optimism, that western modernity, with its liberal democracy, individual and human rights, will become a globalized norm, is not justifiable.

Second, Habermas points to the increasing influence of religious actors within the cacophony of voices participating in "national public spheres," believing such voices are "increasingly assuming the role of 'communities of interpretation,'" wherein they influence the "formation of public opinion" by engaging in national discourses on a variety of pertinent issues (Habermas, 2009: 64). By engaging in such national discourses, such religious citizens not only

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[8] Emphasis added.

affirm their right to participate in the life of a secular republic, but contribute to the pluralistic society's "responsive sounding board" that aids in the determination of appropriate political regulation on a host of controversial moral problems, i.e. abortion, euthanasia, bio-medical ethics, animal rights and environmental sustainability (Habermas, 2009: 64). Additionally, Habermas writes that the presence of "foreign religious communities enhance the influence of the established churches and congregations," by confronting Christian citizens with the practice of a rival faith (Habermas, 2009: 64). This in turn heightens the awareness of the "public presence of religion" among the secular citizens, who are daily confronted with religious individuals who are equal citizens and are equally inclined to participate in the public life of the nation (Habermas, 2009: 64).

Last, immigrants from non-western countries, whether through "guest-worker" programs, asylum seekers (political refugees) and or economic refugees, have augmented the *change in consciousness* about religion in the modern secular society (Habermas, 2009: 64-65). Immigrants bring with them their religious traditions and ways of life that are not rooted within a western religious or secular worldview. In other words, while Europe has been accustomed to *confessional schisms* in terms of the Catholic and Protestant divisions, they do not have a history of *pluralism of religious confessions*, outside of the limited presence of Judaism (Habermas, 2009: 65). The fact of post-colonial pluralism, or as Habermas calls it, a "post-colonial immigrant society," which is the reality for most Western European countries, pushes forward the struggle to integrate and assimilate those from entirely different cultures within a single body-politic (Habermas, 2009: 65). The fact of cultural and religious pluralism, coupled with the "pressures of globalized labor markets," has led to the "humiliating conditions of growing social inequality," which leads many immigrants, especially among the second generation, to search for

answers to life's questions outside of the West's philosophical and cultural resources (Habermas, 2008: 65).[9] This is an acute problem especially for disaffected Muslim immigrants, who often fail to "Europeanize" Islam, and would rather "Islamize" Europe. The explicit and implicit demands of secularity contribute to religious radicalization, which eventually turns its angst against the secular society itself. While philosophers like Derrida no longer believe Europe wishes to remake the world outside of Europe in its own image, leaving that mission to the Americans, the pressure to *Europeanize* the *immigrant's* present lifeworld in France, Germany, the Netherlands, etc., echoes the bitter experience of European colonialism, wherein the immigrants' home-country was also *Europeanized* in the name of progress (Derrida in Chérif, 2008: 64; Fanon, 2005, 2008). The resulting turn towards a *reactionary* and *resentful* fundamentalism also contributes to secular society's *change in consciousness* regarding religion, as the apparent signs of such a rejection of assimilation are routinely encountered in the public sphere via anti-West protests, insistence on conservative dress, verbal and physical abuse of women, the demands for religious exemptions from national laws, and the impassioned desire for Muslims to establish parallel religious legal systems (*Shari'a*) that are recognized by the state, etc.

The above represents Habermas' *diagnosis* of the post-secular condition, which has become normative in "all European societies," including the United States, Canada and Australia. The fact of pluralism, especially the increasing antagonism between the religious and the secular, the religious Muslim and the secular post-Christian European, which is at the heart of the problem within the post-secular society, calls not only for a sociological *diagnosis,* but also a *prognosis:* what is the likely course of this particular ailment? Habermas seems to imply

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[9] According to Robert S. Leiken, discontent with Europe is especially acute with the second generation of immigrant Muslims, whose identity neither belongs to Europe nor the Muslim world. See Robert S. Leiken, *Europe's Angry Muslims: The Revolt of the Second Generation.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

that it can go one of two ways; it can either follow the current trend of internecine violence, as we've witness from the terrorist attacks in Europe and on westerners, such as the Madrid train bombing (3/2004), the murder of Theo van Gogh (11/2004), London bus bombing (7/2005), the violence unleashed by the *Danish Cartoons* controversy (9/2005), the violent reaction of Pope Benedict XVI's *Regensburg Lecture* (9/2006), the public butchery of the British soldier Lee Rigby (5/2013), the ISIS beheadings of James Foley, Steven Sotloff, David Haines, Hervé Gourdel, Alan Henning, Peter Kassig, and Tomislav Salopek (2014-2015), the attack on the Parisian satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (2/2015), the ISIS attacks on Paris (11/2015), Brussels (3/2016), Istanbul (6/2016) and Nice (7/2016), the murder of the French Priest Jacques Hamel (7/26/2016), the Christmas Market attack in Berlin (12/19/2016), the New Year's attack on an Istanbul nightclub (1/1/2017), the attack on Westminster (3/22/2017), the attack on the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England (5/22/2017), the attack on the London Bridge and Southwark (6/3/2017), and the attack in Barcelona (8/17/2017). Nearly all of these attacks were followed by a spike in hate crimes against Muslims in western countries, the passing of discriminatory legislation, and the rapid rise of the xenophobic neo-fascist parties in Britain, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, etc.[10] Or, secular nations and their Muslim populations can search for an alternative to this destructive path, which, for Habermas, is predicated on answering the following question: can the West, especially Europe, engage the post-secular condition through another *change of consciousness*, one that recognizes the imperative to transform how non-religious and religious citizens relate to each other within the confines of a reasonable democratic discourse? Can the *hazardous initiative* of recognizing "the

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[10] See Žižek, Slavoj, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and the Other Troubles with the Neighbours.* United Kingdom: Penguin Random House UK, 2016; Nussbaum, Martha C., *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.

other," learn about "the other" and learn *from* "the other," and remain open and tolerant to the utterances of the other, change the antagonistic trajectory of the post-secular society? If so, this will require some difficult questions to be asked of the secular West. As Habermas poignantly asks,

> How should we understand ourselves as members of a post-secular society, and what must we expect from one another if we want to ensure that social relations in firmly entrenched nation-states remain civil in spite of the growth of cultural and religious pluralism? (Habermas, 2009: 65)

Finding a Shared Sense of Citizenship amidst Diversity

Reminding his readers of the necessity to separate church authority from the state, Habermas goes in search of what he calls the "preconditions" for the achievement of an "inclusive religious freedom" for "all citizens" (Habermas, 2009: 67). As a result of the confessional wars in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Enlightened state saw fit to extract itself out of the business of religion and vice versa; from there on it would take a *neutral* stance in regards to religion, even when it had previously been "intertwined with the dominant religion of the country" (Habermas, 2009: 67).[11] In this sense, the state refrained from showing favor for any particular denomination within the nation, thus bestowing equality upon minority religions in regards to practicing their faith publicly. The consequence of that being that each faith settled into "a niche of its own" and yet remained "estranged from one another" (Habermas, 2009: 67). However, this ghettoization of each religion became inadequate within

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[11] France's form of secularity, *laïcité*, is different from the "neutral" stance of other modern state concerning public displays of religion. In France, it is the role of the state to protect its citizens from undue exposure to religion, thus the state engages in a proactive form of secularity, wherein through legislation it regulates public displays of religion. Such measures would be deemed a violation of the state's neutrality towards religion in other secular countries, such as the United States, with its "establishment" and "prohibition" clause in the First Amendment. This issue with be taken up later in this chapter.

the period of the constitutional revolutions, which represented a new political order that depended upon religious individuals embedded within religious communities coming out of their niche and engaging a *national* discourse as equal *citizens*. Habermas writes,

> This constitutional state is able to guarantee its citizens equal freedom of religion only under the proviso that they no longer barricade themselves up within the self-enclosed lifeworlds of their religious communities and seal themselves off from each other. All subcultures, whether religious or not, are expected to loosen their hold on their individual members so that the latter can recognize each other *reciprocally as citizens* in civil society, hence as members of *one and the same* political community (Habermas, 2009: 67-68).

Here Habermas argues for a relative unbinding of the religious identity; it is not sufficient within a constitutional state for *religious* communities to monopolize the identity and/or worldview of their members. The believer must also be allowed to identify with, and therefore participate in, the *political* community, i.e. become part of the *national will formation*, for it is within this will formation that the "democratic citizens" give "themselves those laws which enable them as private citizens to preserve their identity in the context of their own particular culture and worldview and to respect each other" (Habermas, 2009: 68). Behind this call to unbind the religious identity from religion's monopolization, is the fact that the constitutional state has divorced the *demos* from the *ethnos*, thus allowing citizens who did not share the same *pre-political foundations*, i.e. dominant religion, ethnicity, shared historical background, and common language, etc., to become full members of the political community. With the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, nationhood has been understood to be one of an *intentional democratic community* (*willensgemeinschaft*), which replaced the "ethnic complex" wherein religion was once located (Habermas, 1996: 494). Within these conditions, private citizens are asked to be both who they are within their own particular subculture and/or religion, as well as to become active and engaged citizens within a constitutional state. This complex

identity, this intersectionality between believer and citizen, wherein individuals find themselves within their own "particular culture and worldview," as well as find themselves as "author" of a democratic state, is meant to be complimentary.

Unfortunately, in the post-secular society, the differentiation between believer and citizen is often competitive and antagonistic. The imperatives of religion and the imperative of citizenship within a secular state are often presented as being irreconcilable, especially when both sides of the argument take a dogmatic-inflexible stance on their positions. Yet, Habermas reminds us that the "universalist project of the political Enlightenment" saw no contradiction between these two identities; multiculturalism therefore *should not* be an impediment to civil life, but nevertheless it has become so (Habermas, 2009: 68). The religious identities of many immigrants to Europe, especially Muslims, often find difficulty reconciling the two identities, as the alloyed bridges necessary to bind the particular identity of the individual believer with the national identity of the state and culture have simply not been built; a theoretical, nor a practical, process of alloying such identities has not been adequately disclosed to either side of the conflict. The result is often that the "antagonistic subculture," i.e. the Islamic community, returns to the "niche" of the particular, thus bringing a certain level of estrangement from the rest of the nation and/or national culture/identity (Habermas, 2009: 66-68). This estrangement, coupled with poverty, unequal opportunities, social stigmatization and humiliation, often leads to social strife: petty crime and delinquency, and in its most extreme cases, terrorism against the nation – thus producing more distrust and hatred from the secular and/or native citizens.

With this difficult situation in mind, Habermas sees three important factors that are preconditions for a successful integration of the Muslim population into civil life: *tolerance*, *recognition* and *inclusion*. First, by "tolerance" Habermas means that, "members of other

301

religions, and non-believers must concede each other's right to observe convictions, practices, and ways of life which they themselves reject" (Habermas, 2009: 69). Toleration however is not a demand simply on the majority culture, but rather is "mutual-recognition," as it makes equal demands on both the majority and minority. "Recognition," on the other hand, does not equal *esteem* for the worldviews and practices of others that one may find repugnant or at best questionable, but rather "recognition" means "an awareness of belonging to an inclusive community of citizens with equal rights in which each is accountable to everybody else for her political utterances and actions" (Habermas, 2009: 69). In a reciprocal fashion, the individual accepts the right of the other to engage in actions and to believe in ideas that they could not accept as a way of preserving their own right to engage in actions and beliefs that others would find objectionable. Lastly, "inclusion" of the other demands a political culture that values the particular contributions that individuals and their communities make to society as a whole. In such an inclusive civil society, "equal citizenship and cultural differences complement each other" (Habermas, 2009: 69). However, as Habermas points out, this "inclusion" is not simply a matter of legality, but also a matter of material conditions, wherein the other also shares in the same material advantages as the majority. This translates into "full integration of kindergartens, schools, and universities in order to offset social disadvantages; and equal access to the labor market" (Habermas, 2009: 69).

Habermas is aware that the roadblocks to the realization of such an inclusive, mutually-recognizing and tolerant society are not always erected by the majority culture, but often times have their origins within the minority culture itself, especially when it is "estranged" from the dominant society. In discussing the issue of the Turkish population in Germany, he writes of the difficulties as such,

> As long as a substantial proportion of the Germany citizens of Turkish origin and Muslim faith take their political orientation more from their old home country than from their new one, for example, the corrective votes required to expand the range of values of the dominant political culture will be lacking in the public sphere and at the ballot box. Without the inclusion of minorities in civil society, two complimentary processes will not be able to develop hand in hand – namely the opening of the political community to a difference-sensitive inclusion of foreign minority cultures on the one hand, and the liberalization of these subcultures to a point where they encourage their individual members to exercise their equal rights to participate in the political life of the larger community of the other (Habermas, 2009: 69-70).

These "two complimentary processes," i.e. the opening of the political community towards an embrace of differences, and the "liberalization" of the subculture, so that it can find ways from within its own resources to engage the broader society by willful participation within the political community, are necessary preconditions for the creation of a post-secular society that is tolerant, rooted in mutual-recognition, and inclusive. However, the conditions of the post-secular society have not always made themselves agreeable to such positive developments. The ongoing *kulturkampf* (culture war), which has pushed many native Europeans into a myopic anti-religious form of "Enlightenment fundamentalism," as well as driven many Muslims to retreat into politico-religious extremism, has left much of Europe distrustful of their Muslim neighbors (Buruma, 2004). In addition, many Muslims have begun to think there is no future for Islam and Muslims in Europe, for they feel they are not welcome due to their religious commitments and identity. The growing demand for stricter forms of secularism as well as the increasing levels of fundamentalist religiosity threatens the very fabric of the Enlightenment's universalistic project, especially the pluralist ethos Europe has embraced post-colonialism and post-World War II.

Yet however bleak the situation may appear at first, Habermas thinks there is a way to avoid a *totalen krieg* between the two camps, which includes a translation of religious semantics and semiotics into post-metaphysical reasoning. But before we move towards what he sees as a

possible solution, we must concretely understand what exactly is the nature of this post-secular *kulturkampf,* what is meant by the seemingly oxymoronic phrase "Enlightenment fundamentalism," and determine the nature of "religious fundamentalism" and its threat to the post-secular society. We do this so that we can properly diagnose the problem, offer a possible prognosis, and lastly assess whether or not Habermas' translation proviso is headed in the right direction or whether it needs to be amended. It is not possible to correctly understand the nature of the impasse between the religious and the secular if we do not grasp exactly where their epistemological positions derive from and what they are risking if they open up to one another. The particularities of the *Kulturkampf* discloses the *immediacy* and *intensity* of Habermas' insistence that religion be translated into post-metaphysical reasoning.

Kulturkampf: Multiculturalism and Secularism

The rapid influx of Muslim immigrants into Europe has led to a divergence between two groups concerning the best ways to deal with foreigners who often become equal citizens of the country without "liberalizing" the religious and/or cultural norms deriving from their homelands. The public sphere, as Habermas contends, is saturated with opinions on how to deal with this problem. The two most prominent positions are advanced by 1) "multiculturalists," and 2) "secularists" (Habermas, 2009: 70). On the one hand, the multiculturalists argue for an "even-handed adjustment to the legal system" which would promote an equal treatment for minorities, and "warn against" policies of "enforced assimilation" (Habermas, 2009: 70). They argue for a greater toleration for the differences of the minority groups and think that the state should not attempt to force them, or coerce them, into a false integration within the "egalitarian community of citizens," which could produce fractures within the very communities "in which they form

304

their identities" (Habermas, 2009: 70). They must freely choose to become a member of the nation's political community while maintaining the choice to keep their distance if they so choose. From this perspective, the state must avoid at all cost the perception that it is subjecting the minority culture to the imperatives of the majority culture. To augment the multiculturalist perspective, Habermas writes, "in fact Muslim immigrants cannot be integrated into a western society in defiance of their religion, *but only together with it*" (Habermas, 2009: 71).[12] The multiculturalists wish for a thorough integration of the Muslim community but are not willing to coerce such an integration, especially if it means that the Muslims must forfeit their identity as Muslims. Rather, they look for ways to preserve their culture while simultaneously participating fully in the political life of the nation. In their view, the Enlightenment's "universalism" leaves open the door for all peoples, even the devoutly religious who feel no need to engage in the discourse of the nation.

From the perspective of the secularists, this open accommodation to a culture that repeatedly demonstrated its refusal to reconcile itself to the values of the Enlightenment is a "multiculturalist betrayal" of the Enlightenment itself, which they often view as being under attack by such foreign religious influences that are by nature non-democratic and illiberal (Habermas, 2009: 70). According to Habermas, "this side warns against the consequences of a 'politics of identity' which goes too far in adapting the legal system to the preservation of the intrinsic characteristic of minority cultures" (Habermas, 2009: 71). Religion, in the perspective of *laïcité*, which imposes "emancipation from religion as a condition of modernity," must remain strictly a private matter, safely locked away from influencing the secular state, or even having a presence within the public sphere in some cases (Göle, 2015: 3). Thus, as in France, the state does not take a *neutral* position vis-à-vis religion; rather it engages in an "aggressive

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[12] Emphasis added.

compulsion" which safeguards its citizenry from undue exposure to religion (Derrida in Chérif, 2008: 50). This is done through robust legislation that forcibly privatizes religion or bans certain religious symbols deemed inappropriate for public display. Such a position rejects the possibility of a multi-faced political community that is rooted in their particular religious communities, but rather emphasizes *common* political rights, the equal rights of *citizens*, and not the religious individual rights of Christians, Muslims, Jews, etc. In other words, when a Muslim is attacked in the street, his *citizenship* is what is injured, not his faith, despite the Islamophobic motivation for the attack.[13]

Despite their bitter disagreements, Habermas argues that both sides share the same goal: "a liberal society which allows autonomous citizens to coexist in a civilized manner" (Habermas, 2009: 71). Nevertheless, these two fundamentally different interpretations of the Enlightenment are locked in a clash that is reignited with every controversy concerning Muslims, especially amidst the aftermath of terrorist attacks. The debate falls along the lines of "preserving cultural identity" and the freedom of expression (including religious expression), against the necessity to enforce "shared citizenship" (Habermas, 2009: 71). Both sides attempt to answer the issue of terrorism and the problem of integrating Muslims into their post-secular societies in their own way. From the multiculturalist side, it is argued that more compassionate, understanding and accommodating social policies would ease the estrangement felt by many Muslim immigrants and their children, thus making them less likely to be susceptible to the call of the Islamic fundamentalist, for they are more likely to *invest* themselves into the society at their own pace

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[13] Stéphane "Charb" Charbonnier, the later editor of Parisian satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, made this argument forcefully in his posthumous book *Open Letter: On Blasphemy, Islamophobia, and the True Enemies of Free Expression.* From his perspective, it was a mistake to defend Muslims because of their religious identity. Rather, Muslims had to be defended on the basis of their citizenship within the French Republic. Their religious identity was incidental. This distinction is what allowed Charb to defend French Muslims while ridiculing their faith in good conscience.

and in their own unique way – one that is both sensible from within their religious identity, and respectful to their religious identity. From this vantage point, they affirm the formal *universalism* of the Enlightenment; the belief that all peoples, regardless of their religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds are equally included within the body-politic and can autonomously join the political community of citizens in the matter most appropriate to their needs, desires and talents.

On the other hand, the secularists see the growing presence of a foreign and non-Enlightened religion within their republics as being a threat to their open societies, their liberal culture as well as their secular democratic institutions. For them, the Enlightenment is a *particular* project; it is a "European" endeavor that the "other" has to adapt to, reconcile with, or risk being marginalized by. If they fail to do this, the inevitable result is life within an excluded "parallel society" lacking commonality with the broader society. Such a parallel society, by its nature, doesn't fully participate within the political and cultural life of the nation (Habermas, 2009: 71; Esposito and Kalin, 2011: 6). Many prominent secularists, including the nationalist politicians Marine Le Pen in France and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, do not believe that Islam itself can be reconciled to democracy and democratic culture, or that its revealed faith can be made adaptable to autonomous reason, or that its faithful citizens following a moral code rooted in *divine command* can be democratized, i.e. made open to democratically deliberated moral and ethical norms, but they are not necessarily hostile towards people of other nations and cultures as long as they adequately assimilate. For them, it is the *religious worldview* that is incommensurable with secular democracy; freedom doesn't mean freedom to choose unfreedom, and therefore religious considerations, religious arguments, and religious ways-of-being must be kept locked within the domain of the private (Habermas, 2009: 72). The secularists position

maintains that religious Muslims must not be allowed to impede on the secular society's democratic will formation with their non-democratic comprehensive worldviews.

Additionally, the secularist, whom the multiculturalist charges with "Enlightenment fundamentalism," sees no option other than to defend the European, i.e. "Enlightened" way-of-being, from the "backward" religious individual, who often seems incapable of ascending to a tolerant pluralistic secular polity while remaining attached to his intolerant exclusivist pre-modern religion.[14] To defend the Enlightenment is to defend Europe, they think, and to defend Europe means to resist the efficacy of religion within society, especially a threatening foreign religion: Islam. According to Habermas, these "Enlightenment Fundamentalists" have been joined by many former leftist "multiculturalists" who in their revolt have "turned into bellicose liberal hawks" in light of the struggle against religiously inspired terrorism (Habermas, 2009: 73; Buruma, 2006: 17-35). Faced with the challenges of multiculturalism and its supposed "failure" (according to Angela Merkel and others), as well as the over-generous immigration policies of the European Union, which have created "little Third World colonies" and "Muslim Ghettos," these conservative former-multiculturalists have begun to see the Enlightenment in a similar way as the secularists: Enlightenment values are *our* values, which stand in stark contrast to *their* values: Islam (Habermas, 2009: 73; Kundnani, 2014: 62).[15] To be enlightened is to be *culturally*

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[14] This argument is the mirror image of a common Islamic fundamentalists argument. For example, Usama bin Laden and his lieutenant Ayman al-Zawahiri often argued that democracy and Islam were incompatible, for in democracy the laws are subject to man's will and desires, which are often contrary to the will of the Divine. That which the Divine has made forbidden man makes permissible and vice versa. On the other hand, Islamic law is the law of the Divine, and thus not subject to the fickle will of man. Since men make their own laws in democratic nations, men usurp the divine role of lawgiver. Thus man deifies himself via democracy (Usama bin Laden, 2005: 167; Ayman al-Zawahiri in *The Al-Qaeda Reader,* 2007: 130).

[15] In her 17 October, 2010, speech to the youth of the Christian Democratic Union Party in Potsdam, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "this [multiculturalism] approach has failed, utterly failed," claiming that immigrants need to do more to *integrate* into German society, including learning German. According to the anthropologist John R. Bowen, who's specializes in Islam in Europe, Merkel's remarks followed similar statements from the French President Nikolas Sarkozy, Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron, and the Dutch political right (Bowen, 2012: 17) For Merkel, integration was the antidote to multiculturalism, wherein she defined the later as *living side by side and being happy with each other*, all the while hoping that the immigrants would one day return

European, and to be European is to embrace a *secular way-of-being in the world*, which doesn't include overt public displays of religion. In their evaluation, traditional religious identities are antithetical to the Enlightenment and modern European identity.

According to the Dutch writer and historian, Ian Buruma, in his book *Murder in Amsterdam,* he claims that "the conservative call for Enlightenment values is partly a revolt against a revolt" (Buruma, 2006: 34). He writes,

> Tolerance has gone too far… They believe… that multiculturalism was a mistake; our fundamental values must be reclaimed. Because secularism has gone too far to bring back the authority of the churches, conservatives and neo-conservatives have latched onto the Enlightenment as a badge of national or cultural identity. The Enlightenment, in other words, has become the name for a new conservative order, and its enemies are the aliens, whose values we can't share (Buruma, 2006: 34).

From the perspective of the conservative anti-multiculturalists, there is a great fear that Islam will soon become the majority religion in Europe, replacing a fast-dying Christianity. If Islam is not repelled, Europe will cease to be an open liberal and intelligent society, but will rather collapse into an intolerant backwards "Eurabia" or "Europistan."[16]

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to their homelands. In light of the reality that the immigrants will remain in Germany, integration must be promoted to avoid the ills that plague a "side by side" society. Consequently, in the summer of 2015, amidst the civil war in Syria, Germany became the primary destination of the millions of refugees traveling to Europe, which ignited a backlash in much of the populace, including members of the Christian Democratic Party, Free Democratic Party and some within the Social Democratic Party. It is often assumed that Germany's welcoming of massive numbers of immigrants is connected post-World War II guilt, but in reality has more to do with Germany's need for workers in the face of a decreasing population. According to a 2001 report by the Christian Democrat politician, Rita Süßmuth, Germany needed up to 500,000 a year to fill its needs (Caldwell, 2009: 19). With the strong Germany economy, there is no reason to believe this need will decrease in the near future. The tension produced by such an unprecedented immigration/refugee policy became especially poignant during the New Years Ever 2016 celebrations in numerous German cities, especially Cologne, wherein claims of sexual harassment, sexual assault and even rape by "Arab looking" men against German women spiked, leading to public demands that the immigrants either be deported or closely monitored. Inevitably, the right-wing group *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), commonly known by their acronym PEGIDA, and the new *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany) Party (AfD), used the offenses to push their nationalist agenda, which brooks no future for Islam in Europe.

[16] According to John R. Bowen, the Bundesbank member Thilo Sarrazin published a book in 2010 indicting Muslims for lowering the intelligence level of the Germans, a claim that was easily accepted by those who believed Germany was already "overrun by foreigners," despite the fact that there was no evidence for such a claim (Bowen, 2012: 23).

This fear is also shared among the *religious* skeptics of Islam. According to Christopher Caldwell, the conservative American journalist and author of *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West*, "the Islam professed by roughly half of Europe's new arrivals sits uneasily with European traditions of secularism. In the struggle between the two, it would be arrogant to assume secularism has the stronger hand." He continues, "the spiritual tawdriness Islamic immigrants perceive in the modern West is not imaginary. It may be Europe's biggest liability in preserving its culture" (Caldwell, 2009: 22). From this perspective, massive immigration of religious Muslims, coupled by the "spiritual tawdriness" of post-Christian Europe, is especially worrisome, since the great cathedrals and churches of Europe are now "tourist sites, apartment houses, theaters, and places of entertainment" (Buruma, 2006: 35). In other words, they are what Nietzsche said they were already in 1882: the "tombs of God," and therefore such dead churches, much like a dead God, fail to be countervailing forces against the robust expansion of Islam (Nietzsche, 2008: 104).

Additionally, some European leaders have tried to functionalize the *Christian legacy* of Europe as a bulwark against Islam, but it has failed to engender any substantive support among the secular population, especially since those who have attempted to do this, according to Roland Boer, are usually those who know what a Cathedral looks like only from the outside (Boer, 2012: 38). On the other hand, those among the truly religious have been some of the most welcoming of Muslim to Europe. For instance, the Argentinian Pope Francis has not wavered in his solidarity with plight of the Muslims, both immigrants and refugees alike. Since his election in 2013, the ecumenical Pope has repeatedly called upon Catholics to transform their churches into interfaith "field hospitals" in order to tend to the wounds and sufferings of all peoples, including those of the Islamic faith. For him, the *Christian legacy* of Europe should not be confused with

anti-Islamic xenophobia; it is actualized in unconditional *mercy* and *brotherhood* towards the suffering other, not their rejection, and because of this the Christians of Europe have a special obligation to *feed the hungry and clothes the poor* (Pope Francis, 2013b: 30-35; Pope Francis, 2016; Matthew 25:35).[17] This position has not made many friends for the ecumenical Pope Francis among anti-immigrant politicians and political parties in much of Western and Central Europe.[18] Nor has it endeared him to many of his own conservative bishops, who see the expansion of Islam as well as the entrenchment of secularity, relativism, and multiculturalism in the West as a poisonous concoction that will lead to the end of the Church itself. Indeed, Pope Francis's "mercy" towards Muslims seems to have thrown gasoline onto the fire already lit by the *kulturkampf*. For those functionalizing Christianity in their anti-Muslim politics, Christian *identity* – in the name of European civilization – must resist Islam. The Pope's Christian *social-ethics* must not get in the way of this.

Recognizing the difficulty in maintaining a multicultural democracy, Habermas nevertheless questions what he sees as a dubious "philosophical background assumption" made by the conservative "Enlightenment fundamentalists" and their conservative religious cohorts, who insist on the impossibility of integrating the foreign "other." He is primarily concerned with

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[17] It should be noted that Pope Francis' immediate predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, formerly Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in his *Regensburg Lecture* of 2006, argued that Christianity was the religion of reason, contrary to Islam. He argued against Europeans intellectuals who undermine the Christian sources that define European identity. For the German Pope, this had become especially important in the face of a "de-Hellenized" religion that often resorts to terror, i.e. Islamic terrorism. In his discussion with Jürgen Habermas, Ratzinger asks the question: "must not religion… be placed under the guardianship of reason, and its boundaries carefully marked off? A *religion-without-reason* is precisely what he saw as the danger in Islam. The undermining of Christianity opens up a relativistic and multiculturalist space for such a dangerous religion within Europe (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 53-80). Additionally, according to Nilüfer Göle, whether or not a reference to the *Christian identity* of Europe was a subject of a contentious debate during the crafting of the European Constitution until France – the foremost proponent of bourgeois secularism – blocked it (Göle, 2016: 13). For the French delegation, it was not Christianity that had to be emphasized; the secular nature of Europe had to be stressed. The Christian legacy would not be able to be used as a bulwark against "Islamization," rather secularism would defend Europe from its return to religion.

[18] In his discussion with Eduardo Mendieta, entitled *A Conversation About God and the World,* Habermas praises those Christians who maintain their "ethic of Christian love," which preserves the "devotion to the suffering other" (Habermas, 2002: 164).

the narrow idea – originating from the secular opposition – that religion must remain exorcised from the political arena because it "represents a historically obsolete 'intellectual formation' (a past '*Gestalt des Geistes*,' in Hegel's terms)" (Habermas, 2009: 73). As we'll see, Habermas does not follow the line of thinking that insists that religion "cannot claim to provide a cultural resource for the self-understanding of any truly modern intellectual formation" as the Enlightenment fundamentalists maintain. Neither does he follow the religious objections of cultural conservatives, who see no place for Islam in Europe because of its *Christian heritage*. Rather, he sees a role for Islam – as it is – within the pluralistic post-secular society both in the general public sphere, and in the state if it can be translated into publically accessible post-metaphysical language and reasoning (Habermas, 2009: 73). In this way, Habermas stands clearly on the side of the Enlightenment's claim to universality; it cannot be made into a "new conservative order" (Buruma, 2004). Although it was originally a *European* project, it nevertheless pertains to all mankind, both religious and secular, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In this openness towards religion's potential contribution to modern thought, he follows the line of thinking of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin and their openness towards religion's potential to offer something meaningful to modernity whilst at the same time rejecting any "traditionalist" call for an anachronistic return to a pre-modern religion.[19]

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[19] Traditionalist philosophers, such as Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist, Tomislav Sunic, and Alexander Dugin, view modernity, especially liberalism – both cultural and economic – as being responsible for the destruction of the organic nation, the traditional family, and national culture, which was once closely associated with religions. Forming the intellectual foundations for the "New Right" in Europe and the "Alt-Right" in the United States, and drawing upon Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt and other fascist philosophers, they argue for a wholesale abandonment of the liberal world order, and a return to a pre-Enlightenment way-of-being in the world, which, in their view, would restore man's dignity, his ties with his native soil (and therefore sense of belonging) and respect for other nations and cultures. Thus, they are often the most vocal opponents of immigration to Europe, and multiculturalism (within one nation), while respecting the cultural differences of different nations (as long as they stay within their own historic territories). See Julius Evola, *A Traditionalist Confronts Fascism.* London: Arktos, 2015; Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance.* London: Arktos, 2012; Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right.* London: Arktos, 2011; Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory.* London: Arktos, 2011 and Alexander Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning.* Ed. and Trans. by Nina Kouprianova. Arlington, VA: Radix, 2014.

Learning the "Other": A Complimentary Process

For a post-secular society that embraces both pluralism and democracy to find a stable equilibrium, Habermas insists that both the religious and the secular should be burdened with *mutual* (or *complimentary*) *learning processes* (Habermas, 2008: 119). Despite the secularists' resistance towards any form of religion influencing the democratic will formation; Habermas praises their insistence on the "indispensability of including all citizens as equals in civil society," even if they think that the religion of those citizens must remain privatized (Habermas, 2009: 74-75). He counters their privatization imperative by saying,

> Because a democratic order cannot simply be *imposed* on its authors, the constitutional state confronts its citizens with the expectations of an ethics of citizenship that reaches beyond mere obedience to the law. Religious citizens and communities must do more than merely conform to the constitutional order in a superficial way. They must appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles *under the premises of their own faith* (Habermas, 2009: 75).[20]

Here Habermas makes an interesting claim: from within their own religious tradition the believer must find ways of appropriating "secular legitimation of constitutional principles." Unlike the secularist, Habermas is not asking for the total privatization of religion, but rather that the believer, in their own cognitive space, which is saturated with religious considerations, find a way to accept "secular legitimation" for the animating principles of the democratic constitution (Habermas, 2010: 21). In other words, the believer does not have to step outside of his or her own religious worldview, but rather is asked to look *within* the resources of their religion in order for them to come to an acceptance of secular legitimation of constitutional principles (Habermas, 2010: 21). As Habermas writes,

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[20] Emphasis added.

Instead of grudging accommodation to externally imposed constraints, the content of religion must open itself up to the normatively grounded expectation that it should recognize for reasons of its own the neutrality of the state towards worldviews, the equal freedom of all religious communities, and the independence of the institutional sciences. This is a momentous step. For it is not just a matter of renouncing political force and religious indoctrination as means of imposing religious truths; it is also a matter of religious consciousness becoming reflexive when confronted with the necessity of relating its articles of faith to competing systems of belief and to the scientific monopoly on the production of factual knowledge (Habermas, 2009: 21).

On the other side of Habermas' complementary learning process, he insists that secular citizens do not close themselves off from the contributions that religious citizens can put forward in the public sphere. As Habermas writes, the "liberal state must… expect its secular citizens, in exercising their role as citizens, not to treat religious expressions as simply irrational. Given the spread of naturalism based on a naïve faith in science, this presupposition cannot be taken for granted" (Habermas, 2010: 22). If religious believers are able to translate their deeply held positions into post-metaphysical language, they should be accorded the respect of their fellow secular citizens to hear out their reasoning – for in that reasoning, Habermas contends, certain insights and intuitions may prove to be valuable for the society aware that something has been "irretrievably lost" amidst secularization, especially sources of solidarity (Habermas, 2010: 15-23). With this move, Habermas corrects the *asymmetrical burden* imposed on the religious community via Rawls' translation proviso, and makes each side of the discourse accountable to the objections of the other.

Euro-Islamic Reformation

Habermas does not explicitly explain how such an acceptance of secular legitimation occurs for Muslims; rather he leaves the processes and mechanisms up to the believers – it is

314

their burden. However, he does point to a historical instance where this has been accomplished, which he thinks is a revealing example: the Catholic Church's adoption of the Second Vatican Council (1965), wherein they "embraced" liberalism and democracy, as well as the many Protestant churches in Germany who also moved in that direction.[21] However, Habermas contends, Muslim communities in general have not undergone such a "painful learning process" by which the religious consciousness deploys its own resources to accept secular legitimation for the constitutional order. Without doing so, Habermas contends, it becomes difficult for believers to accept religion's wholesale removal from state power (Habermas, 2009: 75; 2010: 21). As such, confusion rises as to why traditional *moral* norms do not have the weight of law in western societies, as they are often perceived to be in "Islamic" societies, where fact and value – legality and morality – often remain fused.[22]

In light of this comprehensive learning process, Habermas calls for an Islamic historical-hermeneutical "reformation," which he believes is the order of the day, as only a reformulation of such can produced the desired "Euro-Islam" that is thought to be compatible and/or comfortable within the post-secular society (Habermas, 2009: 75). Nevertheless, such a reformation cannot come from outside of the religious tradition, but must be formed from within the tradition itself. "It is the religious communities themselves," Habermas states, "that will decide whether they can recognize their 'true faith' in a reformed faith" (Habermas, 2009: 75).

Yet what is the ultimate goal of such a "reformation"? Ever since September 11th, 2001, there has been a call emanating from the West for Islam to be "reformed" without a clear

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[21] This might be an over-optimistic assessment on the part of Habermas. While officially the Catholic Church embraced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, and opened up to some aspects of liberalism and democracy, it is a matter of record that every Pope since the Council, at least until Pope Francis, has worked to stall, arrest and/or undermine many of those reforms, including the suppression of Liberation Theology in Latin America – which brought together the Gospels and Marxism, including the Frankfurt School.

[22] This is a general statement about "Islamic society," not a wholesale description of all majority Muslim countries. Many of these countries have secular constitutions wherein Islamic law is not the governing law.

understanding of what an Islamic reform would look like. There is a prevalent *assumption* in the West that reformation means *liberalization*, but that assumption is highly flawed. Indeed, Islam has been "reformed" before, in the 18th and 19th century, which led to a more puritanical, fundamentalist and anti-democratic variant: Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism (or Salafism) – the variant/interpretation of Islam that most fundamentalists adhere to. This orientation of Sunni Islam rejects social democracy, advances a strict adherence to the *Hanbalī* school of *Shari'a* law, and repudiates most forms of *cultural modernization*, especially the West's sexual revolution and other cultural freedoms (DeLong-Bas, 2004).[23] Furthermore, many Islamists, especially those following the lineage of Seyyid Qutb's influential book *Milestones*, reject the need to subject revelation to the guardianship of reason, but rather emphasize the primacy of faith over reason, thus exclusively preferring literal readings of the sacred texts. This reform did not wish to reconcile the religion to the changing conditions of history, rather it wished to undue the various enculturations it had acquired over the centuries of Islam's existence. In other words, it was an attempt to purify Islam from those things that they perceived made it more syncretic, tolerant of other cultures, respectful towards epistemological differences, and open to plurality within religious adherence. Such "reforms" rejected the Hellenization of Islam – the very problem that Pope Benedict the XVI identified in his 2006 Regensburg lecture. Surely this is not what Habermas was thinking when he called for Islam's reform, as it would be contrary to the pluralistic goals he subsequently puts forth in his various essays on post-secularity. So if he thinks Islam needs a reformation, what imagined "reforms" is he looking for?

Through a *historical-hermeneutical* reformation of Islam, Habermas looks for a reordering that would make this closed religious universe more open and complimentary to the

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[23] The Hanbali school of law (*maḏhab*) is the smallest and considered the strictest of the four major schools of law in Sunni Islam.

pluralistic conditions of secular Europe. However, from what he describes, he seems to have in mind a trajectory that mirrors *not* the Protestant Reformation of Christianity, as he so states, but rather a reformation that mirrors the changes in Christianity brought on by secularity's assault on its metaphysical claims, which subsequently led to Christianity's capitulation to the demands of autonomous reason, science, empiricism and the separation of church and state (Habermas, 2009: 75).[24] He states, "when we think of such a shift from a traditional to a more reflexive form of religious consciousness, the model of the change in epistemic attitudes within the Christian churches of the West following the Reformation springs to mind" (Habermas, 2009: 75). Yet, Habermas' reading of the developments within the church is slightly misguided, which leads to some confusion as to what he expects of Muslims. The western churches did not engage in a *willful* abandonment of a "traditional religious consciousness" for a "reflexive form of religious consciousness," but were rather forced into such a change by the Bourgeois Enlightenment, science, technology, liberalism, and the secular state. Even today the churches are divided amidst themselves in regards to how much compromise with secular modernity is possible – those having made the most compromises being those who are under the greatest threat of collapse in the contemporary moment. We should remember that the church was removed from state power and *compelled* into civil society (in the United States and France), wherein it had to compete for parishioners like capitalists compete for customers, all the while fighting rearguard struggles against the ongoing revolutions in science, epistemology, the separation of morality and legality, and the expansion of personal freedom, etc. Furthermore, in the face of the secular sciences,

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[24] According to Pope Benedict XVI, Christianity de-Hellenized itself via three factors: 1) Martin Luther's *sola scriptura* (scripture only); 2) the trend-turn in 19th and 20th century theology, wherein the focusing on the simple ethical life of Jesus became a way of reconciling Christianity to science, and 3) the advent of modern pluralism. These three factors were cited in the Pope's 2006 Regensburg Lecture, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memoirs and Reflections" (*Glaube, Vernunft und Universität.Erinnerungen und Reflexionen*). Also see Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger's (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 53-80.

Christianity could no longer defend its central claims solely using its own epistemological resources. When it attempted to defend its positions with the use of the secular tools of modernity, it tacitly confirmed the triumph of that modernity precisely because it had to appeal to modern secular epistemology and reasoning for its defense. Habermas seems to mistake the reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century with the *determinate negation* of religion by the Enlightenment in the eighteen and nineteenth century, wherein the particularities of each religion were dissolved in an attempt to unfold a *universal-rational core* – devoid of its historical particularities. Although the former led to the rise of the later, the Protestant Reformation was in no way *fundamentally* anti-Christian, in fact its critique of Christianity was an attempt to make it *more Christian*, and therefore its project was not to undermine the overall theological edifice of the tradition, upon which both the Catholic and Protestant traditions stood. On the other hand, the Enlightenment undermined Christianity's theological systems, its moral certitudes, the meaning of its rites, rituals and symbols, and its exclusive claim to salvation, regardless of its denominational origins and attachments. Only after it was determinately negated into the Enlightenment's universal-rational religion, Deism, and later by the 19th century's turn towards materialism, did it then shift towards a more "reflexive religious consciousness."

In light of his comparison to Christianity, what then does Habermas want for Islam in Europe: an *autonomous reformation* or a modern *enlightened negation*? It appears that he *offers* the later as an exemplary model for Islam in Europe while *implying* the first as the truly viable option. If he really wants the later, is it because he knows – or should know – that it will lead to Islam's collapse as it has done with those Christian denominations that have compromised the most, thus ultimately relieving Europe of its Islam problem? I don't think he has such ulterior motives, but his argument here would certainly lead to that conclusion.

The envisioned "reform" of Islam that Habermas suggests in his essay, which would make Islam aware and reflexive on the limitations of its own theological claims amidst modern epistemology and pluralism, would by consequence entail being more open to secular modernity and autonomous reason, for it too would recognize its inability to defend itself without borrowing the tools of secular reason, which by doing so, tacitly confirms the triumph of autonomous reason over revealed faith. Additionally, since Kant articulated the limits of reason in his 1793 book *Religion within the Bounds of mere Reason*, his prevailing prohibition on articulating the ultimate *thing-in-itself,* reason could not help prove the transcendent claims of Islam.[25] Modern reason resists and excludes any form of *cataphatic* theology that is articulated by Muslims. Therefore, reason cannot provide unconditional certitude that Allāh is, for example, *al-Raḥmān* (the merciful) and *al-Raḥīm* (the compassionate), or even that the Divine exists. This self-reflexive realization of the limitation of its own theological claims, which would as a result weaken the Qurʾānic legitimation of its moral claims, if taken seriously, undermines the believers' confidence in the exclusive and absolute truth of Islam, if only in their private reflection. As a result, Habermas hopes that this more reflexive and less rigid interpretation of Islam would be less inclined for dogmatism, less inclined towards fundamentalism and exclusivism; it would adopt an agnostic attitude towards the epistemological claims of other religions. And as a result, its ability to be comfortably integrated into the post-secular society would increase, as it would confront the pluralistic situation with a humble, open and therefore ecumenical, non-dogmatic epistemological stance.

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[25] For Habermas, Kant himself had to translate the "authority" of Divine Command into the "unconditional validity of moral duties," in order for the "ought" to resist being collapsed into the "whirlpool of enlightened self-interest" (Habermas, 2003: 110). On the significance of Kant in the discussion of religion and modernity, also see Habermas' "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Important of Kant's Philosophy of Religion*,*" in his book *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 209-247.

Yet, is there a hint of Bourgeois in Habermas' proposition? Is the price of such a "humbling" of religion the *neutralization* of its normative basis, and therefore its social force? Is this not the hypocritical stance that passes for modern belief that Adorno et al discovered in their studies on the authoritarian personality: religion is what we say we believe but don't really take seriously? Does not this make religion simply a matter of culture and not ultimate Truth – just another personal position within a complex of relativism? Does not this humbling make religious people easier to govern, i.e. less likely to be critical of the state and bourgeois society, because the *negativity* of their religion, the unconditional Truth behind their claims, the basis of religion's critique of the status quo, is weakened or even abrogated, thus leaving a *religion that consoles* but does not motivate the believer to engage in socially-transformative *praxis*? Furthermore, does the secular society lose something when religion extracts – or weakens – its prophetic resources – its absolutes – from its theory and praxis? As these questions will become important to my critique of Habermas' position on translating religion into post-metaphysical and therefore publically accessible reasoning, we will return to this important question shortly. For now, it is important to consider that these kinds of questions forcefully impinge on Habermas' conception of religion, especially on what he thinks it can deliver to the post-secular society.

What then can be done to have the Muslim community actively engage in the political will formation of the secular nation while at the same time hold fast to their traditional religious identity? How can they at once contribute to the national discourse from *within* their religion while simultaneously making their religious arguments accessible to those who are outside of their semantically closed universe?

In his search to find ways of *integrating* Islam into Europe, Habermas turns his attention to the liberal political theorist John Rawls and his theory of the liberal state and the public use of reason. Following Rawls, Habermas contends that in a pluralistic condition, wherein members of different religious groups find themselves as equal citizens within a given constitutional state, and therefore are bearing equal rights to engage in the political will formation of the nation, a common language must be found by which they can democratically deliberate and legislate; this in order to avoid "wars of religion and confessional disputes" (Habermas, 2008: 120). For the liberal constitutional state, such a language is rooted in "natural reason," and is therefore devoid of any particular religious coloring, i.e. it is *religion-neutral*.[26] According to Habermas, the use of natural reason relies "exclusively on arguments that claim to be equally accessible to all persons," and thus no religious individuals are inherently excluded and none are favored based on their particular faith tradition (Habermas, 2008: 120). The Enlightenment's insistence that there exists a common human reason that is accessible to all humanity – and therefore may serve as the basis by which all peoples, regardless of the closed semantic universes they subscribe to – allows for political communication to avoid appeals to legitimating concepts rooted within those closed semantic universes. This universal accessibility of natural reason serves as one of the

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[26] For example, this "neutrality" on matters of religion is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States – in the "establishment and prohibition clause." But as stated before, the most poignant exception to this neutrality can be found in France's *laïcité,* wherein the state plays a more active role in prohibiting displays of religion within the state *and*, when it feels necessary, civil society. For instance, the 2010 law, *Loi interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public* (Act prohibiting concealment of the face in public space), banned the *niqāb* (Islamic face veil) not only from state institutions, but also from France entirely. Although the law was couched in language that would suggest it was a neutral ban on all face coverings, including masks and balaclavas, the pretext was the claimed "security threat" posed by women in face veils. In addition, such secular neutrality has been recently compromised in other European states. For example, Kosovo has banned the hijab in its schools. Germany, Holland, Spain and Belgium all ban the hijab from being worn by public employees on the job. Switzerland banned the hijab for girls playing basketball, etc. (Nussbaum, 2012: 4).

most important justifications for the separation of church and state; the state no longer needs religious legitimation and/or justification when its citizenry has access to a shared natural reason by which they can collectively determine the national political will. Additionally, the "democratic constitution," according to Habermas, fills the state's legitimation "gap" once it has been deprived of religious basis (Habermas, 2008: 121). In other words, self-governing politics replaces religion as its source of legitimation. Furthermore, instead of an internecine conglomerate of competing religious justification for various legislative initiatives, there is but one commonly shared secular language in which all arguments and justifications are articulated, although such arguments and justifications may have historically begun their life within the closed universe of religious semantics. This secularization of political language allows for equal participation of all citizens in the democratic will formation, even if outside of that political arena the citizens adhere to a variety of religious worldviews. This liberal conception of the equal accessibility to "natural reason," as well as the state devoid of religious legitimation, serves as the background for Rawls' version of the secular state and the discourse of citizens within the public sphere. Nevertheless, the reality of the post-secular society and the recalcitrance of religious communities to enter into a secular discourse with their fellow citizens impinges on the praxis of this liberal theory, and Habermas parts ways with Rawls on how to address such religious recalcitrance.

For Habermas, Rawls' initiated a contentious discussion with his *translation proviso*, which, according to Habermas' thinking, is too restrictive of religion within the public sphere. For example, in his 1997 essay *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,* Rawls writes,

> Reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons… are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support" (Rawls, 1997: 783).

Against Rawls' translation mandate unilaterally levied on religious citizens by the secular state, Habermas cites two main objections.[27] First, many citizens "*cannot* or are *not willing to make*" the requisite division between contributions articulated in religious semantics and those forwarded in secular semantics when engaged in political discourse (Habermas, 2011: 25).[28] If a large segment of the population declares itself religious, and thus "cannot or are not willing" to introduce their arguments via "proper political reasons," i.e. secular language, then such a segment is marginalized if not silenced within the process of the national will formation. Second, Habermas reminds Rawls that it is an imperative that the liberal constitution "safeguard religious forms of life," and therefore "must not inflict an additional, and hence *asymmetrical*, burden on its religious citizens" (Habermas, 2011: 25). In other words, the liberal state cannot impose an unequal burden upon a segments of its citizenry in regards to requirements for political participation. Religious citizens, from within their religious consciousness, have an equal right to engage in democratic deliberations as secular citizens have. Furthermore, he insists that within the post-secular society, "it is in the interest of the constitutional state to deal carefully with all the cultural sources that nourish its citizens' consciousness," for they may be important sources of solidarity and other intellectual and moral insights and intuitions that are currently depleted in secular society (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2011: 46). In other words, religion may be called upon to do what reason and the Enlightenment cannot: provide the necessary motivation for secular citizens to engage in a virtuous life, as opposed to simply following their own limitless self-

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[27] According to Todd Hedrick's study of Habermas and Rawls, the later took great pains to emphasize that public reason should not be identified as "secular reason," which would naturally suggest that it would ally with the secular side amidst disputes with the religious, and thus subject itself to the claim that public reason decides issues in advance. Rather, according to Hedrick, Rawls argued that religious claims could be advanced "without offending public reason, so long as the argument are couched in terms of commonly shared political values" (Hedrick, 2010: 31).
[28] The emphasis is from Habermas.

interests (Jeffries, 2016: 379-380). Habermas believes his proposal can overcome these two objections. How?

Similar to Rawls' insistence that members of *comprehensive worldviews* use publically accessible reasoning when entering into the political public sphere, Habermas also challenges religious citizens, especially Muslims, to translate their deeply held beliefs into theologically-neutral post-metaphysical language, so that it may migrate from within the closed semantic universe of their religion into secular discourse. However, he believes his translation proviso steers away from the restrictiveness of Rawls' position in a few different ways. First, Habermas contends that all citizens are free to choose whether or not they wish to express their thoughts and ideas in the *public sphere* via explicitly religious language and in doing so, should be considered within such public sphere even if such arguments are dressed in religious semantics. There are no restrictions on this form of open discourse. However, when such "truth contents of religious utterances" make their way into public institutions, i.e. parliaments, courts and other state agencies, they "must be translated into a generally accessible language" before they can be considered (Habermas, 2011: 25-26). In matters of the state, Habermas agrees with Rawls, language and arguments that remain clothed within a closed semantic universe of religion cannot serve as the basis for secular legislation; that is the role of autonomous reason. But where Habermas differs from Rawls is in the "informal" *public sphere* at large. Here the religious individual is free to retain the language of his comprehensive worldview in Habermas' perspective. This allows those who cannot or are not willing to translate their deeply held convictions into secular language to remain engaged in the public will formation, if only informally. Additionally, allowing the religious citizen to articulate their faith positions from *within* their comprehensive worldview avoids the *asymmetrical burden* placed on the religious

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citizen by Rawls' translation proviso, at least in the *informal public sphere*. However, at the level of the state, an "institutional filter" must be established to make sure religious arguments do not undermine the state's strict secularity, precisely because the secular state is engaged in *formal* deliberations that will govern all members of the pluralistic nation (Habermas, 2011: 26). Thus their democratic contestations should be free of particular religious' utterances.

Due to its post-secular condition, the secular state represents a body of citizens with various religions and worldviews, and must maintain a disinterested distance from explicit religious considerations, as to avoid confessional conflicts and accusations of bias, which undermine the confidence in the state's neutrality (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 51). The neutrality of the state in regards to religion must not be compromised and thus the "institutional filter" must remain ever vigilant.[29] Nevertheless, in *informal* discourse among peers in the public sphere, the desire of the religious believer to offer their thoughts within a religious language is protected. They must, regardless of their faith, feel – and be – a part of the political will formation, even if only outside of the halls of official government institutions. Nevertheless, if the input of religious voices – who cannot or are unwilling to translate their arguments into publically accessible language – is to be considered within official democratic processes, the "translational efforts of cooperative fellow citizens" must be enlisted if such contributions are not to "fall on deaf ears" (Habermas, 2011: 26). As such, religious voices have no "obligation" to make their arguments understandable within publically accessible language, but as a result they become dependent on others to do the translational work on their behalf.

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[29] However, it should be noted that the secular state also plays the role of the judge of what is religious and what is secular, thus giving it veto power over the arguments it does not believe the proponent has sufficiently extracted the religious element.

Habermas' added differentiation within the translation proviso – between the *informal* public sphere and the *formal* state – ensures that the integrity of the secular state remains intact while simultaneously avoids flattening the "polyphonic diversity" of the citizen's discourse (Habermas, 2011: 26). The informal public sphere remains vibrant with discourse, profiting from voices emanating from both the secular and the religious, whereas the state continues to safeguard its neutrality and objectivity in regards to religious worldviews.

Yet, in regards to contributing to the formal discourse within the state, the secular citizen does not share the burden levied upon the religious. Their political statements are assumed to be already devoid of religious material, and therefore, if reasonable, are acceptable within the formal discourse without any further transformation. Habermas sees this unequal burden as problematic, as it still appears *asymmetrical* – unfairly burdensome on only one side. As already stated above, if religious citizens must accept the translation proviso as the cost of the state's neutrality towards religions and other competing worldviews, then there must be an *equal* burden on secular citizens. Unlike Rawls, in Habermas' proposal, there is also a "complimentary burden" shouldered on the secular side of society (Habermas, 2011: 26). Habermas explains,

> By the duty of reciprocal accountability towards all citizens, including religious ones, they are obliged not to publically dismiss religious contributions to political opinions and will formation as mere noise, or even nonsense, form the start. Secular and religious citizens must meet in their public use of reason at eye level. For a democratic process the contributions of one side are no less important than those of the other side (Habermas, 2011: 26).

With both sides being burdened with equal imperatives, there is a hope that such a rigorous epistemic mind-set will be willingly absorbed by both sides, for it is not possible to legally impose such a mind-set on the citizenry. Democracy is at the mercy of the willingness of the citizenry to engage in such a *change of consciousness* towards the other – stubbornness only perpetuates the *modus vivendi*, i.e. an unstable situation of living uncomfortably side by side.

The sometimes painful realization of Habermas' complementary learning processes results in the religious side's adoption of a "reflexive consciousness," which is demanded by the public use of reason. This reflexive consciousness reveals itself in three ways, (1) it "relates itself to competing religions in a reasonable way," (2) it "leaves decisions concerning mundane knowledge to the institutionalized sciences," and (3) it "makes the egalitarian premises of morality of human right compatible with its own articles of faith" (Habermas, 2011: 26-27). On the other hand, the "reflexive consciousness" of the secular must, (1) reflect on the "limits of a secular or post-metaphysical kind of reasoning," and, (2) come to understand that "world religions may be bearers of 'truth contents,'" in the sense that they are repositories of "suppressed or untapped moral intuitions," which are presently unavailable to secular consciousness. "A genealogical awareness of the religious origins or the morality of equal respect for everybody" Habermas contends, "is helpful in this context" (Habermas, 2011: 27; Habermas, 2009: 76-77). He determines this "morality for equal respect" to be a secular translation of the religious idea that all men are made "in the image of God," the *Imago Dei* (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 45).[30] Furthermore, Habermas contends,

> Secular citizen who encountered their fellow citizens with the reservation that the latter [the religious] cannot be taken seriously as modern contemporaries because of their religious mindset would regress to the level of a mere modus vivendi and abandon the basis of mutual recognition constitutive for shared citizenship. Secular citizens should not exclude *a fortiori* that even religious utterances may have semantic contents and convert personal intuitions capable of being translated and introduced into secular discourse. Thus, if all is to go well, each side must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge from its own

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[30] Habermas argues that there is a "mutual compenetration" of religion and philosophy, which began with Christianity and Greek metaphysics. This interpenetration resulted in an "intellectual form of theological dogmatics and a Hellenization of Christianity." He writes that this "mutual compenetration" also "promoted the assimilation by philosophy of genuinely Christian ideas. This work of assimilation has left its mark in normative conceptual clusters with a heavy weight of meaning, such as responsibility, autonomy, and justification; or history and remembering, new beginning, innovation, and return; or emancipation and fulfillment; or expropriation, internalization, and embodiment, individuality and fellowship. *Philosophy has indeed transformed the original religious meaning of these terms, but without emptying them through a process of deflation and exhaustion* (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2011: 44-45). Emphasis added.

perspective, which enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner (Habermas, 2009: 77).

It is clear that Habermas not only accepts the *possibility* of translating religious ideas and concepts into secular philosophy, but also thinks that there is a long history of such religious migration into philosophy; it has been an ongoing engagement that has lasted for centuries in the West. Habermas reminds his readers of the religious origins of much of what may now appears to westerners as purely secular principles, value, and moral claims. He writes,

> The occidental development has been shaped by the fact that philosophy continuously appropriates semantic content from the Judeo-Christian tradition; and it is an open question whether this centuries-long process can be continued or even remains unfinished (Habermas, 2011: 27).

Harkening back to the religious resources preserved through translation by the Bourgeois Enlightenment, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and even Freud and Nietzsche, upon whose shoulders stood Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin, Habermas invokes a future oriented remembrance of philosophy's debt to religion, with the understanding that religion today *may* still provide access to moral, ethical and even political perspectives and intuitions, that have been seemingly closed off to autonomous reason. What's more, Habermas suggests that such recognition of secular society's indebtedness to religion may provide an alternative avenue by which the West can relate to other more traditional and/or religious societies. He writes,

> Those moral feelings which only religious language has as yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed. *The mode for non-destruction secularization is translation.* This is what the Western world, as the worldwide secularization force, may learn from its own history. If it presents this complex image of itself to other cultures in a credible way, intercultural relations may find a language other than that of military and the market alone (Habermas, 2003: 114).[31]

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[31] My emphasis. In a similar fashion, the French-Algerian intellectual Mustapha Chérif, writing about Jacques Derrida's understanding of Islam and the West, wrote that objective thought admits that "most Western philosophical concepts are still imbued with their theological sources and that reason continues to be fed, without

Indeed, Habermas seems optimistic that philosophy can still learn and *appropriate semantic content* from religion, which may in the future supplant war with discourse. In 2006, Habermas wrote that, "philosophy must be ready to learn from theology, not only for functional reasons, but also for *substantial* reasons" (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 44).[32] These substantial reasons could have global effects. However, in terms of this study, the question is whether secular western philosophy is prepared to learn from Islam, and more specifically *Islamic* theology? And if so, what aspects of Islam can and *should* be translated?

Now that we have determined that Habermas is open to religion's potential contributions to the life of the secular democratic and constitutional republic via their own unique semantic resources, we must demonstrate how his form of the translation proviso can and will affect the numerous Muslims living within the post-secular society. We must delve into the difficulties associated with such a translation process, explaining how particular beliefs about the language of Islam may hinder Habermas' proposal to translate Islamic values into publically accessible reasoning. In discovering the difficulties, we conversely discover the conditions of the possibility for translating particular truth content of Islam into post-metaphysical reasoning.

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admitting it, on predicates and references issued from Christianity, in spite of the *de-signification* of the world and the ravaging effects of a dominant, largely anticlerical, nonreligious, and atheist ideology" (Chérif, 2008: 13-14).

[32] Emphasis added. Additionally, in Habermas' conversation with Mendieta he expresses another reason for keeping the open discourse between religion and philosophy open. He writes that "indispensable potentials for meaning are preserved in religious language," and that those potentials have "not yet [been] fully exhausted" by philosophy, as they have "not yet [been] translated into the language of public, that is, presumptively generally convincing reasons" (Habermas, 2002: 162). As such, religion remains as a repository of meaning, much of which philosophy has yet to sublate.

When we look to Islam itself, its doctrines, its sacred texts, its structure of authority, we find there are substantial roadblocks to Habermas' "translation proviso," even despite his modifications to Rawls' more restrictive model. These particular issues are not well known outside of the Muslim community, and as such, I suspect Habermas may not have entirely appreciated the difficulty of the project he laid before the Muslims of Europe. While considering his proposal, it is particularly important to follow Habermas' own idea of *mutual-perspective taking*, wherein two sides of a given issue attempt to look through the perspective of the other in order to "develop a common horizon of background assumptions in which both sides accomplish an interpretation that is not ethnocentrically adopted or converted but, rather, *intersubjectively* shared" (Habermas in Borradori, 2003: 37). Thus, from a dialectical approach, it is important to look through the lenses of those Muslims who cannot or will not translate their religious moral-practical materials into publically accessible language for the abiding reasons which prohibit them from doing so. In following this imperative, I have identified three of the most impenetrable factors that would motivate religiously devout Muslims from engaging in Habermas' translation project; they are, (1) the inseparability of Qurʾānic "Truths" – its *content* - from its "revealed" *form*, (2) the Qurʾānic notion that Islam is already a "perfected" religion, and therefore should not mix its "truth with falsehood," and, (3) the lack of a traditional religious authority who could guide the broader European Muslim community through such a tenuous translation process. While there may be similar problems within Christianity, these three issues alone from within the Islamic tradition could effectively derail Habermas' translation proviso if strategies are not found to overcome such roadblocks, for it is these Muslims whom Habermas'

translation proviso is directed towards, not the already *liberalized* believers who already live within the cognitive space wherein they have reconciled their faith and the demands of secular society.

When asked to translated certain moral and ethical positions from within the closed semantic universe of Islam into publically accessible reasoning, Habermas assumes that the validity of such moral and ethical positions remain essentially the same in the process, i.e. he assumes that the truth content *can* survive the migration from the depth of its religious sources without being depleted. Habermas contends that translation, unlike determinate negation, is the "model for *non-destructive* secularization" (Habermas, 2003: 114).[33] If this idea is not already assumed, it would make no sense to translate religious semantics into secular language. Thus secularization, in this sense, does not disturb the *core veracity* of the religious claim, it only changes its medium of expression.[34] However, in arguing this, Habermas has already assumed a parallel with Christianity, precisely because the long process of secularizing Christian concepts into philosophy has a long history in Europe (Habermas, 2011: 27). Yet I do not find this parallel easily defendable due to the particularities of Islam that do not have strict Christian equivalences.

The problem, as I see it, is twofold; first, Christianity was in the process of "dying" when the *rescue* of its still relevant semantics and semiotics began to occur, especially during the Enlightenment. Thus, such an enlightened rescue attempt "salvaged" the "truth content" from a religion whose outward form – not only its political apparatus, but also its passé epistemology, moral hypocrisy, etc. – was causing it to collapse from decay, lost rearguard struggles,

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[33] Emphasis added.

[34] Horkheimer insisted that unconditional meaning, truth, etc. is "futile" without God. Many religious traditions argue that relativism prevails without a guarantor of the principles unconditionality. Nevertheless, Habermas rejects this claim, believing that post-metaphysical reasoning is able to defend "unconditional meaning" without theology. Therefore, he insists that the Truth claims of the religion can migrate into post-metaphysical thought without sacrificing the unconditionality it once had within religious semantics (Habermas, 1993: 133-146; Habermas, 2002: 162).

corruption, etc.[35] This is seemingly not the case for global Islam, wherein the religious community, despite the areas plagued with violent *fitnah* (divisions), continues to grow. As Habermas learned during his 2002 trip to Iran, religion appears to be on the increase; only the West is on a *Sonderweg*. Islam today is the fasting growing religion in the world, as well as in Europe, despite its current social and political predicaments.[36] In other words, although its *form* – especially its political form, i.e. *the Caliphate* – is seemingly defunct (from the western point of view), the core content of the religion itself is faithfully preserved by the vast majority of Muslims around the world, who have mostly been able to reconcile science and modern epistemology with its religious claims.[37] Wherein a salvaging of Christian concepts via translation into secular philosophical language was appropriate for a religion on the verge of its historic unraveling, Islam shows no sign of such fate, even though it often shows signs of distress or even sickness, often due to similar "modern" infections that Christianity suffered from. Nevertheless, the Muslims' antidote to those plagues has not followed the western model; it has not been a desperate salvaging of religious material, but rather a call for *tajdīd al-dīn* (renewal of religion). In this sense, Islam is presented as its own cure; secularization being rejected as the cure-all remedy for ailing religion. In fact, secularity, for many of these critics, is but one of the ailments of the *ummah* (global community). If there is no sense of urgency relating to the salvaging of a "dying Islam," as there was with Christianity, then Muslims are less likely to

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[35] Clearly not all recognized Nietzsche's claim and continued on with their passé religious claims. While some adjusted them in light of modern epistemology, secularization, etc., some continued on with their pre-modern faith, thus contributing to the religious diversity that defines the post-secular condition.

[36] We should be careful here not to fall under the spell of the fundamentalist's logic, which fails to distinguish between mere quantity and quality. While the Muslim community is growing numerically, it does not mean it is growing in terms of intellectual achievements, cultural achievements, or contributions towards a more reconciled future society. In these realms it is rather stagnant – a big difference from when it was at the forefront of history in the "Islamic Golden Age," the 8th to the 13the century.

[37] There are some notable exceptions, such as the Salafiyya and *Wahhābiya* (or *al-Muwaḥḥidun,* "Unitarians") who parallel many of the same religious stances as Christian fundamentalists; suspicion of science, including a rejection of evolution, rejection of the separation of church and state, rejection of autonomous reason and rejection of democracy, etc.

engage in such a transformative project, for the feeling is that their religion is alive (even if not well) and still capable of expressing itself adequately, and healing its own wounds, from *within* its own closed semantic universe.

Second, there is an assumed ontological unity of *form* and *content* when discussing the very Qurʾānic Truth claims that Habermas seeks to translate.[38] A part of "those who cannot or are not willing to" translate Islamic principles into secular language resist the divorce of the Qurʾānic form (the sacred language it was revealed in) from the Qurʾānic content, believing that such a divorce drains the "truth content" of its unconditional validity. Habermas himself recognized Horkheimer's claim that "one cannot secularize religion without giving it up" – a position that may be more tenable when a religion is already dying than in one whose death is not on the horizon (Horkheimer in Habermas, 2002: 96).[39] For devout Muslims, it is only in its *revealed form* that the truth content of the sacred text is understood to be unequivocally True (with a capital T), and therefore "unconditioned."[40] Therefore, to liberate Truth and morality

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[38] There is an old theological debate within Islam concerning the nature of truth and its revelation in divine scripture. The *Muʿtazilah* (Muʿtazilites in English), are best known for this kind of rationalist disputation of sacred texts. The *Muʿtazilah* were a school of prominent theologians in Iraq during the 8th to 10th century. Akin to medieval scholasticism, wherein the truth of the religion was already assumed, the *Muʿtazilah* used Hellenistic philosophy to prove the validity of the Qurʾān and other Islamic beliefs. However, their influence outlived their school, which was accused of deviating from the path of Muhammad due to its supposed elevation of reason over revelation. Their insistence on the unaided use of reason that could serve both as the inquisitor and the final judge of what is true, cause concern among those who were skeptical of reason's ability to ascertain truth. In the minds of the skeptics, reason rivaled revelation, and therefore trespassed on the sovereignty of the Divine. By the 15th century they ceased to exist as an independent school of Islamic philosophy and theology.

[39] On the other hand, in his 2003 essay *Faith and Knowledge,* Habermas calls the act of translating religion into secular philosophy "nondestructive" (Habermas, 2003: 114). The believer may ultimately decide whether or not it is destructive.

[40] This unconditional truth was rendered in Arabic in a precise form – it is understood by the believers to be the precise word of God (*Kalām Allāh*), not the language of an inspired writer, as one has in the case of the Gospels. Arabic thus has been rendered a sacred language, and the sacredness cannot be dismissed. Furthermore, the Qurʾān is, according to the Catholic theologian Hans Küng, dissimilar to Christianity, wherein Divine Logos became human. Rather in Islam, Divine Logos became book, and therefore the Qurʾān itself should be treated in the same reverent manner as if Jesus was physically appearing before a Christian (Küng, 2007: 65). Centuries of scholars and believers have worked to preserve the Qurʾān from linguistic modifications through rote memorization and careful copying. This process began already during the life of the Prophet. Therefore, the language in which the Divine reveals his truth is not a matter to be reckless with in Islam, but rather Muslims have a sacred duty to preserve the word of God precisely as it was revealed. When the a Qurʾān is "translated" from Arabic to another language, it is

from its sacred justifications, its legitimation, i.e. its rootedness in divinely revealed scripture, robs its of its objectivity – it becomes simply a matter of personal taste, self-interest, preference, etc., even if it would be *informed* by sacred tradition.[41] A Qurʾānic Truth is objectively true in the faith of the believers because it is part of a tapestry of Truth woven by the guarantor of all truth: *Allah,* who is himself *al-ḥaqq* (the Truth).[42] For traditional believers, the condition of Truth depends on the relationship of the truth claim to the Divine Creator – if it is understood to have derived directly from the Creator as revelation, or the Creator has declared it so, it is True. If it does not, it *may* be true or correct, but still remains within the possibility of being untrue. Therefore, the *unconditionality* of a Truth claim is in question without its revelatory medium of expression. To divorce the content from the sacred form therefore deprives the claim of its certitude and as a consequence undermines the claim itself within the eyes of the believer. This being the case, a translated Truth becomes a *postulate truth* – only assumed to be true but cannot be understood as unconditionally true. This is not to say that for Muslims all truth must derive from revealed sources; Islam has a long history of ascertaining truth by way of analogy (*qiyās*), empirical science (*ʿalm*), autonomous reason (*ʿaql*), etc., all being outside of its sacred texts. Rather, what is clear, is that even those truths must pass before the judging eyes of *Qurʾānic* norms if they are to be accepted as truth in Islam. In Islam, the *Qurʾān* is the *Furqān* (the criteria) for determining the veracity of any truth claim (al-Qurʾān, *Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 185).

With this Islamic epistemology in mind, the act of "sublation" – the act of transforming a greater form of rationality (sacred) into a lesser form of rationality (profane) i.e. translating

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often accompanied with the disclaimer that it is not the Qurʾān itself, rather a *translation of the meaning* of the Qurʾān. It can only a Qurʾān if it is in its revealed form, i.e. the original Arabic spoken by Prophet Muhammad and recorded by his *ṣaḥābah* (companions).

[41] Horkheimer made a similar critique in his essay on unconditional meaning without divinity, a sentiment Habermas rejected. See "To Seek to Salvage an Unconditional Meaning Without God is a Futile Undertaking: Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer" in Habermas' 2002 book, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God and Modernity.*

[42] In the Islamic tradition, Allah has ninety-nine names or "attributes," *al-ḥaqq* being one of them.

Islamic semantics and semiotics into secular language, by which it loses its claim to unconditional truth – would be a problem for many believers, as it appears to be a retrogressive development. To reduce what is understood to be unconditional Truth into *postulant truth* is to reduce the quality of truthfulness, not augment it. In other words, from the believer's perspective, it doesn't integrate a lesser into a greater, but rather debases a greater into a lesser. Here, Habermas may not only be *unmusical* in religion, as he's often claimed, but also simply unaware of the theological minutia of Islam that makes his translation proviso difficult to stomach for devout Muslims. Although Islam bears striking resemblance to "Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman ethics, norms and principles," due to its genealogical connection with them, it is nonetheless different in important ways, and these essential particularities cannot be neglected or set into abeyance, for they could appear to be insurmountable barriers to Habermas' translation proviso (Chérif, 2008: 21).

Furthermore, Habermas also does not bear in mind that Muslims believe, as an article of faith, that the Divine declared Islam to be a "*perfected religion*" – complete in what has been ordained by the divine. In the Qurʾān, Allah states, "today I have perfected your religion and completed my favor for you and approved Islam as your religion" (al-Qurʾān, *Sūrat al-Ma'idah*: 3; Lings, 2006: 350).[43] While there is internal discourse and dissention on the meaning and veracity of various ideas within the tradition, on constitutional matters of faith, it is truly a *closed semantic universe* – sealed within its own "perfection." Therefore, the core tradition cannot be added to or subtracted from, nor can it be modified by the hands – or minds – of man. From a theological perspective, this claim of "perfection" safeguards against unwanted *bid'a* (innovation), as it attempts to preserve the original theological and moral presuppositions that were established by the Divine through Prophet Muhammad from being infected by erroneous

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[43] My translation.

doctrines, enculturations, and ill-informed "reformations," which correspond to the social *needs*

of man, not the *commands* of the Divine.[44] This insistence on its own perfection is especially

important from a historical perspective; Islam understands itself as the *determinate negation* of

the *bid'a* of both Judaism and Christianity – Islam is the *negation of their innovations* and the

preservation of their truths. Thus it takes as its task to stand as the true standard bearer of

Abrahamic faith, the faith of radical *tawḥīd* (Divine oneness).[45] When it already understands

itself as the end result of a purification process, the idea of transforming it into something less

than the divinely established "perfected" again appears retrogressive and therefore undesirable –

a return to the man-made mistakes of Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, the act of sublimating

a "perfected religion" into imperfect conceptions of man would most certainly engender strong

objections from the devout, the very people whose positions are most sought after in Habermas'

translation proposal, as it is within that community of interpretation that philosophy looks for

"indispensable potentials for meaning" (Habermas, 2002: 162).

Habermas should not forget that the Qurʾān is the *primary source*, the *great constant* and

the *normative basis* for the *moral-practical rationality* that he seeks to translate into post-

metaphysical reasoning, and therefore the Qurʾān should not be taken as simply another

mendable "religious, ethical and legal-social codex" (Küng, 2007: 66, 74).[46] It is the "great

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[44] *Bid'a* should be understood as any erroneous innovation of religion. In traditional terms, it connotes a belief that something is a prescribed *devotional* practice that is not, or a belief that something is not a prescribed devotional practice when it is. Third, it can mean any belief or practice elevated to a status beyond what is determined by *Sharia'* law. While in secular matters, "innovations" are generally worthy of praise, as it brings needed changes to civil society, the arts, commerce, etc., in matters of religion, according to Islam, it is condemnable. That which Allah and his prophet ordained no man has the right to change.

[45] Similarly, the Qurʾān is often referred to as *al-Furqān* (the Criteria) by which passages of other sacred texts, especially the Torah and Gospels, are judged "authentic" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or not.

[46] Hans Küng rightly likens the Qurʾān to the Torah for the Jews and Christ for Christians, saying that it is "the way, the truth and the life" for Muslims. He writes, "the truth: the original source of the experience of God and piety and the mandatory criterion of right faith; the way: the true possibility of coping with the world and the eternally valid standard for correct action (ethic); the life: the abiding foundation of Islamic law and the soul of Islamic prayer, already the material for the instruction of Muslim children, the inspiration of Islamic art and the all-permeating spirit of Islamic culture" (Küng, 2007: 66).

thread" that interconnects all aspects of life for the believer, and as such, an unraveling of that thread is unwise, especially when that thread is the source of the potential semantic and semiotic material Habermas seeks to enlist in public discourse (Küng, 2007: 73). Hans Küng has rightly pointed out that Muslims understand the Qurʾān to be (1) linguistically perfect, (2) unique, inimitable and unsurpassable, (3) untranslatable, and (4) infallible and absolutely reliable, thus giving it an unquestionable status among the faithful (Küng, 2007: 66). And the sacred text is clear on the issue of Truth; it emphatically commands, "mix not the Truth with falsehood nor conceal the Truth while you know it" (al-Qurʾān, *Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 42).[47]

Furthermore, as long as the believer understands that Islam itself, without any translation, can say something important that cannot be said in a secular idiom, whether it is in secular philosophy or simply publically accessible political reasoning, the devout will resist its translation for the very reasons just discussed. Devout Muslims, who take the idea of Islam's *perfection* seriously, are not likely to risk their *ākhira* (heavenly afterlife) for the sake of *al-dunyā* (this life/this world), if they think that translating sacred texts and ideas transgresses the sovereignty of the Divine by mixing his Truth with man's infallibility/falsehoods. Again, such eschatological anxiety regarding the transforming of sacred thought into secular arguments escapes Habermas' own secular assumptions about religion's ability to be translated into secular reasoning. In a secular age, where the possibility of Divine punishment holds little if any credence, it is easy to suggest such a sublation of religion into secular philosophy, for it risks nothing. However, amidst the believers, who take eschatological questions seriously, such a suggestion risks *eternal* consequences. As such, Habermas' translation proposal, although it rests with good intentions, may unfortunately prove to be iatrogenic.

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[47] My translation.

To the secular observer, this seeming inflexibility in theology and sacred beliefs may appear dogmatic, unreasonable and even fundamentalistic, but at the same time, for many Muslims, it is this stubborn inflexibility that allows them to resist the corrosive effects of capitalist consumer culture, neo-liberal globalization and social degradation. In order to preserve their religious identity and human dignity, they must hold onto the most basic of theological premises, even when they appear irrational in the light of secular modernity. For better or worse, when disruptive social calamities occur, when anomic war breaks out, when society devolves into a vacuous mess of ethical relativism, it is the commitment to such normative values, principles, and ideals that keeps the Muslims from losing their dignity, their sense of identity and their sense of mission in the world. Surely there is a risk of back peddling into a fundamentalistic belief attitude when taken Islam's self-declared "perfection" to mean that it cannot evolve (Habermas in Borradori, 2003: 32). However, among more progressive Muslims, "perfection" doesn't mean cancelling of the religion's capacity for *becoming*, as to be "perfected" means to possess the authentic resources by which it can evolve without threatening the collapse of the non-negotiable aspects of Islam. In other words, *perfection*, among many scholars, doesn't necessarily mean *petrification*, as the fundamentalists seem to suggest, but rather Islam holds within its constitutional resources the capacity to remain true to its core social and theological claims while facing new and unique situations that call for imaginative responses and independent reasoning (Safi, 2003). Nevertheless, such progressivity is a minority voice amidst contemporary Muslims, as it appears that a large percent of traditional Muslims reflexively side with more conservative or even *reactionary* interpretations – especially in light of the moral and familial collapse of the West.

338

This desperate holding onto sacred tradition becomes even more important in light of pluralistic democracy and its antagonism towards the sacred. If Habermas' translation of Islamic semantics and semiotics were to occur, and the sacred "residue" still recognized within the now-secularized semantics remain recognizable, such a tacit sacred would be subjected to democratic scrutiny – man's irreverent critique of the Divine's imperatives (Habermas, Butler, et al, 2011: 112-113). Willingly offering up sacred claims to the slaughter of secular democratic deliberations may simply prove to be an insurmountable request for Habermas to expect religious Muslims to engage in. What still remains of the sacred is already rightly perceived to be under assault from the deleterious influence of secularity, especially the now globalized neo-liberal order. Why then would the Muslims willingly (1) profane the *sacred that remains* by translating it into profane language, and (2) then subject what's left of the sacred within the profane translation to possible democratic slaughter? Especially at a time when Muslims are globally feeling defensive about their faith, defensive about their status within Europe, and defensive about Islam's future in the West, offering up the most sacred to secular discourse – a sacred that resides at the heart of their already besieged identity – even if in a translated form, may be too much to risk. The potential reciprocity gained from the secular side by entering into such a theologically and eschatologically tenuous discourse may not be appreciated adequately by either side of that discourse. There is always the possibility that such communication could end in an even greater antagonism. Not wanting to jeopardize their already tenuous position in the post-secular society, it may be the case that devout Muslims now take the separation of church and state more seriously than Habermas; they wish not only to keep religion out of the state, but more importantly to keep the business of the state – formal deliberations – out of their

religion – both politically *and* semantically – whether that be in the original language or in translated form.

The key to potentially overcoming such Islamic objections to Habermas' translation proviso is to make clear to those who presently cannot or will not translate their beliefs into publically accessible reasoning is that the act of a Habermasian translation is "non-destructive," as opposed to *determinate negation*, which, as we saw with the first generation of Critical Theorists, follows Horkheimer's thinking that "one cannot secularize religion without giving it up" (Habermas, 2003: 114; Horkheimer in Habermas, 2002: 96).[48] While *determinate negation,* by its very nature, destructively produces a new phenomenon from the simultaneous negation and preservation of the thesis and antithesis, translation, the way Habermas intends, does not demand upon the believer the destruction of the thesis, i.e. Islam, only the creation of a temporarily-existing, exterior formulation of Islamic ideals, values, and principles in secular language, through which the believer can enter fully into the democratic will formation. In fact, such a translation does not affect Islam at all, but potentially advances the interests of the Muslims via language that can, in all hopes, be accepted via Islam's own resources as being valid within itself. Confusion as to the Hegelian logic of *determinate negation* and Habermas' form of translation will be the greatest hurdle to overcome among the recalcitrantly devout, as such believers are not interested in abandoning their faith for man-made ethical-moral formulations. Thus, the *non-destructiveness* logic of translation must be ensured.

Last, the issue of authority is a vexing problem in the Muslim community today. This bears upon our examination here due to the fact that someone has to speak for Islam and the Muslims. However, the conflict over who has legitimate authority over the Muslim community has been disputed since the death of Prophet Muhammad (632 CE), which resulted in the

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[48] Recall, Habermas states that "the mode for non-destructive secularization is translation" (Habermas, 2003: 114).

entrenched divisions between the *ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamāʿah* (Sunni) and the *Shīʿatu ʿAlī* (Shiʾa) (Dabashi, 1989: 47-120). Sunni scholars hold no authority over the Shiʾa faithful and vice versa, neither have they developed an official priesthood who could serve as an authoritative voice of the community. The Shiʾa on the other hand have developed a powerful hierarchy of clerics based on religious merit and scholarship, which culminate in the figure of the *marjaʿ-i taqlīd* (source of emulation), of which there are only a few dozen or more at a time in existence.[49] And unlike the Sunnis, the Shiʾa concentration of religious power in the hands of clerics has taken on a theocratic concreteness with the Islamic Republic of Iran (Byrd, 2011). The religious authorities not only hold spiritual authority, but also hold a large degree of political authority, at least in Iran. Conversely, the Sunni's religious authorities do not have the same binding power over the faithful. The faithful autonomously bind themselves to religious scholars but always preserve their individual right of conscience to interpret sacred text according to their own understanding. Nevertheless, within the context of the European post-secular society, the question isn't really which *sect's* authorities will be followed, but rather *who among the Muslims have the authority to translate the sacred meaning material of the Qurʾān into non-revealed secular language; who – from the Islamic perspective – has the right to not only speak in the name of the Muslim masses, but also to subject the Kalām Allāh* (speech of God) *into secular translation?* Seemingly, within a democratic society, we assume that every individual has the right to translate his or her faith positions into public reasoning, but Islam is not a democracy nor is the individual believer granted such a right from *within* the tradition itself. In a free society, and as a matter of individual conscience, yes, all Muslims are capable of making such a translation, but their individual translations have no bearing on the rest of the *ummah*. However,

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[49] The Iranian scholar and revolutionary Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is the most prominent of the 20th century's *marja'-i taqlīd.*

even if all Muslims were to accept the right to translate their personal faith positions, a disparate conglomeration of individual translations is hardly feasible when discussing the *formal* deliberations of governing bodies. While it may be suitable for the *informal* public sphere, such translations must be packaged in legislative proposals and such proposals imply cooperation and consensus, and an *authoritative* author must do such work.

Thus, our problem of Islamic authority seemingly remains intractable. Traditional religious scholars and authorities (ʿulamāʾ) have never engaged in such a translation project. Islam, since its birth in the 6th century, has never had to make itself known outside of its own theological language and legitimation. This lack of precedent is an abiding factor for the Muslims in the West; as stated before, there seems to be no traditional authority, which retains proper Islamic credentials (*ijazah*), which would feel comfortable with the theological landmines and eschatological uncertainties associated with this project. This claim rings especially true in light of the current antagonism between Islamists and Europe – between western *hubris* and their terroristic *nemeses*. Translating Islamic ideals into a supposedly "western," i.e. secular idiom, would inevitably involve allegations that Islam was being distorted for the benefit of occidental sensitivities. Beyond the political, no *traditional* scholar would claim to have the authority to reformulate Islamic principles within a non-revealed secular language.[50] While such formulations *may* engender democratic legitimation, they may fall short of Islamic legitimation.

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[50] The traditional ʿulamāʾ are the guardians of tradition, the inheritors of legal precedent, and the conservative safeguard against *bid'a*; they themselves are not usually sources of truly innovative thought. Theirs is a universe steeped in classical institutions and methods, legal-moral antecedents, and historical continuity, and remain extremely skeptical of any kind of deviation from traditional conceptions of religion. In the realm of Islamic law (*fiqh*) there resides a deep antagonism regarding the validity of *ijtihād*, or "independent reasoning" versus *taqlīd*, or "imitation of and/or conformity to legal precedent" practiced by the *fuqahā'* (legal scholars). While some Sunni scholars emphasize the necessity of the *faqīh* (Islamic jurist) to use their independent reasoning to discover solutions to problems that are not explicitly addressed in sacred texts and *shari'a*, other scholars claim this leads to ad hoc law, devoid of sacred legitimation. They rather emphasize the necessity of conforming all contemporary legal opinions within the precedents established by earlier legal *ijmāʿ* (consensus). See Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction* (2010).

Nevertheless, the legitimation of the Muslim demos may be all that is needed within the democratic society.

Secular Roadblocks to the Translation Proviso: Terrorism and Islamophobia

In looking at the various difficulties with implementing Habermas' translation proviso, we have hence focused on one side of our *mutual-perspective taking*: the potential for problems deriving from the Muslim side of the equation. Whether it's due to the compounded diversity of the Muslim *ummah* in Europe, the theological claims of the Qurʾān and other sacred texts, or the intractable problem of authority, we have seen there are some major internal hurdles for Habermas' proposal to overcome. However, it is also clear from identifying the determining conditions of the European post-secular society that there is also an equal or even more powerful opposition to such a religious translation emanating from outside the *ummah*: from the secular side. The fear of *political Islam*, i.e. *Islamism*, by far is the most palpable.[51] As the presence of Muslims in the European public sphere becomes more and more visible, as the public signs of Islam, i.e. mosques, hijabs, halal restaurants and public prayer, become more prevalent within the public sphere, and as Muslims vocally press their case for equal rights, equal protections, and equal opportunities under the law, the more resistance Muslims face from those who do not see their presence within the West as being desirable. Furthermore, the more the threat of *terrorism* – violent Islamism' most universal sign – defines the coordinates of the western lifeworld, the

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[51] Islamism, or "political Islam" (*al-Islām al-siyāsī*), is the modern attempt to infuse Islam, or Islamic values, into governance. The scholar of the Middle East, Deepa Kumar, defines it broadly as "the reinterpretation of Islam by various individuals and groups to serve particular political goals" (Kumar, 2012: 94). While this can take on the form of fundamentalism, it is not inherently hostile to liberal democracy. For instance, the Duke University Professor of Islamic Studies, Omid Safi, has often argued for a "progressive Islam" that has much to contribute to politics, including a critique of capitalism. Islamic progressives do not advocate for an "Islamic state," but rather view the emancipatory values of Islam as being compatible and/or complimentary with socialism. See Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (2003).

343

more *resentment* grows towards Muslims, immigrants, and any other group associated with Muslims, including the European left.[52] The xenophobic Far Right, sometimes referred to as the "New Right" or "Alt-Right" in the U.S., often view liberals and leftists, who are committed to multiculturalism, as the friendly gatekeepers of the West, and Europe in particular. It is claimed that due to their misguided sense of post-colonial guilt, they have let the invading horde into the fortress – thus setting Europe on a path of self-destruction.[53] As Islam becomes increasingly a permanent fixture within modern European society, the more the anti-Islam discontent grows, becomes entrenched, and becomes normalized politically. Already in some cases, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiments have become mainstream, no longer limited to the private sphere. In some cases, such sentiments form the basis of political parties, such as the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) in Italy, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands, *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany) in Germany, and *Front National* (National Front) in France, etc. Whereas such xenophobic sentiments would have been thoroughly excluded from the public sphere just as recent as a decade ago, they are now free to be openly expressed in public, or even more cynically, to serve as the platforms for mainstream political parties (Žižek, 2013).

Islamophobia can be defined simply as the "fear of Islam and/or Muslims." However, on the face of it, this definition does not adequately capture much of the true feelings for Islam that

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[52] In the Dutch political discourse there is a world that represents the sense of being "wronged" by immigrants and the problem they bring: *verongelijktheid.* This word goes beyond the feeling of "resentment," and embodies the bitter feeling that a historical crime has happened. According to Ian Buruma, this feeling pervades any discussion of immigrants and Islam in the Netherlands. See Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam* (2006).

[53] Here I'm thinking particularly about those who share the beliefs of the Norwegian Islamophobe Anders Behring Breivik, who massacred seventy-seven individuals in Oslo and Utøya Island in July of 2011. Breivik thought that "cultural Marxists," especially those influenced by the Frankfurt School, were responsible for the lax immigration policies of the EU, which he believed were threatening the culture of Christian Europe. He documented his arguments in his manifesto: *2083: A European Declaration of Independence,* which was released the day of his attack. See Aage Borchgrevink, *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya* (2013). Additionally, it is clear that Anders' beliefs are not atypical for "New Right" philosophy, which is fundamentally opposed to multiculturalism, immigration and especially Muslims.

its opposition harbors, which is more akin to *hatred* than *fear*.[54] Many who hate Islamists do not fear Muslims, and many who hate Muslims do not fear Islamists. As such, there is a distinguishable difference between *fear of Islam and Muslims* and *hatred of Islam and Muslims* that should be reflected in our concepts. Yet, as to avoid the controversy of redefining a generally accepted definition, I will follow the definition of the Turkish philosopher Ibrahim Kalin, who writes that Islamophobia is "intolerance, discrimination, unfounded fear and racism against Islam and Muslims" (Esposito and Kalin, 2011: 4).[55] Defined as such, Kalin notes that Islamophobia "factors into a range of contentious issues, from politics and immigration to schools and the workplace," thus revealing the *systemic violence* embedded deep within the antagonisms of the post-secular condition (Esposito and Kalin, 2011: 8; Habermas, 2006: 15).[56] Understanding the problem to be beyond the realm of law, Habermas calls for a more comprehensive approach, one that isn't limited to mere legislation from the liberal state, but rather a comprehensive *change of consciousness*, a rethinking of the framework by which we understand shared citizenship, and a broader commitment to inclusivity amidst differences, especially religious differences. But how we get from the current condition to a more reconciled condition is still in question, and Habermas' translation proviso, or even discourse ethics, so far has not seemed adequate to the task he assigns it to.

Although some fear that the mass influx of immigrants means social chaos, rise in crime, and a return of anti-Semitism (by Islamists), at the core of Islamophobia resides the fear of a

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[54] Elsewhere I have preferred to use the neologism *miso-Islamism,* which abandons the suffix "phobia" (fear) and replaces it with the Greek prefix "miso," meaning "hatred." This better encapsulates the feeling of many anti-Islam activists and thinkers.

[55] I have serious disagreements with those who equate racism with Islamophobia. As I've shown elsewhere, one can be Islamophobic and not racist, and racist but not Islamophobic. As long as the two can be philosophically differentiated, the two should remain conceptually delineated.

[56] Slavoj Žižek defines *systemic violence* as the "often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems." Furthermore, he states that it "may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seems to be 'irrational' explosion of subjective violence," i.e. violence "experienced… against the background of a [perceived] non-violent zero level" (Žižek, 2008: 2).

religion reloaded with political zeal; the fear of a return to a time when religion had an undue influence over the political apparatus; the fear of a state of existence wherein the autonomy of the individual is eclipsed by the heteronomy of dogmatic religion, and the fear when moral matters were determined by sacred texts, clerics, and authoritarian hierarchies.[57] For example, the Dutch artist Theo van Gogh, who was publically assassinated by the Dutch-Moroccan Mohammed Bouyeri in November of 2004, often argued that Islamists wanted to implement *Shari'a* law in the Netherlands, which would completely undue its libertine culture, i.e. its sexual openness, its liberal attitude towards drugs, prostitution and pornography, it irreverence towards religious figures, its irreligiosity, and its broad embrace of free speech and expression, including the right of blasphemy (Eyerman, 2008: 1-23). Although the Netherlands have been one of the Europe's most progressive states since the Middle Ages, it has had to struggle for the social freedoms it now enjoys. This *Islamic threat* to the liberal culture of Europe via the imposition of religious law, especially of the Netherlands (in van Gogh's case), is a motivating factor for the liberals to join with the conservatives against open immigration – immigrants being the identified bearers of such conservative potentials. Without seeing any alternatives, this *clash of values* is placed within a binary framework, as Ian Buruma writes, it is "secularism, science, equality between men and women, individualism, freedom to criticize without fear of violent retribution" against "divine laws, revealed truth, male domination, [and] tribal honor" (Buruma, 2006: 31). This binary choice, as Mustapha Chérif has indicated, between the "hatred of the spiritual – felt by some – and the fear of a freedom suspected of being only license and

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[57] Despite the fact that most violent crimes perpetrated by Muslims in Europe have not been recent immigrants, but rather by those who've been in Europe for years of even a couple generations, the "summer of welcoming" in 2015 (in Germany) has transformed into the "summer of violence and fear" in 2016, with controllable immigration being perceived as the greatest problem. The numerous Islamist attacks that have occurred within the German Republic have led to a sense that Merkel's open door policy towards Syrian refugees has welcomed in a population unfit for Europe. 1.1 million refugees have entered Germany by the summer of 2016, and this mass influx, coupled with random acts of terrorism and the economic strain associated with providing for them, have legitimated the Far Rights' position on Muslims: "they have to leave Germany."

permissiveness – which obsesses others – accelerates dehumanization" (Chérif, 2008: 4). Furthermore, the fear of Islam's cultural influence in Europe is coupled with the fear that Muslims are overtaking the population of native Europeans, who as a whole have a negative birthrate. It is often claimed that Muslims intend to implement their political theology whilst seeking to conquer post-Christian Europe in a way that the Ottomans at Vienna's gate in 1683 could never have imagined: from the inside – through mass immigration.[58] Immigration from North Africa and the Middle East are viewed from the position of both the Enlightenment Fundamentalist and the political Far Right as being the open flank of Europe – an attack that will have civilizational consequences. This growing suspicion that Muslims are overwhelming Europe, and Europe has made itself defenseless with its overly-accommodating immigration and multiculturalism policies, may play an undermining factor in Habermas' proposal to translate Islamic principles, values, and ideals into publically accessible reasoning, for it may appear that, just as immigration is the Muslims' *front door* to Europe, translation of Islam into secular legislation is the *backdoor* for Islam into Europe. The difference being that the latter is camouflaged by secular garb, while the former is easily identifiable.

As such, Europe has become increasingly leery on two front: first, the growth of Islamism within its midst, especially among recent immigrants and increasingly among the disaffected second generation of Euro-Muslims, who have left Europe by the thousands to join radical Islamist group such as *al-Qa'eda* and the *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria* (ISIS) (Leiken, 2012; Weiss, 2015: 153-169).[59] Secondly, Europe is concerned with the growing frequency of

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[58] The year 1683 has become a rallying cry in many anti-Islam movements and parties in Europe. This was the year that the Ottoman Empire was defeated by a combined European force just outside of Vienna, Austria. This defeat marked the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which finally dissolved after the end of the WWI with the last Sultan, *Meḥmed-i sâdis* (Mehmed VI).

[59] On this subject, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes that true *passion* today can only be found with religious fundamentalism. The West is mired in its own absolute narcissistic economy, which robs it of all motivating convictions and transcendent causes, leaving it with a sterile detachment. It can be argued that these apathetic

terrorist strikes within its borders, which is the ultimate result of the unchecked growth in radical Islamism as well as the unresolved political situation in the Middle East that daily provides the *revenge* motive (lex talionis) to attack the West. Many of these young Islamists have returned to their home countries in Europe to carry out attacks on civilians, such as the coordinated terrorist attacks on Paris in November of 2015 and the attacks on Brussels the following March of 2016. With Europe under the spell of a "siege mentality," wherein it has become increasingly defensive of "its values" versus "their values," while at the same time dealing with the pervasive identity crisis – a part of what Habermas calls Europe's "faltering project" – it would be questionable to engage in an opening of any doors that could appear to grant the foreign – and seemingly hostile – "other" any more access and/or influence within the fragile society and secular state (Habermas, 2009). The invitation for Muslims to translate Islam – the perceived source of such uneasiness (*unbehagen*) in Europe – into secular legislation that will govern all citizens, could engender a considerable backlash, especially from the "Enlightenment fundamentalists," who would inevitably accuse the state of compromising its secularity with Islamic political theology. Neither would the Far Right go along with this quietly; they have already accused the state of abandoning European culture and civilization in order to appease the Muslim "hordes." The optics themselves would be enough to invite suspicion of religious infiltration into the secular state. Secular language could therefore be accused of being the *Trojan Horse* in which Islam infiltrates, undermines, and overtakes Europe. Furthermore, Muslims themselves may not want to engender this hostile reaction, as it is sure to provoke Islamophobic violence against their homes, schools, mosques, and vulnerable members of the *ummah*.

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conditions are one of the reasons why so many young Muslims gravitate towards ISIS and their rebuilding of the Caliphate; it provides them with a sense of identity, purpose and mission. Outside of right-wing anti-immigrant populism, religious fundamentalism is the only clear example of a transcendental cause in the secular West (Žižek, 2013: 85, 96).

I think there is a revealing lesson to be learned from the experiences of the Jews in Europe, one that may be beneficial to Muslims, and one that was not unfamiliar to the first generation of Critical Theorists. Zionist philosophy exists due to Theodor Herzl's realization that no matter how much the Jews integrated into European society, no matter how much they assimilated European culture, the "remainder" – the non-identical, to use Adorno's term, always determined the *outsider* status of the Jewish people.[60] He was not alone in this opinion. Herzl's philosophy, summarized in his pamphlet *Der Judenstaat*, voiced a common feeling among the Jewish population even before the rise of the Third Reich and their virulent form of anti-Semitism. From their experiences, many Jews realized that they would always remain *mere Jews* in the view of European society, even by "enlightened" liberals. Even in the Soviet Union, where it claimed to be the actualization of universal equality derived from the Marxian Enlightenment, the "Jewishness" of a segment of the proletariat always made the Jews suspects, and thus there was a need to "de-Judaize" Russia. Stalin himself deployed traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes in his battle with Leon Trotsky, which harkened back to the bloody pogroms of the Czars. Therefore, even if Jews subjectively feel a part of the *willensgemeinschaft*, their experiences teach them the painful limitation of such *willensgemeinschaft*. As already pointed out, the Dreyfus Affair most powerfully affirmed the suspicion: Jews as *perpetual outsiders*. Today, the deepening crisis of terrorism and its response may affirm the Muslim as the new *perpetual outsider*.

It may be the case for the contemporary European Muslim community, that no matter what is "translated" into non-theological, i.e. non-Islamic language, as long as it is seen to have originated from within Islam, the foreign "other," it will be rejected and/or resisted. As we've

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[60] Frantz Fanon came to a similar conclusion regarding the colonized who attempt to assimilate the culture of their "mother-country." See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York, Grove Press: 2008.

seen, this insight has precedence in the painful history of Jews in Europe. Secular authors, such as Marx and Freud, who bore no outward allegiance to Judaism, and were by all means assimilated into European culture, we're also accused of advancing *Jewish thought* within their secular works. Like the accusation against the camouflaging of Islam in secular garb, these two authors were accused of camouflaging Judaism within secular philosophy and psychology, which, as I've argued earlier in this work, may be true to some degree. Jewish ideals, it appears, remained recognizable within the secular translation, and thus the suspicion of "Judaizing" (*Verjudung*) Europe continued (Aschheim, 1997). An echo of such suspicions can be heard in the "stop the *Islamization* of Europe" slogans today and would nevertheless grow even stronger should Islamic ideals be translated into enacted legislation.

If it can be Translated, what can be Translated: The Islamic Moral-Practical?

If we have considered all the "roadblocks" that will be encountered in the actualization of Habermas' translation proviso, and still remain committed to the project, we must ascertain what aspects of religion and theology can be translated into publically accessible reasoning and what cannot, and we must ascertain what the ramifications are for the Muslims' faith if such aspects of their religion are translated into publically accessible reasoning.

First, it is clear that Habermas' logic presupposes that Muslims will not be leaving their religion behind once they have entered into his translation project, but rather will remain faithful to their religious creeds. Therefore, while they are preserving the religious ideas rooted within their sacred texts, they will also be creating new formulations of those ideas that they will also bear some degree of allegiance to. In other words, they are *strategically* translating aspects of the

350

religion for the purposes of discourse, not mere communication, with non-Muslims. In other words, they are not leaving their religion in the process. This form of translation is not a permanent *determinate negation* per se, nor is it a wholesale sublation of religion under the banner of philosophy, by which the believer *disavows* himself from the previous medium of articulation (religious) and *allies* himself with the new (secular). Rather it is a *temporary* and *public* re-articulation of religious semantics and semiotics by which those elements are made accessible to the public use of reason. Islam and the *Qurʾān*, within the *private domain* of the individual, remains untranslated. Their faith retains its original religious expression although the believer can now recognize its "residue" within the public-secular expression of its materials. But what does this residue express? This brings us to the second point; Habermas rightly assumes that the whole of the Islamic tradition cannot be brought into discourse with the secular, as some things are simply 1) untranslatable, or 2) not willing to be translated, as it would invite intellectual absurdity and/or eschatological anxiety. For example, how does one translate the Islamic ban on consuming pork into secular legislation in Europe, or the ban on urinating in the direction of Mecca? Such things, such as Islamic dietary laws (*ḥalāl*), must simply remain within the domain of the sacred, for that is the only geography in which they make sense. If Habermas is correct, and religion intrudes onto the modern landscape "as the most awkward element from its past," what specific "awkward element" could possibly be rendered into publically accessible reasoning? (Habermas, 2010: 16)?

In Habermas' theory of *communicative rationality,* he surmises that the once organic, holistic and substantively integrated reason, which characterized pre-modern worldviews, especially those rooted in religion, have been thoroughly drained of their content and divided into three *formal* types of reason: *cognitive-instrumental, aesthetic-expressive* and *moral-*

practical (Habermas, 1984). Since religions, including Islam, are examples of *pre-modern worldviews*, we can safely argue that they still retain all three types of reason, even under the strain of modernity. Although in the West most believers have made peace, or at least come to a détente, with the compromises they've made with modern reason, and therefore unconsciously submit to the tripartite division Habermas presents, to many, such a fractured and compromised worldview cannot be accepted. Among the Muslims with such a position, Islam is thought to be holistic, integrated, and comprehensive; it cannot therefore be artificially segregated by way of its rationalities. Therefore, their *pre-modern* worldviews defy the compromises that their fellow believers capitulated to. This is important due to the fact that those believers who have compromised with modern reason can find their way into public discourse already through publically accessible reasoning. In other words, they have already found strategies by which they can translate their religious views into secular rationality or don't feel the need to so precisely because they feel free to consent to the secular rationality without any appeal to religious justifications. Rather it is the religiously recalcitrant who retains the purely religious arguments, motivations and intuitions that Habermas is seeking to translate.

According to Habermas, not all three forms of reason provide the necessary *moral-deliberative* material that is needed in a discourse amidst the post-secular society. Habermas rightly warns against such an overly ambitious translation of religion by saying that "it would be the worst kind of intellectualism to expect that philosophy's 'way of translation' could completely appropriate the forms of experience preserved in religious language" (Habermas, 2002: 164). Indeed, philosophy remains incapable of translating those aspects of religion that defy linguistic articulation: the mystical state of Divine transcendence and other cultic experiences being the most obvious. With this in mind, it becomes abundantly clear that

Habermas is not particularly interested in the *cognitive-instrumental* and the *aesthetic-expressive*
side of religious worldviews/rationality for translation, for those aspect do not adequately supply
the ethical and moral substance needed to address social issues. With this in mind, he does
provide a clue as to what aspect of religion he's hoping to translate into reason accessible to
secular society, writing,

> Although religion can neither be reduced to morality nor be assimilated to ethical
> value orientations, it nevertheless keeps alive an awareness of both elements. The
> public use of reason by religious and nonreligious citizens alike may well spur
> deliberative politics in a pluralist civil society and lead to the recovery of
> semantic potentials from religious traditions for the wider political culture
> (Habermas, 2011: 27-28).

In this passage, we see that he's looking to those aspects of religion that can "spur deliberative
politics" over a variety of social issues confronting contemporary society, through which such
contemporary society may rediscover latent or forgotten semantic and semiotic potentials that
may prove to be valuable. Thus, I argue Habermas looks primarily at the *moral-practical*
rationality within religion to be the vehicle by which religion enters into public discourse with
secular citizens.

In Habermas' 2001 Peace Prize lecture, *Faith and Knowledge* (2003)*,* he gives us a
concrete example of a religious notion translated into publically accessible reasoning by which it
delivers important and insightful moral material to secular society. If done successfully, and the
religious genealogy of an apparent secular argument is made visible, then such an understanding,
he believes, may contributed to the "self-enlightenment of a civil society torn by *kulturkampf*"
(Habermas, 2003: 114-115).[61] In other words, the consented to post-religious argument may
serve as a bridge between those factions torn by deep cultural divisions. The particular case he

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[61] On this issue, Jacques Derrida goes beyond Habermas' religious origins of secular morality, believing that some
of the most fundamental *political* categories of the West, such the *state* and *sovereignty*, are "secularized theological
concepts." Like Habermas, he also calls for a deconstruction of such concepts by which the theological genealogy
can be made visible within the secular category (Derrida in Chérif, 2008: 52-53).

cites as an example of such a bridge has to do with a controversial biomedical issue: genetic

engineering, which, without engaging in the self-reflexivity of *mutual-perspective taking*, often

pits secular *cognitive-instrumental* reason against a religiously rooted *moral-practical* form of

reason. In his translation, Habermas invokes the *imago Dei* – man's creation in the "image of

God" – as a source of religious insight that sheds light on the morality of modifying human

genetics (Genesis, 1:27). He writes,

> In the controversy, for instance… many voices still evoke the first book of Moses, Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." In order to understand what *Gottesebenbildlichkeit* – "in the likeness of God" – means, one need not believe that the God who is love creates, with Adam and Eve, free creatures who are like him. One knows that there can be no love without recognition of the self in the other, nor freedom without mutual recognition. So, the other who has human form must himself be free in order to be able to return God's affection. In spite of his likeness to God, however, this other is also imagined as being God's creature. Regarding his origin, he cannot be of equal birth with God. This creatural nature of the image expresses an intuition which in the present context may even speak to those who are tone-deaf to religious connotation. Hegel had a feeling for this difference between divine "creation" and mere "coming from" God. God remains a "God free men" only as long as we do not level out the absolute difference that exists between the creator and the creature. Only then, the fact that God gives form to human life does not imply a determination interfering with man's self-determination (Habermas, 2003: 114-115).

Not even here is Habermas done with his complex translation of the theological into language

accessible to all citizens. He continues,

> Because he is both in one, God the Creator and God the Redeemer, this creator does not need, in his actions to abide by the laws of nature like a technician, or by the rules of a code like a biologist or computer scientist. From the very beginning, the voice of God calling into life communicates within a morally sensitive universe. Therefore, God may "determine" man in the sense of enabling and, at the same time, obliging him to be free. Now, one need not believe in theological premises in order to understand what follow from this, namely, that an entirely different kind of dependence, perceived as a causal one, because involved in the difference assumed as inherent in the concept of creation were to disappear, and the place of God be taken by a peer – if, that is, a human being would intervene, according to his own preferences and without being justified in assuming, at least counterfactually, a consent of the concerned other, in the random combination of

354

> the parent's set of chromosomes. This reading leads to the question I dealt with elsewhere: Would not the first human being to determine, *at his own discretion,* the natural essence of another human being at the same time destroy the equal freedoms that exist among persons of equal birth in order to ensure their difference?

Two important points can be deduced from Habermas' sophisticated translation of a particular biblical insight into post-metaphysical reasoning. First, that such a translation is possible, wherein a particular religious value is reformulated in such a way that it no longer appears explicitly tied to religious legitimation – it has migrated from the depth of the exclusive semantic universe of religion to the common space of secular discourse. Having untethered it from its theological mooring, the *truth content* is now articulated in religiously neutral, language, without sacrificing the intent of such a religious belief (Junker-Kenny, 2011:134).[62] Although it is no longer a *religious* argument per se, both the religious and the secular can detect the genealogical relation to religion, its "residue" to use Judith Butler's term (Butler in Habermas et al, 2011: 112). This augments the secular individual's appreciation of religion's potential to export meaningful semantic and semiotic material to the national discourse without the threat of introducing its closed system of reasoning, and on the religious side, they know that the state and their fellow citizens take their concerns and contributions seriously, albeit expressed through the secular language. However, the second point we can learn from Habermas' exhaustive example is not as positive as the first. If we accept Habermas' translation as a typical example of what is intellectually necessary to make a theological argument into a secular one, then we can surmise that it is well outside of bounds of the average religious believer due to the intellectual complexity and philosophical sophistication of such arguments. As is expected in such a project, Habermas deploys the language of specialists, i.e. philosophers and theologians, to make an

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[62] The theologian Maureen Junker-Kenny sees Habermas' translation of the *Imago Dei* as proof of his ability to step inside of the closed semantic universe of religion and understand their perspective from within their own resources, which, she finds, is superior to his liberal counterpart John Rawls (Junker-Kenny, 2011: 134).

intellectually complex theo-philosophical argument. Such abstract language resources are not generally available to the average believer, or for that matter, the average secular citizen. Thus, such a project calls for the labor of specialists who have an intimate knowledge of both the religious lexicon, including theology and law, as well as the lexicon of secular social, political and economic philosophy. While Habermas may be qualified to play a role in such a difficult project, his non-academic neighbors may not be, regardless of their faith or faithlessness.[63]

However, there may still be an important role for the average Muslim citizen in Habermas' translation proviso. On an individual basis, Muslims may find ways of reconciling their personal ethical-moral principles with secular principles already found within the common universe of ethical-moral norms that are routinely expressed within the public sphere and/or by the state. Among the moral-practical resources that Islam can offer pluralist civil society, are social practices such as *zakāh* and the ethical reasoning that justifies it. For example, a Muslim who believes in *zakāh*, or the religious obligation to give alms to the poor, may lend their support to the secular welfare state, as it also attempts to provide for the minimum needs of the citizenry. However, the idea that giving alms to the poor *purifies* the wealth of the individual donor, for wealth is a trust and a *test from the divine* in Islam, may not find expression in secular terms. The citizens' *legal requirement* to pay taxes, which is naturally coercive, is not the same as the *moral decision* to *freely* give alms to those in desperate need.[64] Nevertheless, support can be lent to the welfare state precisely because the ultimate goal of both *zakāh* and welfare is to provide for the

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[63] Habermas often calls for religious believers to accept the finding of the expert cultures, especially those of science, who are more qualified to determine the empirical truth about physical reality, as opposed to those who rely on revelation for such judgments. Here, I think it is also appropriate that such expertise, in this case the expertise of professional theologians and philosophers (intellectuals), be deployed for his translation project, for they are the ones with the necessary linguistic and conceptual resources by which such a complex linguistic translation can be brought about.

[64] Although Muslims are required under Islamic law to give a certain percentage of the excess wealth to the poor, there is no mechanism in most Muslims countries to penalize those who do not. Being so, those institutions that collect and distribute the *zakāh* are dependent on the individual's own moral compulsion to contribute.

minimum needs of those who are deficient in the means to satisfy those needs themselves. While

the *spiritual* element of *zakāh* evaporates in the secular translation, the *moral-practical* element,

including a sense of solidarity with others, remains intact.

Another example in which individual Muslims can find a secular counterpart to their

religious morality comes directly from the Qurʾān itself. In *Sūrat al-ḥujurāt,* verse 13, it states,

"O mankind, we created you male and female, and fashioned you into nations and tribes, so that

you may know each other. Verily the most honorable of you in the sight of God is the most

righteous. Allah is all-knowing and aware."[65] This verse has traditionally been interpreted as the

basis of Islam's rejection of racism. In it, it calls for mankind to understand human differences as

reasons to come to "know each other," i.e. to enter into an inter-subjective discourse and

cultivate neighborly relations. Racism, by which an individual judges the measure and worth of

another human being on account of their racial makeup, is *ḥarām* (forbidden) in Islam precisely

because it is unjust according to this and other divine dictates. Such an absolute restriction is also

supported by the *Sunnah* (prophetic way) of Prophet Muhammad, as racism was explicitly

condemned in his 632 CE *Farewell Sermon*. Speaking for the last time before a crowd of his

followers, he said, "O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no virtue

of an Arab over a foreigner nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin

nor black skin over white skin, except by righteousness." (Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Hadith:

22978; Ramadan, 2007: 196). The Islamic insistence on *monogenesis*, that all of humanity

derives from a common ancestor, who name is Adam, and thus all humans share in the kinship

bonds regardless of race, finds similar expression in the Enlightenment's rejection of racism and

equal rights, even though such modern struggles no longer refer to a monogenesis creation story.

Although the positivistic anthropology of race can account for the *accidents* of race, such racial

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[65] My translation.

differences do not cancel the *universal* that binds humanity, which was expressed in the Qurʾān and Muhammad's sermon, nor do those accidents provide sufficient reason for antagonisms according to sacred scripture. Yet, because anti-racism, rooted in scientific biological studies and anthropology, is a defining feature in much of the modern Enlightened West, one need not believe in the *literal* existence of Adam and Eve to consent to the belief that all humanity, by virtue of being human, are equal bearers of human rights, equally deserve respect, and as such engender equal consideration in terms of those basic rights and privileges. Again, while the *monogenetic mythos* (sacred story) of Adam and Eve disappears in its secular translation, the *moral-practical* element of the Adamic story, the rejection of racism, the struggle against racist bigotry, and the preservation of man's inherent equality is preserved within the liberal democratic society as a moral good, and as a legal imperative to treat all humans as equals regardless of race or national origin, language, etc. Both the Enlightened scientific secular West and Islam agree on this matter.

These two examples, and the many more that could be written here, give credence to a belief that is common among many Muslim scholars: that there is some form of *universal morality* that is inherent in human cultures that transcends both religion and non-religion. In other words, in agreement with many Enlighteners, these scholars do not believe that *religion* makes man moral per se, but rather mankind finds expression in their particular religions of a "common" morality that may already be present before a religious conscience forms. For example, according to the influential Mauritanian Sunni scholar Shaykh 'Abdallah bin Bayyah,

> shared values do exist. The best proof for this are the human faculties of reason…
> and of language. Every rational mind recognizes justice and every language has a
> word for it… the same can be said for "truth," "liberty," "tolerance," "integrity,"
> and many other concepts. These are praised by all cultures and expressed
> positively in all languages" (bin Bayyah in Esposito and Kalin, 2011: 8).

While it is clear that different cultures, religions, and civilizations, forward vastly different articulations to these "shared values," these universal impulses, while not laden with historical and cultural particularities, can be found throughout mankind, at least since the moral explosion that occurred during the Axial Age. These "shared values" according to bin Bayyah, can serve as the common basis for discourse among the religious and the secular.[66] With this realization, bin Bayyah is optimistic that such an open, honest, and robust discourse can find a comfortable overlapping consensus on a variety of *moral-practical* issues that are confronting both the West and the *dar al-Islam.* In other words, the self-contained universes of meaning are not entirely incompatible. As long as they remain open to the reasoning, regardless of its epistemological basis, of the other, they may discover a compelling overlapping consensus on a variety of moral and ethical issues.[67]

In addition to Shaykh bin Bayyah's optimism, Habermas himself contends that philosophy "seeks to re-express what it learns from religion in a discourse that is independent of revealed truth," thus giving credence to the idea that there are shared moral-practical elements within both that have a shared genealogy (Habermas, 2002: 164). If such is the case, and I

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[66] In some cases, it is the Muslim scholars who are attempting to communicate with the secular West via Islam's traditional theological and legal language. In the case of ISIS, Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, a foremost authority in Sunni Islam in Syria, attempts to demonstrate not only to Muslims, but also to the western world, how traditional Islam, from its own sacred sources, cannot accept the barbarity of the Islamists' theory and praxis. In this way, al-Yaqoubi doesn't translate his Islamic arguments into secular language, but rather advances them in their original language – thus demonstrating the incompatibility of Islam and ISIS from within its own closed semantic universe. Al-Yaqoubi hopes that the West can see the rationality of Islam through what Habermas calls *mutual-perspective taking*. See Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, *Refuting ISIS: A Rebuttal of its Religious and Ideological Foundations* (2015).

[67] A recent example of Muslims, Christians and non-religious citizens coming together over a shared sense of morality can be found in the aftermath of the gruesome execution of the French Priest Jacques Hamel (7/26/2016). While saying mass on an early Tuesday morning, two French-Algerian teenagers burst into the cathedral and slit the priests throat in front of his parishioners. Yelling *Allāhu Akbar* and engaging in theological discussions with frightened members of the church, the two men thought they could spark a religious war between the secular Republic of France and ISIS. Both men were killed before they could escape. As a response to the atrocity, thousands of Muslims around France attended mass at their local Catholic cathedrals. Remarkably, many non-Catholics and lapsed Catholics also attended to register their solidarity with the innocent victim. Here, Christians, Muslims and secular citizens all shared in the same moral condemnation of violence against an innocent cleric and they all vowed to work together for a better understanding of each other's worldviews.

contend it is, the Judeo-Christian element within western philosophy remains identifiable and can be brought home to itself through an open discourse with the adherents of another Abrahamic faith: Islam. In other words, the sublated theological material within western philosophy can serve as the primary common ground between philosophy and religion within a discourse of citizens.

What Should Be Translated: Prophetic and Tawhīdic Negativity?

In our discussion thus far we have focused on the *moral-practical rationality* of Islam that Habermas thinks is the most important resource for its integration into the post-secular society. Due to the stubborn problems emanating from its multicultural and pluralistic conditions, it is not surprising that Habermas focuses on those elements that appear to help rectify Europe's inability to adequately integrate and/or assimilate its Muslim population. The increasing demands of a liberal society, fed by suspicion, anxiety, and in some cases Islamophobia, impinge on his assessment of Islam and its future in Europe. According to the theologian Maureen Junker-Kenny, Habermas' translation of the *Imago Dei* in his 2001 Peace Prize acceptance speech, as well as other examples by which he translates religious semantics and semiotics into post-metaphysical reasoning, demonstrates to her satisfaction that Habermas' interest in religion is not "for the functional reasons of motivating or stabilizing democratic society," but rather expresses his sincere conviction that religion provides *moral-practical* content that only it has access to – which, in itself, may prove to be valuable to moral deliberations in the secular society (Junker-Kenny, 2011: 135). While Habermas' mining of religious resources may have good intentions, I am less optimistic about his translation project

than Junker-Kenny. It appears to me that those elements of religion that he chooses to translate demonstrate a different motivation for such interest, one that disregards the first generation of Critical Theorists own translation and sublation of Judaism's and Christianity's *contra mundum* negativity. Even in the case of the *Imago Dei*, Habermas appears to only give examples of those elements within religion that could lend their support to the mere *integration* of religious believers into the already existing secular society. But, if we take the first generation of Critical Theorists as our exemplars, and apply their method of sublating religion to Islam in Europe, we should not only look at it as a problem of (1) what strategies the Muslims deploy to adjust to the conditions of post-secular society, and (2) that Europeans remain open to religious voices, as Habermas has put forward, but also as a problem of (3) how does Europe learn from, develop with, or be affected by, the *negativity* of Islam? – the same religious *negativity* that animated the *inverse theology* of the first generation of Critical Theorists via their *determinate negation* of Judaism and Christianity; the same negativity that motivated the most progressive of European religious movements, and the same negativity that was later translated into the secular rationality of Marx and other revolutionaries (Horkheimer, 2002: 130)? The *adversus mundum* "impulse" of prophetic religion appears to have been buried underneath Habermas' attempt to cherry-pick particular (or even dogmatic) moral claims without the least bit of interest as to how those particular claims relate to the *overall* critical nature of revealed religion.[68] In Habermas' project, religion provides a disparate multitude of semantic and semiotic resources to secular discourse, but it – the *geist of its totality* – is not a resource. In other words, the *adversus mundum* impulse, its inherent *negativity* towards the world as it is, its absolute refusal to *affirm* the unjust and

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[68] By now it should be clear that the *impulses* that animate prophetic religion cannot always be made identical with its official dogmas, as Adorno stated in his essay *Education after Auschwitz*, wherein he writes, "one of the greatest impulses of Christianity, not immediately identical with its dogma, was to eradicated the coldness that permeated everything. But this attempt failed, surely because it did not reach into the societal order that produces and reproduces that coldness (Adorno, 2003: 31).

corrupt given, is sacrificed to the harmonizing project in which religious moral claims *are* functionalized to stabilize the status quo (within its own self-imposed limitation). With this critique in mind, we must ask: could Habermas' translation proviso allow for such a translation of this *non-integrative* impulse within Islam (or any other revealed religion), or is it only open for those moral principles and sentiments that help *integrate* believers, in this case Muslims, into the dominant coordinates of the given society? And beyond that, does Habermas really want to continue to "suspension" the religiously-rooted utopian motif in Critical Theory and abandon the possibility of translating the most radical, and therefore most progressively transformative, elements of revealed religion, like Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin did, only to keep its *integrative ethics* even when that element is among the original impulses of the revolutionary, emancipatory and liberational qualities of Critical Theory?[69]

I argue that Habermas' exclusive focus on the *moral-practical rationality* within religions, while making available important social and ethical resources to the post-secular society, is too conservative. Such a translation leaves out the most fundamental of all impulses that animates all three of the Abrahamic traditions: *prophetic negativity. Prophetic Negativity* – the negativity of Divine transcendence transubstantiated into the social realm – is different from the *moral-practical reason* in this way: *moral-practical rationality*, as discussed within the context of Islam in post-secular Europe, is deployed when an individual is faced with "cognitive dissonances" – which arise due to the moral contestation between religious faith and secular values, autonomous reason and revelation (Habermas, 2003: 32). Such dissonances call for introspective deliberations wherein religious principles squarely face the countervailing force of

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[69] In his *Notizen*, Horkheimer points out a similar problem with Christianity – its betrayal of the non-integrative element, remarking, "Christianity is no longer a progressive element, its function now being largely to further integration into the monopolistic reality. Here, it has to compete with fascist and nationalist ideologies which do that job equally well, or better" (Horkheimer, 1978: 169).

social imperatives, social standards, and normative practices – an epistemological situation wherein the individual painfully recognizes religion's "double relativity," i.e. it pluralistic relativity and its scientific one (Habermas, 2003: 31-32). In Europe, such countervailing norms are predominately rooted in post-metaphysical reason which is formal, and therefore, divorced from any religious moral code. The *moral-practical* form of reason turns *practical* in the sense that the hoped for answer to the moral dilemma is geared towards helping the individual reconcile their religious principles with the *already existing* geography of what is socially determined – or at least within the realm of acceptability. In other words, Habermas' insistence that the *moral-practical* element of religion be emphasized is in effect asking the believer to find ways of translating their deeply held beliefs into post-metaphysical language through which they can comfortably be absorbed within the boundaries of the *already established society and worldview*, which is structured by the dominating coordinates of the political-economic status quo. While such translations may push against those coordinates, in such a limited form, it will never truly transgress them. On the other hand, while he's not quite asking religion to become entirely *affirmative,* and give its unconditional blessing to the status quo, his translation project does neglect the fundamental *transcendent* element – the "propulsive concept" – of revealed prophetic religion – the utopian impulse towards the *totally Other* that Horkheimer sees as the core of religion – and later on within secular revolutionary/liberational movements (Horkheimer, 1970; Horkheimer, 1978: 58, 185, 239). By not even attempting to transgress the defined bounds of the given, his non-threatening translations of religion's *moral-practical rationality* gives the status quo priority over the *still possible*, the *potential*, the *not-yet*, the *utopian impulse* of religion – it delivers man to the horror and terror of the present conditions, with only the potential for modest reforms.

Implicit within Habermas' project is the idea that Muslims have to find ways of *investing* themselves *and* their religion into the already existing society, which entails more of a modification of Islam than it does for society at large, regardless if the secular citizens remain *open* to religious reasoning. This modification reveals itself as the sacrifice of the *prophetic*, the theologically-rooted socially recalcitrant side of revealed religion that refuses to be dissolved into a fallen "totally dark" world (Horkheimer, 1978: 124).[70] Islam becomes a religion that only protests when it perceives that its members are not being treated equally *within* the status quo – never protesting *against* the overall status quo itself. In light of the imperative for Islam to alleviate itself of its prophetic core, the *asymmetrical* burden of Habermas' translation proviso is revealed; the religious person has to semantically deflate the *prophetic-negativity* of their religion so that it can fit somehow within the generally accepted confines of the already existing monopolistic society – as opposed to being the irritant thorn in the side of such an unjust, complacent and class-stratified society.

Habermas' translation proviso may be the first step towards making Islam a *normative* component – as opposed to looming specter – in the already existing post-secular society of Europe, and that inevitably would be a good development in light of the growing racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic trends that are presently gaining strength in the West. But, if we are honest, we'd admit that such a moralizing-project is safe, imposing very little by way of an imperative for the already existing society to transform its fundamental structure. In a sense, translating religion this way only makes religion *tepid – domesticated* within the confines of the given. Thus, such an engagement with religion only asks the believer to offer *mid-level* critiques

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[70] Prophetic religion is "disobedient" religion, rational religion, sensitive to the demands of democracy and autonomous reason, and unequivocally committed to the society in which it turns its critique. It *belongs* to that society but is not *of* that society. Its function, according to Erich Fromm, is to "show reality, to show the alternatives and to protest," and to "call loudly, to awake man from his customary half-slumber" (Fromm, 1981: 41-43).

and interpretations of vexing moral dilemmas as they appear in the public sphere; no more, no less. In other words, Muslims are to join an ethics discussion as a "community of interpretation," but not as a community that actively constructs the *fundamental* coordinates of the society with likeminded citizens (Habermas, 2002: 162). Habermas' translation proviso does not ask Islam to engage in a *macro-level* critique of the neo-liberal social, economic and political structures that dominate and therefore determine contemporary democratic society. Such a translation project is merely a *reformatory* appropriation of semantic and semiotic potentials from Islam, not a *transformative* appropriation of those semantic and semiotic potentials by which they could pass into revolutionary-political causes and oppose the dominating structures of society, i.e. neo-liberalism.

Whether Habermas is aware of it or not, his translation project appears to have a dual function: 1) to *integrate* Islam and Muslims into the already established post-secular society, and 2) by way of such a reformatory investment into the already existing society, it serves to *neutralize* the recalcitrant, non-conforming and non-integrative nature of revealed prophetic religion. In this way, it resembles – if not mirrors – the bourgeoisie's own hypocritical *functionalization* of religion, wherein religion is allowed to remain a part of civil society, is able to contribute to national discussions, but in effect is skillfully used by powerful forces as a social adhesive so that the status quo can be reproduced with minimum disturbances (Adorno et al, 1950: 730; Siebert, 2010: 273). In reading Habermas thoughts on religion, Michael Reder has come to a similar conclusion. He wrote that Habermas' tendency to instrumentalize religion "becomes apparent in his functional definition of religion. Religions for him have in the first place the social function of a moral resource, when modern societies are no longer able to tap into a motivational source for their normative principles" (Reder in Habermas et al., 2010: 39),

For Reder, the multi-dimensionality of religion cannot be reduced to its moral-practical rationality without losing what religion is in its fullness.[71] Likewise, Stuart Jefferies, in his 2016 book *Grand Hotel Abyss,* comes to the same conclusion, writing that Habermas thinks that "religion could be useful; his hope was that it could be used to help overcome social disruptions and the alienation from the modern liberal state. In effect, religion was being instrumentalized" (Jeffries, 2016: 382). In the case of Islam, Muslims are allowed to practice their faith, advance moral insights into public discourse, and engage with their fellow citizens within that discourse, but the truly *disruptive* aspects – those aspects that call into question the fundamental conditions of the political-economic status quo, i.e. democratic neo-liberalism and the structure of domination it maintains – are thoroughly marginalized, if not entirely muted under the guise of *tolerance* and *social inclusivity*.

Presently, Muslim populations in many European countries are the greatest and most persistent signifiers of Europe's failure to fully realize the Enlightenment's *universal* principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – values that also have conceptual antecedences in Islam itself. In light of this situation, the question becomes, not whether Muslims can contribute to the discourse of the already existing society, but rather can Muslims translate their religious articulations of these same values, principles, and ideals into post-metaphysical reasoning, so that Europe can *relearn* – or at least become reacquainted with – the "propulsive element" it has since forgotten in his own religious heritage? Can Europe, which often appears to long for the "last man" (*der letzte Mensch*) stage of history, recognize *what's missing* in itself through its religiously motivated Muslim citizens, who still remain unreconciled with the world-as-it-is, or will the Muslim's social, political and economic restlessness and angst continue to be dismissed as the

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[71] Habermas is aware of the problem of reducing religion to only one of its facets, but seems to think that it would be philosophical hubris to attempt a translation all of religion, as some of it simply must remain in its original medium of expression if it is to mean anything, i.e. the aesthetic-expressive, the cultic and the mystery.

infantile murmurings of pseudo-fundamentalists and youthful malcontents? If Habermas'
translation of *moral-practical rationality* only *integrates* the individuals into an Islamophobic
society that structurally practices various forms of racism, sexism, militarism, capitalist
exploitation, and social exclusion, which inevitably leads to entrenched poverty, especially
among immigrants and their children, then such a translation is a distortion of Islam's prophetic-
negativity; it is a mere *psychological adjustment* to an unjust status quo; it does not change the
material and/or political-economic conditions in the poverty-trap *banlieues* (low-income housing
projects), it only helps reconcile them to their fate by providing a false-sense of national
inclusion.

One of the principle spiritual veins of Islam, rooted in the *Sunnah*, or the *imitatio
Muhammadi* (imitation of Muhammad), is that Muslims are to be constitutionally *maladjusted* to
injustice, oppression and tyranny, even in small proportions, and therefore must remain
discontented in a society that fails to realize universal humanistic principles – even when it is in
a supposed "Islamic" society (Izutsu, 2002: 45-54). Islam is not meant to reconcile or dull the
believer's consciousness to the world-as-it-is, but rather to sharpen it against a pervasive
substructure of "sin," i.e. poverty, injustice, oppression, etc. This being the case, we not only
have to look to those *moral-practical elements* in Islam that serve an *integrative* function for
Islam in Europe, but also have to identify and translate the *prophetic-negativity* that serves as the
non-conforming and *non-integrative* force, for it is these semantic and semiotic resources that
serve as the basis for comprehensive progressive social change – change that would benefit both
the Muslims in Europe and their secular counterparts. Just as Adorno's *Bilderverbot*,
Horkheimer's *Totally Other* and Benjamin's political Messianism served as concepts *and* ways-
of-being-in-the-world that resisted capitulation to the unjust conditions of the neo-liberal status

quo, authoritarianism, and palingenetic ultra-nationalism, and pointed to another way of being outside of the dominant structures of the given society, so too must the Muslims look into their own religious resources for those resistant elements.[72] The first paradigm of Islam, the "paradigm of the original Islamic community," can serve as the basis for such a resource, and a secular translation of those resources would help such a negativity become acceptable, not within the already established society, but within those communities that seek to transcendent the unjust conditions of that already established society (Küng, 2007: 77-124). Yet, at all times, such a remembrance of the first paradigm of Islam must be a future-oriented-remembrance, not a *nostalgic-anachronistic* "return" to the past that forsakes *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) – which is the fundamentalist and "traditionalist" temptation (Dugin, 2012: 67-70).

Jāhilīyah and Tawḥīd

When the dominant image of Islam in western society is constructed by horrifying images of civil airliners crashing into skyscrapers, or masked men beheading terrified prisoners, or the burning of captives in cages, or the crucifixion of Christians in the streets of Syria, or suicide bombers in the crowded cities of Baghdad, or by the attacks on innocent bystanders in the streets of major European cities, it is easy to forgot that Islam began as a *progressive theologically rooted social protest movement* – one that overthrew the unjust class-stratified society of 7th century Arabia and the polytheistic religion that justified and sanctified it (Küng, 2007: 3-24). Just like Moses, who protested against the unjust slavery of the pharaoh in Egypt and their polytheistic religion, and similar to Jesus of Nazareth, who protested the corrupt and

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[72] This is especially important in the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism, as it is foundational Islamic resources that are most needed to delegitimize such a turn towards an irrational-authoritarian belief attitude. Inner-critique, not a critique from outside sources, which the believer has not bound himself to, is what's called for in these situations.

oppressive society in 1st century Palestine as well as the collaborating religious authorities (*Sanhedrîn*) that upheld it, Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah, the Prophet of Islam, protested against the Arabian *Jāhilīyah* (age of ignorance), wherein slavery, female infanticide, racism, misogyny, tribal blood feuds and other forms of oppression where normative and pervasive (Armstrong, 1992: 55-71; Shariati, 2003: 19-43). Through its mass accumulation of wealth, this age exemplified all the vices that have come to be associated with a robust market economy, especially an entrenched class hierarchy – with a "mercantile aristocracy," extreme uneven wealth distribution, severe poverty, social exclusion, and the deification of money (Rahman, 1989: 150-161). More specifically, women lacked legal rights and were systematically commodified, slaves had no recognized humanity, orphans and widows were discarded; gambling, drunkenness and sexual violence were openly displayed and embraced in the public sphere. To the same degree that the class elites of Muhammad's city of Mecca became wealthy off trade *and* the business of religion, the wretched become more wretched in their poverty and despair. For Muhammad, the system that created such social degradation, wherein the values of justice, fairness, solidarity and peace were buried under the mountains of unearned wealth accumulating at the top of society, was justified and legitimated by Arabia's *polytheistic* religion, which praised the social, economic and political predator over the prey – the *aristocratic law of nature universalized* (Armstrong, 1992: 55-71).

In response to such unjust and oppressive social conditions, Islam was born – bearing all the hallmarks of *prophetic-negativity* that was characteristic of early Christianity and Judaism – the insistence that *that which is should not be*, and *that which should be is not* – and the coming of an *eschatological justice* in response to the injustice of this world. From the very beginning, Islam not only dedicated itself to its theological mission – the advancement of Abrahamic *tawḥīd*

(radical monotheism of an imageless Divine), but also to a social mission born directly from that theology: the eradication of racism, racial inequality and gender inequity; it attempted to reduce class antagonism by introducing a more just economic system without *ribā* (excessive profit taking) – the goal of "free market" capitalism; it dedicated itself to the abolishment of slavery, the abolishment of racial oppression, the abolishment of female infanticide, and all other forms of vice that destroy social harmony and the flourishing of mankind. While the early Muslim community remained realistic about achieving an ideal utopian society, they nevertheless believed a religiously guided utopia – the *sum of all oughts* – should nevertheless be strived for, thus giving them a sociological-conceptual basis by which they interrogated the given societies they encountered. The ideal society of *tawḥīd* was therefore the template for Islam's social *negativity* – its refusal to collapse into any form of *širk* (polytheism), whether it be theological or social.[73] Although many of the particular principles established by Islam's social upheaval are *moral-practical* in nature, the absolute refusal to submit to the world-as-it-is embodies the *prophetic-negativity* of *tawḥīd* – as *tawḥīd* categorically forbids making identical *that which is* to *that which should be,* or in theological language, *that which is created* with *that which creates.*

To grasp a conceptual understanding of this kind of explosion of religiously-rooted social protest, it is appropriate to revisit Horkheimer's conception of *good* and *bad* religion. He writes,

> What is religion in the good sense? To sustain, not to let reality stifle, the impulse for change, the desire that the spell be broken, that things take the right turn. We have religion where life down to its every gesture is marked by this resolve. What is religion in the bad sense? It is this same impulse but in its perverted form, as affirmation, prophecy, that gilds reality in the very act of castigating it. It is the lie that some earthly or heavenly future gives evil, suffering, horror, a meaning. The lie does not need the cross, it already lives in the ontological concept of transcendence. Where the impulse is honest, it needs no apology. No reason for it can be advanced (Horkheimer, 1978: 163).

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[73] According to Alain Besançon, the communist-cum-socialist Catholic and French historian of iconoclasm, the Qur'an's prohibition against creating false images of the Divine is so complete, it does not even need to "command" such prohibition, as in Judaism (Besançon, 2000: 77-81).

Here Horkheimer reminds us that the *negativity* of religion resides in its sustaining the impulse for change – that the unjust conditions of the world as it now stands is not the final word, and that good religion is religion that is saturated with the resolve to overturn the unjust qualities of *this* world. Good religion, in contrast to bad religion, i.e. *affirmative* religion, is that which says 'no' to the tyranny of oppression, 'no' to inequality, 'no' to discrimination, 'no' to the violence of the market society, and 'no' to the identification of that which is with that which ought to be, whether that is in 7th century Arabia or 21st century Europe and America. This impulse for change does not take the form of *mere* contributions to the latest ethical debates, but rather it offers a *macro-critique* of the *world-as-it-is*. Good religion is the religion that gives expression to man's most basic longing, the longing for life outside the unnecessary horror and terror of Golgotha-history, and does not seek to reconcile the believer to their *supposed* fate, but rather fosters their discontent with the status quo, it *sharpens their consciousness* (as Kant says), even in a liberal-democratic society, which still maintains pernicious forms of structural/systematic, symbolic and direct violence (Kant, 2010: 93). This was clearly known by the first generation of Critical Theorists, who experienced Europe not only as good citizens, but also as Jews – forced to face their own Jewishness by European fascism and anti-Semitism. In the face of such a modern antagonistic civil society, they did not follow what Habermas now suggests for Muslims, to settle for a *mid-range* critique of European society by introducing translated Jewish moral positions into public discourse, rather they translated the most radical, recalcitrant and critical aspects of Jewish theology – the absolute negativity of the *Bilderverbot,* the *totally Other,* and the Messiah – which, as we recalled, philosophically forbad them from identifying the *given* with the *not-yet* and *longed-for*, and therefore delivered them to permanent non-conformity with the status quo.

371

We can find the same theological dimension in Islam as we have in the Jewish 2nd Commandment. Recall Horkheimer's connection of Jewish theology with the Jews social status in Europe, "the Jews are the enemy because they witness the spiritual God and thus relativize what puffs itself up as the absolute: idol worship, the nation, the leader" (Horkheimer, 1978: 131). Like the Jewish concept of the *Bilderverbot,* the Islamic notion of *tawḥīd,* which also rejects the 'imaging' of the Divine, is the negative principle that is foundational for all aspects of Islam. As the Swiss theologian Hans Küng has written, *tawḥīd* is *articulus stantis vel cadentis Islamismi* (Küng, 2007: 81).[74] Indeed, the radical monotheism of the non-imaged Divine is the foremost message expressed in the Qurʾān. For example, the Qurʾān states in *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ: "Say: Allah is One. He is the Eternal Refuge. He does not beget nor is he begotten, and there is none other like Him."*[75] As nothing can approach the divine in its absolute oneness and transcendence, and therefore it alone is worthy of "complete submission" (*islām*), nothing worldly can be fully submitted to – least of all an unjust status quo. Muslims therefore are called to be ever vigilant against idolatry – the deification of the created, the temporal.[76] Thus, when transubstantiated into the social-political realm, *tawḥīd* is not purely a theological concern, but also an earthly "fighting programme," as Hans Küng has remarked; it discloses the geography of what is obligatory (*wājib*), what is permissible (*ḥalāl*) and what is forbidden (*ḥarām*) in the comprehensive world of Islamic social-relations and political-economics (Küng, 2007: 80; Izutsu, 2002: 203-249). As such, this *tawḥīdic* way-of-being-in-the-world instills a discontent with the *world-as-it-is*, as this world is the unjust world of *širk* (polytheism), especially in the modern world, wherein the traditional gods of polytheism (traditionally personifications of

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[74] "The belief by which Islam stands and falls."
[75] My translation.
[76] In some cases, especially among fundamentalists, this hypersensitivity towards idolatry takes on an absurd character, such as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan and the destructions of ancient temples and monasteries within the territory controlled by ISIS.

nature and tribal authorities) have been secularized, replaced by the multiple gods of the *new religion*: neo-liberal capitalism, with the resulting unjust class stratification that Muhammad similarly fought against during *Jāhilīyah* (Küng, 2007: 80; Shariati, 2003: 34-39; Benjamin, 2004: 288-291).[77] *Critical Islamic thought* remembers the social, political and economic conditions of *Jāhilīyah*, and sees its resurrection in contemporary capitalist society, wherein mankind has once again succumbed to the idolatry of the market. Only now those gods are expressed in an earthlier form: wealth, status, consumption, neo-imperialism, militarism, capitalistic nihilism, nation, class and necrophilia (Fromm, 1976: 65-119; Shariati, 2003: 34-39; Siebert, 2010: 1145). From an Islamic perspective, the left-wing Iranian social philosopher and revolutionary, 'Ali Shariati, sees western modernity's return to polytheism as being the result of modern nihilism and materialist metaphysics, but also global capitalist economics. He writes, modern idolatry's "roots are in the ownership of a minority over the abased majority. It is the very factor of economics and the seeking of superiority which requires a religion in order to preserve and legitimate itself and eternalize its way of life" (Shariati, 2003, 34). "What factor," he asks, "is stronger than [polytheistic] religion" to make "an individual automatically accept and be content with his abjectness" (Shariati, 2003: 34). Like Muhammad's *sunnah* (way), for Shariati, *tawḥīd* is the theological/utopian basis for the revolt against such a polytheistic (neo-liberal) world order and the conditions it imposes upon much of humanity.[78]

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[77] Walter Benjamin once likened capitalism to a new religion, writing, "capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction. It is the expansion of despair, until despair becomes a religious state of the world in the hope that this will lead to salvation. God's transcendence is at an end. But he is not dead; he has been incorporated in human existence" (Benjamin, 2004: 289).

[78] Interestingly, the Argentinian Pope Francis (Jorge Bergoglio) has taken up the theme of the "new idolatry" In his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), he writes, "One cause of this situation [the *economy of exclusion*] is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays

What can be done?

From this understanding of the *prophetic-negative* nature of *tawḥīd* in Islam, the same question arises; can Muslims translate such a concept into secular philosophy just as Adorno and Horkheimer have done with the *Bilderverbot*? Can Islam's prophetic critique of *širk* migrate from the depth of the Islamic mythos into post-metaphysical reasoning and social praxis, where upon it finds itself actualized in a radical but secular critique of the neo-pagan idolatry of money, while simultaneously remaining open to democracy and resistant to religious fundamentalism (Pope Francis, 2013b: 26-29)? If so, can it join with other anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, and anti-neo-imperialism groups who struggle against the market's neo-liberal colonization of the lifeworld? I not only think it can, but I think it must. Especially if Islam is to have any beneficial influence within Europe, it must side with those secular elements in Europe that struggle towards greater freedom, a more just society, predicated on reconciliation and acceptance of those whose identity resists being absorbed into the prevailing capitalist identity of the West. In other words, it must not only offer its potentially *integrative resources* to European society, but also its *prophetic-negativity,* through which it may play a fundamental role in Europe's actualization of its own religiously translated now secular Enlightenment values: *liberté, égalité, fraternité.*

Thinking beyond Habermas' modest adjustment to Rawls' liberal translation proviso, we should remember the much more radical Adorno, who wrote in the last paragraph in his *Minima Moralia,* "perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic

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bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption" (Pope Francis, 2013b: 29).

light" (Adorno, 2005: 247). Such messianic perspectives are well beyond mere translations of ethical arguments, as Habermas would have Muslims do, but rather are arguments and ways-of-being-in-the-world, rooted in the *Qurʾān*, that call into question the entirety of the given social structure, even the structure of the liberal-democratic society. From its recalcitrant prophetic and theological core, *tawḥīd*, we can determine that Islam, just like Judaism and Christianity, not only has a messianic eschatology, but also a critical *this-world* perspective to offer, especially the West: one which "displaces" and "estranges" the violent world in which mankind needlessly suffers. For Muslims, this perspective comes from taking not the perspective of the messiah, as it did for Adorno and Benjamin, but rather by adopting a similarly "totally Other" perspective of *tawhīdic negativity*, which discloses the world entire as corrupt, fallen, suffering from *weltschmerz* (world weariness) and in need of repair (*Tikkun Olam*). Translating this Islamic *tawhīdic*-utopian *impulse,* which for Horkheimer was the impulse *that unites all men*, into publically acceptable post-metaphysical language in a pluralistic post-secular society is the present *prophetic* task of the Muslims, for even the Muslims long for the day when the *murderer shall ultimately not triumph over the innocent victim.*

Blind Spots: The Limitations of Habermas' Translation Proviso

We have already discussed which religious potentials Habermas has determined to be the most pregnant with social potential by which to translate into publically accessible reasoning. I have also demonstrated the limitations of simply focusing on the *moral-practical rationality* of Islam while neglecting its most essential core, its *prophetic-negativity*. From my perspective, if Habermas' assumes that the translation of Islam's moral code, the Muslims personal morality,

and/or other arguments that animate the moral life of the believer into post-metaphysical language, can alleviate the pervasive alienation, resentment and exclusion Muslims feel towards the West, he is not only naïve, but simply wrong. While it may *help* to reconcile Westerners and European Muslims by *investing* Muslims into the given society, it cannot achieve full reconciliation on its own. The relationship between the *ummah*, both in and outside of Europe, and the West is saturated with 1) a painful historical memory, which recalls a deep sense of humiliation in regards to colonialism and imperialism, the violent and oppressive effects of which still dominate life within many parts of the *dar al-Islam*, and 2) bitter acrimony over the present neo-colonialism domination of the Muslim world by western powers and corporations – especially the suppression of freedom movements within the Arab world and the West's support for "stabilizing" dictators, whether that be Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Bashar al-Assad in Syria or Hosni Mubarak (now General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi) in Egypt. In addition to these factors, the predominate *metanarrative* in the West paints itself as "civilized" and the Muslim world as "barbaric" and "backwards," thus providing itself the ideological justification for continued military and political interventionism. From the perspective of many Muslims, this contemporary form of orientalism, which is rooted in the occidental feeling of superiority, but cognizant of its cultural dependence on the "orient," remains to this day the lenses by which the West, and therefore much of the "colonized" world, views their Muslim neighbors (Said, 1979).[79]

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[79] According to the scholar of post-colonial studies, Edward Said, "orientalism" is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture" (Said, 1979: 1-2). Furthermore, Said categorizes orientalism in three parts; 1) it is an academic pursuit that has influence far beyond the academy, 2) it is a mode of thought that is rooted on an "ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident," and 3) it is a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views

Additionally, Muslims today in their own countries are forced into educational models, family models, cultural models, governance models, and economic models that are not the product of their own autonomous civilizational development, and do not speak to their needs and do not accord with their worldview, but rather have been imposed upon them by heteronomous forces and the collaborating classes which rule in their interests. In other words, since the West is the dominant political-economic power, and the driving force behind secularism and globalization, so much of the Muslim world is determined and defined by the identity imposed upon it by the West – through its political, economic and military interventions, its media, and the globalization of the neo-liberal "free market" and the capitalistic porno-culture that accompanies it. In a real sense, according to the anthropologist Akbar Ahmed, the Muslim world feels *under siege* by the corrosive conditions of the neo-liberal world order, who's hypocrisy and domination calls for a robust response. Where left-leaning secular Pan-Arabism failed to provide sufficient resistance to such domination in the mid-20th century, an invigorated, rejuvenated and reloaded (*tajdīd*) political Islam has become the new vehicle for this response in the 21st century (Ahmed, 2003; Byrd, 2011; Khomeini, 1981). Unfortunately, as both the West and the *dar al-Islam* have learned, this response often materializes in terrorism, which conversely reinforces stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, reinforces the presupposed need for the West to intervene in their internal affairs, and delivers neatly packaged ideological justification for the work of Islamophobes, xenophobes and racists. The pain, anguish, and resentment towards the West, which – in its neo-conservative articulation – presents itself and its political-economics as the cure to the Muslim world's problems, is deeply felt even within those Muslims who are thoroughly integrated and assimilated in the West (Fukuyama, 1992: 287-339). The *grievances*

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of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979, 2-3).

against the West are nearly uniform in the Muslim world, although how to respond to such grievances is still the subject of debate, which is another open fracture among the *ummah*. The role of Islam in such a response resides at the very heart of such *fitnah* (internal strife or tribulation).

With this grim background in mind, it is important to realize what Habermas seems to have neglected: most importantly, that every translated argument from the Muslims living within the post-secular society is indelibly tainted by other determining factors. In other words, every argument has a *subtext, pretext* and *context,* what I call the *tri-text*. This threefold impingement cannot be ignored, as the burden of these three weigh heavily on (1) the very possibility of discourse with the post-secular society, and (2) how and what is translated into post-metaphysical reasoning. Considering this, I suggest that Habermas' translation proviso be supplemented by three additional practices that directly address the tri-textual burden.

First, in accordance with the suggestion made by the deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida, the current antagonistic situation calls for the elimination of the *subtext*: the singular identity-image of Islam and Muslims as wholly other and universally negative. In other words, there must be a *comprehensive deconstruction* of the European intellectual conceptualization of Islam and Muslims (Derrida in Chérif, 2008). Not only are Muslims stripped of credit for their unique contributions to the West, Muslim are too often deprived of the autonomy to define who and what they are, but are rather held hostage to the distorted images made of them by those hostile to their presence, i.e. the Islamophobes, as well as by the Islamophobe's ideological mirror image: Islamist terrorists.

Second, discourse between Muslims and non-Muslims have to engage the problem of the *pretext* – the long history of inner and intra-civilizational catastrophes. This is done thorough

what I've called *inter-subjective passiology* – a future-oriented discourse concerning the historical suffering (*passio*) of the other, which may lead to a greater understanding of the hidden motivations and sensitivities behind the other's ethical, political and cultural norms. The trauma of history is indelible, so too is it instructive; it often molds the very coordinates of a civilization, which may not be known or adequately appreciated by the outsider or newcomer.

Last, As Habermas is right to believe that *discourse* is the primary vehicle through which Muslims and non-Muslims will come to any kind of meaningful understanding of the other, I argue that such encounters must address the *context* of the translated arguments: *contemporary grievances*. These are addressed through what may be called *grievance-bearing discourse*s – a *being-with* that makes public the unhealed injuries, festering fractures and traumatic civilizational wounds that, when left unattended, putrefy into deep-seated resentment and hatred. When the *tri-texts* are vigorously confronted, discussed and worked through by both sides of an honest discourse, a greater potential for reconciliation is likely to develop.

Deconstructing the Image of Islam

Surely, through Habermas' translation proviso, non-Muslims come to understand the Muslims' rationale behind the faith positions on a variety of perplexing social issues. However, this does little to forcefully tackle the prevailing negative image non-Muslims have of Islam and its adherents – an image that has been constructed for more than a millennium. Ever since the 7th century, Islam has been the object of ridicule in the West; The Catholic Church thought of Islam as a deviant "sect" of Christianity, Muhammad as a religious imposter, and both as the work of Satan himself (Reeves, 2000). As late as 2006, Pope Benedict XVI accused the Muslims of

379

spreading Islam by the sword by quoting the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus, who said "show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only bad and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."[80] This Catholic disdain for Islam was also passed on to the Protestants. Martin Luther not only attacked the corruption of Rome and the Pope, but also shared his invectiveness equally for the Muslims. For example, in his 1545 lecture on Genesis, he wrote,

> Therefore, let him who can be angry with the Pope, execrate him, and curse him. For he has done more harm to the Kingdom of Christ and the Church than Muhammad. The Turk kills the body and plunders and lays waste the property of Christians, but the Pope stresses his Qur'an far more cruelly, in order that Christ may be denied. Both, of course, are the enemies of the Church and the Devil's own slaves, because both reject the Gospel (Luther in Reeves, 2000: 119).

Even during the Enlightenment, when the *theological* opposition to Islam began to evaporate, the image of Islam as being a menacing force to western society did not abate, but merely migrated into bourgeois thought. Islam remained the hated other, the vile "Turk," the hostile Saracen, and the antithesis to the civilized Enlightened Europe. One need only to turn to Voltaire to see the Bourgeois' preservation of the Church's animosity towards Islam. Voltaire demonstrated as such in his famous 1742 play, *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet,* the gist of which is encapsulated in the line, "the sword and the alcoran [*al-Qurʾān*] in my bloody hands, will impose silence on the rest of humanity" (Spellberg, 2013: 13).[81] This despite the fact that Islamic Spain (*al-ʿAndalus*) and the *Bayt al-Hikma* (house of Wisdom) in Baghdād laid the groundwork for Europe's renaissance and later the Enlightenment by rescuing the ancient wisdom of the Greeks

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[80] While it is true that Muslims destroyed empires militarily, including parts of Byzantium, it is likewise a matter of record that the religion itself was not propagated by force. In fact, there is abundance of evidence that the early Muslim empires tried to dissuade Christians, Jews and members of other faiths from converting to Islam, for every convert meant a loss in the jizah tax (a tax on a *dhimmi* – "protected person"), which non-Muslims had to pay.

[81] Additionally, speaking about Muhammad, Voltaire wrote, "But when a camel dealer stirs up rebellion, claims to have conversed with Gabriel, and to have received this incomprehensible book, in which every page does violence to sober reason, when he murders men and abducts women in order to force them to believe in this book, such conduct can be defended by no man unless he is born a Turk, or unless superstition has choked all of the light of nature in him" (Quoted in Reeves, 2000: 139).

and Romans that had been almost completely discarded as heretical by the Church in the thousand years of medieval history.[82] However, for many like Voltaire in Enlightened Europe, which sung the praises of man's *universal* capacity for reason, the Muslim was incapable of such intellectual and cultural accomplishments – the Muslims' religion distorted the mind, corrupted the capacity for science and objectivity, and led society into cultural barbarity.[83]

Although Enlightened secular modernity has attempted to alleviate the West of its *biological* biases, it has nevertheless not been able to rid itself of its antipathy towards Islam as an *ideology* – much less a religion. The inherited image of Islam that have been passed down for more than a thousand years has modified with the changing paradigms of European history, but the suspicion of Muslims has remained consistent throughout those paradigms. To be sure, the totalizing image is often reinforced by the experiences of the other within the public sphere – whether that be a direct experience with the other or a secondary experience mediated via mass media. Much like anti-Semitic conceptions of Jews, these negative experiences solidify the image of the Muslims' inherent duplicity, dishonesty, ill intent and irrationality. In the 21st century, especially after the attacks of September 11th and the "war on terrorism," the dominant image petrified in the minds of many is that of the violent religious terrorist, such as Usama bin Laden, whose terroristic-nihilism seemingly knew no bounds until ISIS appeared on the world stage. Without any countervailing forces, by which such a distorted image of Islam and Muslims could be challenged and made subject to rational democratic discourse, citizens easily fell prey

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[82] It is often forgotten that even the greatest theologians of the Church, such as Thomas Aquinas, learned from Muslim philosophers and theologians. In the case of Aquinas, his knowledge of Aristotle and Aristotelian logic, which saturated his theological work – thus providing a post-Platonic foundation for Christian theology, primarily came from his study of ʾAbū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn ʾAḥmad Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

[83] As Minou Reeves has documented, not all enlighteners thought of Muhammad as an imposter or evil man. For example, the French historian Comte de Boulainvillier, the author of *La Vie de Mahomet* (The Life of Muhammad), saw natural reason, theological simplicity and enlightenment in Islam, which he opposed to Christianity's irrationality. Unlike Voltaire, he believed Muhammad to be the opposite of barbaric, but rather as a "wise lawgiver whose sincerity was reflected in the simplicity and straightforwardness of his religion" (Reeves, 2000: 147).

to the most basic form of identity thinking: *The Muslim* as *the other*, and *the other* as *the existential threat*. Coupled with those nationalistic political movements that coldly prey on the insecurity and anxiety of the citizenry with the changing demographics, this singular identity imposed upon a group of people invokes, by such monopolizing singularity, the now-fading memory of Auschwitz – as Adorno said in his *Negative Dialectics,* "Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death" (Adorno, 1999: 362). Palingenetic ultra-nationalism also has an important role in perpetuating such images (Griffin, 1993: 1-55). For their own reasons, nationalist movements reinforce the false absolute – the *Muslim as threat* – that is the ominous and menacing idol made of all Muslims. This politicization of the singular identity, as Adorno alluded to, only brings the society one step closer to repeating the unrepeatable: Auschwitz. For sure, the nationalistic tendency to absolutize the other as purely "other," pure evil, according to Adorno, has outlived the worst of nationalist movements: National Socialism. "Even today," he writes, "we still don't know whether it is merely the ghost of what was so monstrous that it lingers on after its own death, or whether it has not yet died at all, whether the willingness to commit the unspeakable survives in people as well as in the conditions that enclose them" (Adorno, 2003: 3-4). The Muslims of Europe seem to be putting Adorno's theory of identity thinking and genocide to the test: genocide having "its roots in aggressive nationalism" and the absolutization of the identity of the other (Adorno, 2003: 20).[84] Pondering the return of European nationalism, Adorno wrote,

> One should work to raise awareness about the possible displacement of what broke out in Auschwitz. Tomorrow a group other than the Jews may come along… who indeed were still spared in the Third Reich… As I indicated, the

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[84] In his essay *Education after Auschwitz,* Adorno delivers humanity a new *categorical imperative:* "The premiere demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again." Yet, he writes, "the fact that one is so barely conscious of this demand and the questions it raises shows that the monstrosity has not penetrated people's minds deeply, itself a symptom of the continuing potential for its recurrence as far as people's conscious and unconscious is concerned" (Adorno, 2003: 19).

climate that most promotes such a resurrection is the revival of nationalism. It is so evil because, in the age of international communication and supranational blocs, nationalism cannot really believe itself anymore and must exaggerate itself to the extreme in order to persuade itself and others that it is still substantial (Adorno, 2003: 32).

Are the Muslims of Europe the "group" that tomorrow comes along and forces nationalistic tendencies to resurface in its exaggerated form – even more so now because of the unbelievable advances in communications and globalization?

With a long messianic gaze towards history, we can see that the false image of Islam and Muslims as uniformly threatening – the perpetual antagonistic *other* of Europe – is predominately *inherited knowledge* – rooted in the consciousness of those who *want* to believe such claims (the nationalists) and those who have succumbed to the distorted logic of such an image (the truly Islamo*phobic*). As Adorno already predicted, such tendency to engage in identity thinking within the context of resurgent nationalism remains a palpable threat to the next non-identical group to "threaten" Europe. As such, the solidification of such icy coldness increases in degree with each wave of unwanted immigrants, with each aggressive demand for Shari'a law in Europe, and with each terrorist attack.

So what can be done to alleviate such a slide towards catastrophe? As we've stated, many westerners experience Muslims already from within the prism of the "inherited knowledge" and/or from the vantage point of nationalism, which only a direct and friendly encounter with Islam, from *within its own tradition – in its own language*, can break through. Because the prevailing sense of insecurity, of *unbehagen* (uneasiness) with the pluralistic post-secular society, is located with Islam itself, the countervailing arguments meant to assuage that insecurity must come from authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) sources of Islam itself: *al-Qurʾān*, al-*ḥadīth* and the *Sunnat al-Rasul Allāh* (way of the Prophet), and such sources should *not* be translated as

Habermas' proviso would have us do. Translating such material into publically accessible language does not help, for this discourse is part of a *mutual-learning process*, by which the other comes to know their "opposition" for *who they are in themselves* – from *within their own comprehensive worldviews* and *closed semantic universes*. Accompanying the need to translate religious semantics into post-metaphysical language for the purposes of democratic will formation, differing communities must present themselves to each other without any form of distorted communication or linguistic acrobatics, in an open, robust and honest discourse, so that they may come to know each for who they are, without any adjustments meant merely to appease the discourse partner.

Additionally, we cannot neglect the role of mass media. As Habermas has pointed out, mass media plays a defining role in the augmenting of such uneasiness in regards to the growing Muslim presence in Europe, for it "transforms public consciousness" concerning Islam and politics, including on the issue of women, where Muslim women are almost uniformly portrayed as oppressed, abused, and submissive – a crude stereotype of nearly a billion women (Habermas, 2009: 63-64). Within the corporate model, which subjects media to the distorting imperatives of the market, the media often prioritizes that which enforces the singular identity of the Muslims as opposed to what resists such a singular reduction. For example, the day after the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris, there ensued an attack on a nearby Hypercacher Kosher deli, wherein four Jews were killed by Amedy Coulibaly, a Malian ISIS member and close associate of Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers. What went relatively uncovered by the press, both inside and outside of France, was the full potential for mass carnage had it not been for another Muslim, the Malian immigrant Lassana Bathily, who worked at the deli. As the attack ensued, Bathily quickly escorted fifteen patrons into the industrial freezers in the stores

basement, locked them in, and then escaped through the back door to alert the police. Although he was originally suspected of being the attacker, no doubt due to his race and/or his assumed religion, his Islamic faith impelled him *not* to kill, but to do the opposite: to rescue the lives of the innocent. Bathily may have been motivated by the Qur'anic verse 5:32, wherein it says, "For this reason, we have prescribed… that whosoever kills a soul… it is as if he killed all mankind, and whosoever rescues a life, it is as if he rescued the life of all mankind."[85] However, we may never know his motivation. The media, which structured the public knowledge of the attack, spared little time to investigate the possible religious reasons that impelled Bathily to preserve life – the faith position contrary to the dominant singular identity: *Muslim as threat*. Rather, they focused the attention squarely on the distorted faith that motivated the killing – that which reinforced the falsely constructed singular identity of the Muslim. This is by no means an isolated incident of media malfeasance, but one that is repeated on a daily basis throughout the profit-seeking mass media of the West.[86]

When the public image of Islam is petrified, always an absolute negative, even when Muslims are victims of terrorism, or even those who stop terrorism, as in the case of Lassana Bathily, it becomes increasingly easy to exclude the spectral "other" from the public life of the nation and therefore its democratic will formation. Attempts to break into the public sphere in order advance the secular translations of their *moral-practical rationality* that Habermas calls for become increasingly difficult when pathways to that discourse are foreclosed upon due to the entrenched "inherited knowledge" – the intellectual constructs that shape the conditions of the possibility for discourse – of the past thousand years, as well as the nationalistic political

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[85] My translation.

[86] A similar situation appeared during the cargo-truck attack on the French city of Nice on 16 July 2016, wherein 86 people were killed. All but a few media outlets failed to report that thirty of the individuals killed were themselves Muslim, leading many to view the murders within a binary framework: an attack of Islam against secular France, and not the attack of an individual on the French people, a quarter of whom happen to be Muslim.

exploitation of the fear and anxiety about the presence of Muslims in contemporary Europe. Habermas' translation proviso assumes those doors to discourse are open when in many cases they are indeed closed. While those closed doors may still be theoretically *unlocked*, they nevertheless present themselves as being *closed* and *locked* to many Muslims. Therefore, until there is a thorough *deconstruction* of the intellectual constructs of Islam and Muslims that Europe has created over the course of the last millennia, discourse will continue to be anemic, and therefore the democratic will formation will continue to disregard much of the important potential contributions of the Muslims, even when they are thoroughly translated into post-metaphysical thinking.

Intersubjective Passiology

Intersubjective Passiology is the serious attempt to address the *pretext* of Habermas' translation proviso: the imposition of historical suffering. Through it, the participants wish to realize and appreciate the suffering of the other from within their perspective. From the Latin word *passio,* meaning "suffering," both sides enter into what Habermas calls a *mutual-perspective taking* position, wherein they endeavor to sincerely imagine the pain, misery and humiliation that the other has experienced, with the hopes of gaining an insight as to how and why such damaging experiences shape the conditions in which the person and/or civilization now dwells. This is not a *strategic* attempt to gain knowledge of the other by which they can be manipulated more effectively, rather it is an attempt to tap into the deepest recesses of the other's historic wounds, so as to diminish the *coldness* that often determines the relationship between civilizations and cultures. In his discussion of his new categorical imperative, to never let

386

Auschwitz happen again, Adorno writes particularly about such coldness as the precondition for genocide. He says,

> If coldness were not a fundamental trait of anthropology, that is, the constitution of people as they in fact exist in our society, if people were not profoundly indifferent toward whatever happens to everyone else except for a few to whom they are closely, and, possibly, by tangible interest bound, then Auschwitz would not have been possible, people would not have accepted it (Adorno, 2003: 30).

This overcoming of social coldness is especially important when one discourse partner within the intersubjective passiology process is the primary source of the suffering for the other, as is the case for the West's historic colonization of the Muslim world and the contemporary imposition of the western neo-liberal world order on the rest of the globe. The experience of the other's worst suffering invokes *empathy* (to share in) and *sympathy* (to suffer with) for the other, thus provoking a change of consciousness in regards to the immediate alien-ness of "the other." Furthermore, it is an attempt to individually humanize the already socially de-humanized by overcoming socially constructed antipathy by emphasizing humanistic commonality, especially the common experience of suffering. Metanoia ($\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu o\iota\alpha$), or the changing of one's way or mind-frame through self-reflective repentance, either in a religious or secular sense, is the *practical* goal of such activity. Therefore, it is a solidaristic future-oriented co-remembrance of past suffering, so as to alleviate the possibility of unnecessary future suffering and foster the possibility of a future reconciliation.

In terms of the West and Islam, what are the wounds that construct their relationship to religion about which we must reflect?

For Europe, Habermas is keenly aware of the numerous catastrophes that have occurred and have thus defined its culture and its accord with religion. Historically, European society once was a deeply religious society, but such religiosity has since evaporated for much of the

387

peninsula. Where it once rivaled, or maybe even surpassed, the Muslim world in its quest for spiritual knowledge, moral excellence, and its development of the religious arts, it is now thoroughly depleted of its religious *geist*, and that religious knowledge, morality and art are now fit only for museums and empty churches. Although we can certainly point to the seismic shifts in its epistemological understanding of the world with the advent of the Enlightenment, industrialization and the Bourgeoisie's separation of church and state – the formal separation of morality and legality, we must also look to those moments in history that so traumatized European society as to make widespread belief in a divine being – or a reality beyond the world of appearances – nearly impossible.

In the modern period, one cannot underestimate the trauma caused by the 16th and 17th century's Wars of Religion, the Bourgeois Revolution, World War I, World War II and most recently, Auschwitz. In light of the death and murder of millions of Europeans, Jews and non-Jews, at the hands of other "Christian" Europeans, the *theodicy* problem – the problem of God's justice – pierces the collective consciousness in such a way that it leaves behind a social-theological wound that simply cannot be easily healed. Devotedly turning back to a divine being who would allow such things to occur (or author them himself) seems impossible, for if even poetry can't be written after Auschwitz, how then can individuals pray without hypocrisy or intentional mindlessness of historical-induced theological antinomies (Adorno, 2003: 162; Siebert, 2010: 1030-1031)? For many, Auschwitz alone permanently foreclosed on the possibility of a theologically saturated *weltanschauung*.

On the other hand, the historical world-trauma experienced by the Muslims today determines their contemporary relationship to religion. The Muslim *ummah* has suffered supreme humiliation at the hands of their European conquerors since the *Reconquista* of Spain,

388

colonization, and the destruction of the last Ottoman Caliphate at the conclusion of World War I. The system of nation-states, which was imposed on the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East, in the 20th century, was meant to divide and conquer (*divide et impera*) those areas especially important to European colonial interests, especially Britain and France, and today such artificial divisions are the sources of bitter disputes and wars. The direct colonization of the Muslim world lasted until the middle of 20th century, when the *imminent* presence of the Europeans came to an end. However, their influence did not abate, rather it was intensified by the imposition of what Noam Chomsky, at least in the Arab Middle East, has called the *Arab façade:* the native ruling class that ruled on behalf of their western *neo*-colonial masters while simultaneously presenting themselves as representing "native" interests (Chomsky, 1999: xi). Some of the most brutal dictators and autocrats have ruled over the Muslim world under the guise of this façade, many of them have been supported by the United States and its NATO allies, who were fearful those populations would side with the Soviet Union in their struggle for national emancipation and the right of self-determination during the Cold War (Mamdani, 2004). The blowback for the brutal imposition of dictators and autocrats upon the Muslim world occurred most significantly with the retaliatory strike (*lex talionis*) on September 11th, 2001, in Washington D.C. and New York. Habermas was one of the few who correctly interpreted the attack as being laden with "symbolic force," for it attacked the West's symbols of "economic strength" and "projection towards the future," i.e. the "citadel of capitalism" – the World Trade Center – and the military force that imposes and protects that neo-liberal world order, the Pentagon (Habermas, 2003: 27-28). In response to this blowback, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians in each country, physically tortured suspects in CIA black sites, imprisoned thousands of innocent "detainees" in

389

a detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and humiliated "unlawful combatants" in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, wherein the inmates were tortured; forced to perform sexual acts upon each other; were subjected to stress positions; paraded around the prison naked, and were forced to undergo sensory deprivation techniques, which lead to permanent mental damage (Benvenisti et al, 2004; Slahi, 2015). All of these things were eventually exposed, brought into the public sphere, furthering the already deep sense of humiliation, shame and defeat in much of the Muslim world. Additionally, many in the West offered their unconditional support for various Muslim dictators in the name of *national security*. In other words, it became very clear to the Muslim world that the West did not take its own foundational and constitutional principles, freedom, justice, and democracy, seriously, but rather hypocritically condemned other for doing precisely what they also did. The West represented the worst "democracy of hypocrisy" (*dīmuqrāṭīat al-nifāq*); the reality behind their military adventurism was pure geo-political power politics and economics, not morality, not the common good, and not for global progress (Klein, 2007: 325-382). In light of this long history, war seemed to be declared not only on Muslims, but also on Islam itself, which for millions of Muslims was the core of their being, the basis of their dreams, the source of meaning, and the only affective counterweight to the western neo-liberal globalization that brought upon them so much misery.

In both of these cases, historical trauma has indelibly marked the civilization and its relationship to religion. For Europe, religion had to be abandoned – God failed when he was most needed – and there is no way of returning to that absconded God. Thus secularity is not *only* enshrined in the constitutions of the great Bourgeois republics because of the state's neutrality in regards to the confessional schisms within nations, but also a painful statement about the validity and possibility of divinity. For Muslims, the opposite was true; when as a

390

civilization they fell away from Islam they were conquered, subjugated and humiliated (Nursi, 2010).[87] This is especially poignant since the Muslims were previously at the forefront of the historical process when Europe was languishing in the Dark Ages. Now, a rejuvenated Islam has brought religion back to the center of the worldview – producing both its own form of nonviolent liberation theology and religiously justified terrorism.

This is where *intersubjective passiology* becomes vital. Through a civilizational discourse, even if only within the European post-secular society, both sides may be able to mutually recognize the other as *co-sufferer* – someone worthy of their compassion, understanding and recognition. They may recognize their own suffering in the suffering of the other and therefore return to themselves through the suffering of the other. If the oppositional camps can take on the mutual-perspective of the suffering other, sympathize with their trauma, and empathize with their unjustly caused wounds, then a common ground may be found through which there can be a friendly and reconciled *being-with*. Such common ground is the necessary

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[87] Bedïuzzaman Said Nursî, the 19th – 20th century Kurdish Sunni theologian, quotes in his 1911 Damascus Sermon, a Japanese General who spoke on the connection between Muslims and the degree to which they adhere to Islam. He said, "history shows that the Muslims increased in civilization and progressed in relation to the power of the truths of Islam; that is, to the degree that they acted in accordance with that power. History also shows that they fell into savagery and decline, and disaster and defeat amidst utter confusion to the degree of their weakness in adhering to the truths of Islam." Said Nursi responded to such a claim by adding in his sermon that, "as for other religions, it is quite to the contrary. That is to say, history shows that they increased in civilization and progressed in relation to their weakness in adhering to their religions and bigotry, and were subject to decline and revolution to the degree of their strength in adhering to them. Up to the present, time has passed thus" (Nursi, 2010: 30-31). Additionally, Nursi believed a debilitating sense of despair infected the *ummah*, thus making it colonizable. He wrote, "despair is a most grievous sickness and it has entered the hearts of the world of Islam. It is despair that has as though killed us so that a small state of one or two million in the west has as though made twenty million Muslims in the east its servants and their country, its colony. And it is despair that has killed our high morals and causing us to abandon the public good, has restricted our sight to personal benefits. It is despair too that has destroyed our morale. Although with little power we were victorious from east to west through the moral strength that arose from belief, because it was destroyed through despair, tyrannical foreigners have made three hundred million Muslims their captives for the last four hundred years. And because of this despair, Muslims even suppose the indifference and despondency of others to be an excuse for their own laziness and say: 'What is it to me?' Saying, 'Everybody is contemptible, like me,' they abandon the courageousness of belief and fail to perform their Islamic duties" (Nursi, 2010: 48-49). From these passages, one can claim that the revival of Islam (*tajdīd*) is an attempt to overcome the crippling despair that makes the Muslims colonizable. A return to Islam, from this position, is to overcome the historic humiliation of defeat at the hands of western powers and once again take its place at the forefront of history.

precondition for the third practice I think should occur if and when Muslims are to translate their moral-practical, as well as prophetic negativity, into post-metaphysical language.

Grievance-Bearing Discourse

Discourse and discourse ethics are no small part of Habermas' overall social philosophy. Indeed, one may suggest that it is one of the major contributions Habermas has made to Critical Theory. Through his theory of communicative action and universal pragmatics, he forwards the idea of discourse being the process by which various assumptions and claims are subjected to rational deliberation and vigorous critique, in order that a consensus be formed over which argument may be accepted or rejected (Habermas, 1984; Habermas, 2001). Avoiding all forms of systematically distorted communication, it is imperative for Habermas that all who are affected by the decision of the consensus be allowed to join the discourse. In other words, there must be (1) an ideal speech situation, and (2) the discourse community must be made universal (Habermas, 1990: 43-115). With this being established, and the precondition of intersubjective passiology having produced the necessary grounds for mutual-empathy and the alleviation of dehumanization, I argue that the discourse community, here being Muslims and non-Muslim westerners, engage in a robust discourse that publically lays bare the *grievances* each side has against the other. It is not enough to secure a future reconciliation merely through the means of understanding the *historical* suffering of the other. Reconciliation needs more than historical consciousness; it also needs consciousness of the contemporary situation. While history may have brought the contemporary moment to where it presently stands, such history cannot be undone. However, the future is negotiable, if the discourse partners can come to understand the

present grievances that sculpt how they relate to each other. In other words, when political, economic and social factors negatively determine the present lifeworld of community A, but how and why those factors impinge on community A remain unknown to community B, this unknown quality manifests itself as a source of increased antagonism. If the unknown factor that negatively affects community A is publically brought to the attention of community B, it can be made the subject of a proper discourse within the public sphere, through which the merits of such factors can be rationally discussed, critiqued, preserved, negated, or even determinately negated (via compromise), all through the consensus of the universal discourse community. The alleviation of such negatively determining barriers through a *grievance-bearing discourse* may lessen the "otherness" of the opposing community; as it shows good will on the part of community B and it alleviates the source of antagonism for community A.

As to make this concrete, we should ask what this *grievance-bearing discourse* looks like within the post-secular society, especially among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Let's take for example the issue of France's banning of the head covering (ḥijāb) in public places, such as in public schools. In an attempt to preserve France's laïcité, in March 2004, the parliament passed *Loi nº 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics.*[88] This legislation banned the wearing of any explicitly religious symbol in public schools, including the Jewish kippah and Christian crucifixes and crosses. However, being that the discussion around such a ban was sparked by a public outcry against ḥijābīs (young girls wearing the hijab) in elementary and secondary schools, the hidden-in-plain-sight attempt to target the most public symbol of Islam was easily detected. Although

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[88] "Law #2004-228 of March 15, 2004, concerning, as an application of the principle of the separation of church and state, the wearing of symbols or garb which show religious affiliation in public primary and secondary schools."

such legislation was meant to ensure the secularity of state institutions, and thus its neutrality in regards to religious confessions, this ban has had a deleterious effect only on young Muslim girls. For clear reasons, these effects don't seem to be in the interest of France's secular republic. Why? First, Muslim girls are equal citizens of the French Republic, and therefore have equal rights and privileges as all other French citizens. Yet if they want to maintain their religious identity, which includes the wearing the *ḥijāb*, they are officially barred from accessing those equal rights and privileges. What has been the cumulative effect of such discriminatory legislation? Young Muslim girls have been removed from their secular state-run education and have been placed in private Islamic schools, thus depriving them of (1) the opportunity to learn a *being-with ethic* that is developed amidst being exposed to the plural cultures of the citizenry, and (2) the secular education that would be most beneficial to the Republic if France wants Muslim women to assimilate into French society. It is also a matter of gender discrimination, as young Muslim boys do not have a religious requirement to cover their heads and therefore are unaffected by the law.[89] Because young Muslim girls and their families are not prepared to abandon the tenets of their faith, they are punished for their dissimulation by the state. This has in fact contributed to the development of the "parallel societies" that Habermas speaks of as being a danger to secular democracy, as it has sent a message to the Muslim community: "you, within your own identity, are not welcome," and therefore are excluded from this particular part of the public life of the republic. On the other hand, assimilation is much more difficult to achieve if the mechanisms of assimilation, i.e. public education, are made unavailable to those in most need of the benefits of that assimilation.

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[89] There is an Islamic dress code that pertains to both men and women. However, although men are encouraged to wear religious head-coverings, such as a kufi (skull cap) or imama (turban), it is not a requirement.

Additionally, the inclusivity of young Muslim girls is especially important when thinking demographically. The Muslims are the second largest religious group in France next to the Catholics, but have a much higher birth rate. Those young *ḥijābīs* will one day give birth to the next generation of Islamo-French citizens, who will either receive a sense of belonging to France from their parents because they were included in the democratic will formation, or they will receive an inherited grievance against the Republic because of its exclusionary practices. These inherited grievances only contribute to the appeal of the Islamists who promise to restore honor to the Muslims after having been ridiculed and humiliated by France – supposedly their own country.

The grievance in this example is thus: there is a public expectation or demand that the Muslim population of France assimilate French ways-of-being, including its public secularity, which it seems not to be doing. On the other hand, such dogmatic secularity constructs conditions that limit the possibility of the Muslims to assimilate – leaving them in a situation where they are either forced to choose their nationality, and the social expectations that accompany it, or their religion, and its expectations. This binary opposition posits very little space for the Islamo-French citizen to be both Muslim and French – thus aggravating both sides of the issue. Exposing this no-win situation to democratic scrutiny, in the form of a grievance-bearing discourse, may help both the secular citizens, who wishes to ensure the security of the state, and the Muslim, who wishes to find a space to be both Islamic and French, find a common ground by which both can be achieved to the satisfaction of the other. Through the public sharing of the grievance itself, the subsequent effects of the grievance, and the rationality as to why such a grievance should be alleviated, which does not necessarily require a translation into post-metaphysical reasoning, the citizenry comes to know the other through the other's perspective.

This understanding of the contemporary grievances allows for a substantive and rational discourse, which then can lead to demands for change in the system, as to further justice and equality for all citizens.

Conclusion

Habermas' translation proviso, while being an improvement over the asymmetrical translation proviso of Rawls', remains inadequate for the challenge of pluralism embedded in the post-secular society. While his notion that the *moral-practical rationality* of Islam can be translated into post-metaphysical reasoning, and can thus contribute to the integration of Muslims into secular society, is no doubt true and good. However, it nevertheless assumes that such an Islamic contribution to the post-secular society begins on a level playing field. The subtext, pretext and context (tri-text) of Muslim existence in Europe, which impinges so heavily on the conditions of the possibility of such a contribution, seems underdeveloped or neglected in Habermas' project. In light of this deficiency, I have forwarded these three supplementary social-encounter practices that I believe are necessary if his translation proviso is to accomplish what he wishes it to. In summary, there must first be a thorough *deconstruction of the intellectual constructs of Islam* that have been produced over the course of a millennia in Europe. Such *identity thought* constructs a frame around the Muslims that is both inescapable and singular, against which even their legitimate protest somehow legitimates the ideologically-advanced singular concept. Such an ideological construct only aids "exaggerated nationalism," which, as Adorno wrote, leads us to the next Auschwitz. Second, Muslims and their non-Muslims neighbors must enter into a robust dialogue, discourse and friendly debate wherein they take part

396

in learning the history of suffering that has molded both communities. Such *intersubjective passiology* brings home the authentic humanity of the other as well as opens the doors to experiencing the pain and suffering of the other from within one's own perspective. Last, those same citizens must enter into a *grievance-bearing discourse*, one that allows the other to speak openly and frankly about those dynamics within the current society that obstruct either side from coming to some sense of shared citizenship, a sense of equality and a sense of justice. Through such a discourse, each is accorded the respect of an equal citizen and the recognition of their civil and human equality.

When democracy is treated more as a *mutual-learning process* as opposed to a mere ideology or inflexible exclusivist identity, and when there is an honest attempt to *be-with*, *learn from* and *identity-with* the other, by both the state and the citizenry within the public sphere, only then will the potential for a more peaceful and reconciled future society be within reach.

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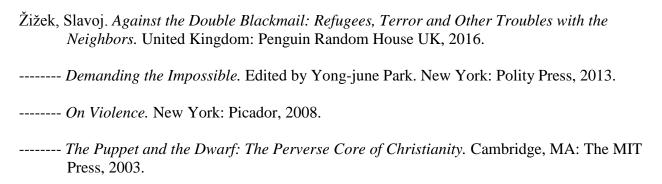Nussbaum, Martha C. *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2012.

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