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The Conceits of Secularism

The Modus Vivendi of Secularism

The historical modus vivendi called secularism is coming apart at the seams. Secularism, in its Euro-American forms, was a shifting, somewhat unsettled, and yet reasonably efficacious organization of public space that opened up new possibilities of freedom and action. It shuffled some of its own preconditions of being into a newly crafted space of private religion, faith, and ritual. It requires cautious reconfiguration now when religious, metaphysical, ethnic, gender, and sexual differences both exceed those previously legitimate within European Christendom and challenge the immodest conceptions of ethics, public space, and theory secularism carved out of Christendom. I certainly do not suggest that a common religion needs to be reinstated in public life or that separation of church and state in some sense of that phrase needs to be reversed. Such attempts would intensify cultural wars already in motion. Secularism needs refashioning, not elimination.

The secular modus vivendi ignores or devalues some dimensions of being that need to be engaged more openly. On one level the secular is more bound up with generic characteristics of Christian culture than its most enthusiastic proponents acknowledge. On another level, the partial success of secularism in pushing specific Christian sects into private life has had the secondary effect of consolidating flat conceptions of theory, ethics, and public life.

Many academic secularists, following the lead of Kant, model public life upon an organization of university life they endorse. And vice versa. The field and authority divisions they project in the university among philoso-

phy, theology, arts, and the sciences marshal an ideal of thinking and discourse that is insufficient either to the university or to public life. The secular division of labor between "religious faith" and "secular argument," where faith and ritual are to be contained in a protected private preserve and rational argument is said to exhaust public life, suppresses complex registers of persuasion, judgment, and discourse operative in public life. Again, these registers continue to operate, even within secularism. But they do so largely below the threshold of appreciation by secularists. A cautious reconfiguration of secular conceptions of theory, thinking, discourse, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity is needed to come to terms more actively with these registers of being. Indeed, such a project might open up promising lines of connection between theistic orientations on the one hand and nontheistic, asecular orientations on the other blocked by the historic secular division between private and public life. For representatives of these two orientations often share important insights into the character of thought and intersubjectivity before they break over specific questions of faith and divinity.

Secularism, in its dominant expression, combines a distinctive organization of public space with a generic understanding of how discourse and ethical judgment proceed on that space. The historical narrative secularists commonly offer in support of this historical modus vivendi goes something like this:

> Once the universal Catholic Church was challenged and dispersed by various Protestant sects a unified public authority grounded in a common faith was drawn into a series of sectarian conflicts and wars. Because the sovereign's support of the right way to eternal life was said to hang in the balance, these conflicts were often horribly destructive and intractable. The best hope for a peaceful and just world under these new circumstances was institution of a public life in which the final meaning of life, the proper route to life after death, and the divine source of morality were pulled out of the public realm and deposited into private life. The secularization of public life is thus crucial to private freedom, pluralistic democracy, individual rights, public reason, and the primacy of the state. The key to its success is the separation of church and state and general acceptance of a conception of public reason (or some surrogate) through which to reach public agreement on nonreligious issues.

This is not the only story that could be told about the origins and legitimacy of secularism. You could tell one about the needs of capital and commercial society to increase the range and scope of monetary exchange in social relations. Here Adam Smith, Montesquieu, and Adam Ferguson would

take on great salience.[1] Or you could concentrate on the challenge that nominalism posed within Christianity to enchanted conceptions of the world in the medieval era, showing how the nominalist intensification of faith in an omnipotent God presiding over a contingent world (rather than one obeying the dictates of a teleological order) ironically opened the door to secularist conceptions of mastery over a disenchanted nature.[2] Or you could treat secularism as the loss of organic connections that can be sustained only by general participation in a common Christian faith. Or play up the role of princely statecraft in supporting secular forces in order to strengthen itself.[3] I want to suggest, however, that the story summarized above has become the dominant self-representation by secularists in several Western states. This story prevails largely because it paints the picture of a self-sufficient public realm fostering freedom and governance without recourse to a specific religious faith.

Evidence of the dominance of the first story can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. According to it, *Seculere,* in Christian Latin, means "the world" as opposed to the One Church or heaven. The early (Christian) Church treated the secular as a necessary but residual domain of its way of life. It was, the *OED* says, mostly "a negative term," even though a restricted secular domain of life was deemed essential. A sense of how it could be both lowly and necessary is revealed in this statement by a priest in 1593 (quoted in the *OED*): "The tongue is the Judge; the rest of our organs but the secular executioners of his sentence." As you go down the list of *OED* meanings and up the list of temporal references, the secular becomes a more positive and independent domain. Thus Ben Franklin is moved to say, ironically, that he speaks as "a mere secular man" in expressing his opinions. By the modern period secularism, as a distinctive political perspective and social movement, is represented positively as "the doctrine that morality should be based solely in regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from the belief in God or in a future state." Note, for later consideration, the reference to "the belief in God," in which both a personal God and *beliefs* about it are treated as definitive of religious practice. And now to "secularize" is to "dissociate (say art or educational studies) from religion or spiritual concerns." This language of "solely," "exclusion," "dissociation" conceals the subterranean flow between the Christian sacred, which now becomes lodged in something called the private domain, and secular discourse, which now becomes associated with public authority, common sense, rational argument, justice, tolerance, the public interest, publicity, and the like. The *OED* story, in fact, becomes

a partisan secular history of the sacred/secular division in the West, adopting as neutral terms of analysis several concepts and themes that became authoritative only through the hegemony of secularism.

John Rawls, too, participates in the dominant story of secularization. In *Political Liberalism,* for instance, he says that "Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century" lacked the ability or willingness to disconnect their divergent religious views from contending conceptions of public life. He then distills one cardinal point about the insufficiency of presecular regimes: "Both faiths held that it was the duty of the ruler to uphold the true religion and to repress the spread of heresy and false doctrines." Under such intense conditions either tolerance emerged as a precarious modus vivendi between contending groups or one side suppressed the others in the interests of truth or justice. Finally, Rawls insists upon the sanctity of an authoritative line of division between religion in private life and public political discourse, even while joining a list of modern predecessors in trying to redefine that line:

> We appeal (instead) to a political conception of justice to distinguish between those questions that can be reasonably removed from the political agenda and those that cannot.... To illustrate: from within a political conception of justice let us suppose we can account both for equal liberty of conscience, which takes the truths of religion off the agenda, and the equal political and civil liberties, which by ruling out serfdom and slavery take the possibility of those institutions off the agenda. But controversial issues remain: for example, how, more exactly, to draw the boundaries of the basic liberties when they conflict (where to set the "wall between church and state"); how to interpret requirements of distributive justice even when there is considerable agreement on general principles.... But by avoiding comprehensive doctrines [i.e., basic religious and metaphysical systems] we try to bypass religion and philosophy's profoundest controversies so as to have some hope of uncovering a stable overlapping consensus.[4]

So secularism strains metaphysics out of politics. But notice how fragile the specific discrimination between the secular public realm and private life has become amid insistence that such a line of discrimination provides *the* way to regulate "religious" disputes in public life: "Let us suppose"; "We try to bypass"; "avoiding"; "so as to have some hope of uncovering a basis for a stable, overlapping consensus." The word "avoid" is revealing because it mediates effortlessly between a demarcation *established* by some philosophical means and one commended because its political acceptance *prior* to introduction of an impartial philosophy of justice would reduce the intensity of cultural conflict. You also encounter in these lines a paradigmatic

secular tactic for taming conflict: the idea is to dredge out of public life as much cultural density and depth as possible so that muddy "metaphysical" and "religious" differences don't flow into the pure water of public reason, procedure, and justice. Finally, the word "religion" now becomes treated as a universal term, as if "it" could always be distilled from a variety of cultures in a variety of times rather than representing a specific fashioning of spiritual life engendered by the secular public space carved out of Christendom.

The first quandary of secularism, then, is that its inability to draw a firm line between private life and public discourse creates opportunities for some Christian enthusiasts to call for the return to a theologically centered state, while the increasingly transparent favoritism of its "neutral" public space opens a window of opportunity for critics to accuse secularists of moral hypocrisy. Thus, in an issue of *First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life,* the editors assert that the American courts have lost cultural legitimacy because of their (secular) stands on abortion, homosexuality, and the right to die. The substantive positions the authors oppose are not too far from those many secularists say emerge out of the dictates of public reason itself. In a follow-up the next month, the editors asserted:

> Almost all Americans claim adherence to an ethic and morality that transcends human invention, and for all but a relatively small minority, that adherence is expressed in terms of biblical religion. By the strange doctrine promulgated by the courts, Christians, Jews and others who adhere to a transcendent morality would, to the extent that their actions as citizens are influenced by that morality, be effectively disenfranchised.... It is a doctrine that ends up casting religious Americans, traditionally the most loyal of citizens, into the role of enemies of the public order.[5]

Secularism, its (primarily) Christian critics contend, lacks the ability to come to terms with the sources of morality most citizens endorse; therefore, secularism itself drifts toward public orientations that challenge the moral sensibilities of many of its citizens. Many such theological critics call upon secularists to return to the nineteenth-century vision of public life registered by Tocqueville. Tocqueville contended that the separation of church and state was viable only because public life was already grounded in a larger Christian civilization. Tocqueville's version of church and state is both objectionable to contemporary secularists and revelatory of a subterranean component of contemporary life too often minimized in secular self-representations.

Consider two quotations from Tocqueville. The first deals with a network of internal relations among religion, mores, reason, and morals in American civilization:

> In the United States it is not only *mores* that are controlled by religion, but its sway extends over *reason*. ... Among Anglo-Americans there are some who profess Christian dogmas because they believe them and others who do so because they are afraid to look as though they did not believe them. So Christianity reigns without obstacles, by universal consent; consequently... *everything in the moral field is certain and fixed,* although the world of politics seems given over to argument and experimentation.[6]

You might read this to say that while politics is *located* in a secular realm, that realm remains safe for Christianity as long as the unconscious mores that *organize* public reason, morality, and politics are Christian. Christianity does not need to be invoked that often because it is already inscribed in the prediscursive dispositions and cultural instincts of the civilization. Tocqueville defends a secularism contained within Christianity, while modern secularists generally seek to contain Christianity within the private realm. Tocqueville proceeds by invoking a conception of preconscious mores eventually pushed out or debased by most secular self-representations. But why, then, bother to support separation of church and state at all? Here is part of the answer, for Tocqueville at least:

> There is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States.... Each sect worships God in its own fashion, but all preach the same morality in the name of God.... America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest power over men's souls; and nothing better demonstrates how useful and natural it is to man, since the country where it now has widest sway is both the most enlightened and freest.[7]

Separation of church and state functions to soften sectarian divisions between Christian sects while retaining the civilizational hegemony of Christianity in a larger sense. This is so because the instinctive register of intersubjective judgment to which Tocqueville appeals both embodies Christian culture and helps to regulate public argumentation. Most contemporary secularists, unlike Tocqueville, either ignore this register of being or locate it beneath public deliberation. Indeed, at the very point where many secularists and devotees of public religious faith meet in combat a space opens up occupied by neither. For most critics of secularism who recognize the visceral register invoke it to deepen the quest for unity or community in public life, while most secularists who eschew it act as if diversity can be fostered only by leaving the guttural register of being out of public life. My suspicion, contrary to one element in each view, is that elaboration of an expansive pluralism appropriate to contemporary life requires cultural investments in the visceral register of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. We must press

Tocqueville's appreciation of intersubjective mores beyond his colonization of them by a civilization of Christian containment. And we must press the (underdeveloped) secular appreciation of diversity into registers of being it tends to reserve to "religion."

Visceral Judgment and Represented Beliefs

Talal Asad, an anthropologist of Islamic heritage, has explored long-term shifts in the Christian experience of ritual, symbol, belief, faith, and doctrine. It is not simply that dominant Christian *beliefs* have changed over the centuries, as, say, the doctrine of original sin gives ground to that of individual choice. But the operative meanings of ritual and symbol have shifted too. With the emergence of secularism and Protestantism, a symbol, in its dominant valence, becomes the representation of an inner state of belief that precedes it; and ritual is now understood to be the primitive enactment of *beliefs* that could also be displayed through cognitive representation. Even sophisticated anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, says Asad, tend to adopt these historically specific meanings of symbol and ritual as if they were pertinent to the universal experience of "religion." But in medieval Christianity, Asad asserts, a symbol was bound up with *enactment or perfection* of inner states and meanings it also represented; and ritual was practiced as a means of educating and constituting appropriate dispositions of appraisal and aptitudes of performance. In medieval monastic life,

> the liturgy is not a species of enacted symbolism to be classified separately from activities defined as technical but is a practice among others essential to the acquisition of Christian virtues.... Each thing done was not only to be done aptly in itself, but done in order to make the self approximate more and more to a predefined model of excellence. The things prescribed, including liturgical services, had a place in the overall scheme of training the Christian self. In this conception there could be no radical disjunction between outer behavior and inner motive, between social rituals and individual sentiments, between activities that are expressive and those that are technical.[8]

Asad draws upon Mauss's exploration of *habitus* as "embodied aptitude" to sharpen the sense of how intersubjective dispositions, instincts, and virtues can be constituted through ritual performance. If Asad is right, then secular understandings of discourse, analysis, and argument capture merely one dimension of thinking, intersubjective judgment, and doctrinal commitment in public life. You might say, then, that intersubjectivity operates on several registers (with significant subjective variations) and that each register exerts effects upon the organization of the others.

I would augment Asad modestly. First, as the reading of Kant to follow suggests, it would exaggerate to draw a sharp line between presecular and secular understandings. Some of these practices persist in Christian Protestantism as well as in some secular orientations to education and training in citizenship. Secularists sometimes address these practices, but seldom in ways that affect profoundly their presentations of how an ethos is to be fostered in public life. So Asad seems right in suggesting that the significance of such practices in contemporary life is underappreciated in secular discourse. Second, and connected to the above, it may be important to underline how representational discourse itself, including the public expression and defense of fundamental beliefs, affects and is affected by the visceral register of intersubjectivity. Public discourses do operate within dense linguistic fields that specify how beliefs are to be articulated and tested and how ethical claims are to be redeemed. But repetitions and defenses of these articulations also write scripts upon prerepresentational sites of appraisal. Although secular presentations of public reason and moral discourse remain tone-deaf to this second register of intersubjectivity, they nonetheless depend upon it to stabilize those practices.

Most pertinent for my purposes, however, is that in addition to the appreciation of this register by many theological thinkers, several nonsecular, a-theistic thinkers pay attention to it as well. This correspondence opens a line of potential communication between theistic and nonsecular, a-theistic agents deflected historically by the secular division between private faith and secular public argument. Indeed, as we shall soon see more closely, secularism as an authoritative model of public life is predicated upon a twofold strategy of containment: to secure the public realm as it construes it, it is almost as important to quarantine certain nontheistic patterns of thinking and technique as it is to monitor ecclesiastical intrusions into public life.

Consider, then, how Nietzsche makes contact with Christian practices of training and thinking. In *The Anti-Christ,* he distinguishes between Christian *doctrines* of original sin, free will, heaven, and damnation, which he attributes to Paul, and pre-Pauline *practices* of character formation, which he attributes to Jesus. He finds the latter infinitely preferable to the former:

> It is false to the point of absurdity to see in a "belief," perchance the belief in redemption through Christ, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian: only Christian *practice,* a life such as he who died on the Cross *lived,* is Christian.... Not a belief but a doing, above all, a not doing of many things, a different *being*.... States of consciousness, beliefs of any kind, holding something to be true, for example—every psychologist knows this—are a matter of complete indifference and of fifth rank compared to the value of the instincts.... "Faith" has been at all times, with Luther for instance, only a cloak, a pretext, a *screen,* behind which the instincts played their game—a shrewd blindness to the dominance of *certain* instincts.[9]

If you attend to what Nietzsche says elsewhere about the relations among culture, instinct, thinking, and language, it becomes apparent that instinct is more than a brutish, biologically fixed force. Instincts are proto-thoughts situated in culturally formed moods, affects, and situations. They are not even entirely reducible to implicit thoughts or tacit judgments, for the latter imply thoughts and judgments like those in explicit discourse that have not been raised to its level. In such a view a dialectical logic of rendering explicit what was implicit would be sufficient to the case, fitting the new entry into an emergent, coherent whole. But for Nietzsche thinking bounces in magical bumps and charges across several registers. Proto-thoughts undergo significant modification and refinement when bumped into a complex linguistic network of contrasts. Moreover, these visceral modes of appraisal are often invested with considerable *intensity,* carrying considerable energy and fervency with them into the other registers of being. This "invisible" set of intensive appraisals forms (as I will call it) an infrasensible subtext from which conscious thoughts, feelings, and discursive judgments draw part of their sustenance. Moreover, instincts that are culturally formed can sometimes be modified by cultural strategies applied by groups to themselves and by individual arts of the self. Hence Nietzsche's durable interest in polytheistic and monotheistic rituals and festivals, and the "misuses" to which Christianity has subjected them.

So Nietzsche says things like, "Our true experiences are not garrulous" and "Even one's thoughts one cannot reduce entirely to words," and "Our invisible moral qualities follow their own course—probably a wholly different course; and they might give pleasure to a god with a divine microscope." He says these things because instincts are thought-imbued intensities moving below linguistic sophistication, consciousness, and reflective judgment as well as through them.[10]

What Nietzsche shares with the medieval Christian perspective explored by Asad is the idea that thinking and intersubjectivity operate on more than one register and that to work on the instinctive register of intersubjective judgment can also be to introduce new possibilities of thinking and being into life. What the medieval and Nietzschean orientations have in common is an appreciation of the significant role the visceral register of intersubjectivity plays in moral and political life and a desire to do some of their ethical work on that register. Where they may differ is in the goals they set for such work, though it is not at all clear that such differences can be read off

simply by knowing whether a thinker is a theist or a nontheist. Bertrand Russell and Nietzsche were both atheists, but they diverged significantly in their orientations to ethics and the registers of being they acknowledged.

When Nietzsche, again, speaks of "thoughts behind your thoughts and thoughts behind those thoughts," he is speaking of "concealed gardens and plantings" below the threshold of reflective surveillance.[11] Now ecclesiastical practices of ritual are translated by Nietzsche and Foucault into experimental arts of the self and by Deleuze into an experimental micropolitics of intersubjectivity. Each tries to shift ethical practices that impinge on the visceral register from their uses, say, in the Augustinian confessional or in state practices of discipline, but each also strives to make investments in this domain that exceed the scope of secular self-representations. Such strategies are experimental because they work on thought-imbued intensities behind conscious thoughts not readily or fully subject to conscious purview; they are important to thinking and theory because such work on oneself can sometimes untie knots in one's thinking; they are important to politics because such work can pave the way for new movement in the politics of becoming; and they are pertinent to the ethos of a pluralist culture because such work can help to install generosity and forbearance into ethical *sensibilities* in a world of multidimensional plurality. To change an intersubjective ethos significantly is to modify the instinctive subjectivities and intersubjectivities in which it is set. But this may sound like mumbo jumbo to many secularists.

The recent work by Joseph LeDoux, a neurophysiologist who maps complex intersections connecting the several human brains involved in our thought-imbued emotional life, may be pertinent here. His study not only confounds behaviorist and computer models of thinking, it may expose insufficiencies in linguistic models of thought and discourse. Let us focus on the relation between the amygdala, a small, almond-shaped brain located at the base of the cortex, and the prefrontal cortex, the large brain developed more extensively in humans than in other animals. The amygdala and the prefrontal cortex can receive messages from the same sources, but each registers them in a different way. When receiving, say, a sign it has stored as an indication of danger, the amygdala reacts quickly, relatively crudely, and with intense energy. Exposure to signs that resemble a past trauma, panic, or disturbance "pass like greased lightning over the potentiated pathways to the amygdala, unleashing the fear reaction."[12] The prefrontal cortex receives its version of the message more slowly, processing it through a sophisticated linguistic network in a more refined way and forming a more

complex judgment. In a situation of stress, the amygdala also transmits its interpretation and much of its intensity to the prefrontal cortex; and

> the amygdala has a greater influence on the cortex than the cortex has on the amygdala, allowing emotional arousal to dominate and control thinking. . . . Although thoughts can easily trigger emotions (by activating the amygdala), we are not very effective at willfully turning off emotions (by deactivating the amygdala).[13]

The amygdala is a site of thought-imbued intensities that do not in themselves take the form of either conscious feelings or representations. The amygdala is, then, literally one of the "concealed gardens and plantings" of which Nietzsche speaks, implicated in a set of relays with other more open gardens. LeDoux suggests that it is for the most part a good thing the amygdala is wired to the cortex, for it imparts energy and intensity to that center needed for the latter's formation of representations and practical decisions. And, I suggest, those gaps and dissonances between the amygdala and the cortex, and between it and the hippocampus (the site of complex memories), may create some of the frictions from which creativity in thinking and judgment arises. How, though, can the amygdala be educated? It is under variable degrees of control by the cortex, depending on the context. But, also, since its specific organization is shaped to an uncertain degree by previous intensities of cultural experience and performance, either it or, more likely, the network of relays in which it is set may be susceptible to modest influence by rituals and intersubjective arts thematized by religions of the Book and Nietzscheans, respectively.

So, if the first quandary of secularism is bound up with uncertainties in the line of demarcation it pursues between private and public life, the second is that its forgetting or depreciation of an entire register of thought-imbued intensities in which we participate requires it to misrecognize itself and encourages it to advance dismissive interpretations of any culture or ethical practice that engages the visceral register of being actively. The secular understanding of symbol and ritual reviewed by Asad provides one index of this combination. A whole litany of dismissive misinterpretations of Nietzschean and Foucauldian arts of the self provides a second.[14]

The Secular Public Sphere

We now need to draw this preliminary engagement with secular accounts of thinking and discourse into coordination with a conception of public space that has become hegemonic within Euro-American secularism. For to engage its presentation of public life is to go some way toward explaining

how the plurality of secular self-interpretations noted earlier becomes organized into a hierarchy. And it helps to set the table for another conception of public life that more actively appreciates the visceral register, that engages the role of micropolitics, and that embraces a more expansive and generous model of public discourses. Let's begin with Kant. Kant struggled to give "universal philosophy" primacy over ecclesiastical (Christian) theology in a way that has become authoritative for secularism. And his passage from an account of the proper organization of the university to the proper organization of public discourse is also exemplary.[15] Card-carrying secularists are very often university academics as well as citizens of a state. And they often pursue the same mantle of authority in each domain. Most pertinently, the way in which they imagine the contour of one institution regularly infiltrates into the mode of governance they project into the other.

In *The Conflict of the Faculties,* Kant's immediate objective is to curtail the authority of the faculty of ecclesiastical theology within both the German university and the larger political culture.[16] His concern is that since (Christian) ecclesiastical theology is governed by texts and practices sunk in the medium of history and sensibility, the claim by each ecclesiastical "sect" to moral supremacy is likely to meet with an equal and opposite claim by others. His object is to cleanse the university and public life of the adverse effects of sectarianism. This is to be accomplished by elevating universal philosophy, also known as "rational religion," to the authoritative position previously reserved for Christian theology. Kant asserts that

> a division into sects can never occur in matters of pure religious belief. Wherever sectarianism is to be found, it arises from a mistake on the part of ecclesiastical faith: the mistake of regarding its statutes (even if they are divine revelations) for essential parts of religion.... But since, in contingent doctrines, there can be all sort of conflicting articles or interpretations...., we can readily see that mere dogma will be a prolific source of innumerable sects in matters of faith unless it is rectified by pure religious faith.[17]

Kantian philosophy is then wheeled out to fill the place of ecclesiastical authority just vacated. But, as *we* now know from repeated experience after Kant, the claim of an upstart to occupy the authoritative place of a teetering authority succeeds best if the upstart plays up the arbitrariness and divisiveness of the resources its predecessor drew upon while sanctifying and purifying the source from which it draws. Kant imagines himself to be up to the task. He elevates a generic Christianity called "rational religion" above sectarian faith, anchoring the former in a metaphysic of the supersensible that, so the story goes, is presupposed by any agent of morality. In the process, he degrades ritual and arts of the self without eliminating them altogether, for these arts work on the "sensibility" rather than drawing moral obligation from the supersensible realm as practical reason does. The point is to deploy them just enough to render crude sensibilities better equipped to accept the moral law drawn from practical reason. Secularists later carry this Kantian project of diminishment a step or two further.

To secure the authority of philosophy over theology, Kant then reduces moral judgment to practical reason alone. The program of anointing one discipline by degrading the other is pursued in the following formulation:

> For unless the supersensible (the thought of which is essential to anything called religion) is anchored to determinate concepts of reason, such as those of morality, fantasy inevitably gets lost in the transcendent, where religious matters are concerned, and leads to an illuminism in which everyone has his own private, inner revelations, and there is no longer any public touchstone of truth.[18]

Kant anchors rational religion in the law of morality rather than anchoring morality in ecclesiastical faith. That is, he *retains* the command model of morality from Augustinian Christianity, but he *shifts* the proximate point of command from the Christian God to the moral subject itself. This, with significant variations, becomes a key move in later secular models of public life. But it also engenders a legacy of uncertainty and instability that still haunts the secular problematic. For authoritative moral philosophy and rational religion are now only as secure as the source of morality upon which they draw. And morality as law now itself becomes anchored only in the "apodictic" recognition by ordinary human beings of its binding authority. To tie *this* knot of recognition tightly Kant must continue his attack on the relative difficulties ecclesiastical theology faces in anchoring morality directly in the commands of God:

> Now a code of God's *statutory* (and so revealed) will, not derived from human reason but harmonizing perfectly with morally practical reason toward the final end—in other words the Bible—would be the most effective organ for guiding men and citizens to their temporary and eternal well being, if only it could be accredited as the word of God and its authenticity could be proved by documents. But there are many difficulties in the way of validating it.... For if God would really speak to man, man could still never *know* it was God speaking.... But in some cases man can be sure that the voice he hears is *not* God's; for if the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be...., he must consider it an illusion.... And... we must regard the credentials of the Bible as drawn from the pure spring of universal rational religion dwelling in

> every ordinary man; and it is this very simplicity that accounts for the Bible's extremely widespread and powerful influence on the hearts of the people.[19]

It is a significant move to give morality priority over ecclesiology, but Kant's rational religion still shares much structurally with the "dogmatic" ecclesiology it seeks to displace. First, it places singular conceptions of reason and command morality above question. Second, it sets up (Kantian) philosophy as the highest potential authority in adjudicating questions in these two domains and in guiding the people toward eventual enlightenment. Third, it defines the greatest danger to public morality as sectarianism within Christianity. Fourth, in the process of defrocking ecclesiastical theology and crowning philosophy as judge in the last instance, it also delegitimates a place for several non-Kantian, nontheistic perspectives in public life. Thus, as Kantian philosophy is elevated to public preeminence, the pre-Kantian philosophies of Epicureanism, Spinozism, and Humeanism are devalued because of the priority they give to sensible life and an ethic of cultivation, respectively, over the supersensible and a morality of command. Moreover, a series of post-Kantian philosophies such as Nietzscheanism, Bergsonism, Foucauldianism, and Deleuzianism are depreciated in advance on similar grounds. For denigration of these latter perspectives sets a crucial condition of possibility for the authoritative regulation of religious sects in public life by universal philosophy.

Later, neo-Kantian simulations of secularism, then, consist of a series of attempts to secure these four effects without open recourse to the Kantian metaphysic of the supersensible. Secularism, in its dominant Western forms, *is* this Kantian fourfold without metaphysical portfolio. The slogans "political not metaphysical," "postmetaphysical," "beyond metaphysics," and even "pragmatic" often provide signals of this attempt, although they occasionally set the stage for attempts to refigure secularism. My sense is, as I will argue later in this chapter and further in the last, that recent attempts to be postmetaphysical often complement secularism by depreciating the visceral register of intersubjectivity and investing too much purity into politics. At any rate, the third quandary of contemporary secularism is that its advocates often disavow dependence upon a metaphysic of the supersensible to fend off sectarian religious struggles in the public realm while they then invoke authoritative conceptions of thinking, reason, and morality that draw them perilously close to the Kantian metaphysic of the supersensible as they ward off contemporary defenders of an ethic of cultivation. Secularism functions most effectively politically when its criticisms of a public role for Christian theology are insulated from its corollary disparagements of nontheistic, non-Kantian philosophies.

The Kantian achievement, however, is cast from fragile crystal. For what if one contends, as Gilles Deleuze does, that the "apodictic" *recognition* by ordinary people upon which Kantian morality is grounded in the first instance is actually a secondary formation reflecting the predominant Christian culture in which it is set? Now the same objections Kant brought against the arbitrary authority of ecclesiology can be brought against him. And this difficulty returns to haunt other attempts to secure secular authority in the public realm after Kant, even by secularists who eschew reference to the Kantian supersensible. The return of Kantian charges against the philosophy that issued them leads one to wonder whether every attempt to *occupy* such a place of unquestioned authority reenacts the plot of Greek tragedy in which all parties promising to resolve an obdurate conflict in the same old way soon find themselves succumbing to it.

Kant introduces defining elements into the logic of secularism, but he himself does not construct a complete philosophy of secularism. His obsequious deference to the prince, his explicit dependence on the supersensible, his hope that a natural teleology of public life will promote rationality in the public sphere by automatic means, and his hesitancy to include most subjects within the realm of public discourse render him a forerunner rather than a partisan of secularism.[20] Nonetheless, most contemporary secularists attempt to secure the Kantian effect by Kantian and/or non-Kantian means. This implicates them, though to varying degrees, in a cluster of protectionist strategies against (a) the intrusion of ecclesiastical theology into public life; (b) the academic and public legitimacy of nontheistic, non-Kantian philosophies; (c) the exploration of the visceral register of thinking and intersubjectivity; (d) the admiration of creativity in thinking; (e) the related appreciation of the politics of becoming by which the new comes into being from below the operative register of justice and representational discourse; and (f) productive involvement with experimental practices of micropolitics and self-artistry. These intercoded interventions are pursued in the name of protecting the authority of deliberative argument in the secular public sphere, that is, of securing the Kantian effect.

Let's look at how one effort to secure the Kantian effect by non-Kantian means unfolds in the early work of Jürgen Habermas, when he traces the emergence and decline of "the public sphere" in modern Western societies. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Habermas draws sustenance from Kant without endorsing a metaphysic of the supersensible.

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According to the Habermas story, a small, vibrant public sphere shone brilliantly for a brief time in postmedieval Europe. Salons, coffeehouses, and weekly periodicals coalesced to foster a public that received ideas disinterestedly and debated them in a way that allowed "the authority of the better argument" to prevail. Early theorists who cataloged this sphere, including Kant, eternalized the historically contingent conditions that rendered it possible. But this historical practice of publicity, critical reason, and pursuit of a free public consensus set a model for public life transcending its immediate place of approximation. Unlike most secularists, the early Habermas (this changes later) finds this moment of evanescence to be short-lived. One element in his account of its fall from grace, however, may express a more pervasive proclivity in secular conceptions of public discourse.

By the middle of the twentieth century, under pressure from an expanding welfare state, the sophisticated capacities of corporate and political manipulation, and so on, the authentic public sphere had given way to a false copy. Consider some summary formulations from Habermas to capture the character of this decline:

> Put bluntly, you had to pay for books, theater, concert, and museum, but not for the conversation about what you had read, heard, and seen and what you might completely absorb only through this conversation. Today the conversation itself is administered. Professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions and round table shows—the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of stars...; it assumes commodity form even at "conferences" where anyone can "participate."[21]

> The sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason has been shattered; the public is split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical. Consequently it completely lacks the form of communication specific to a public.[22]

> The consensus developed in rational political public debate has yielded to compromise fought out or simply imposed nonpublicly.[23]

> A process of public communication evolving in the medium of the parties... obviously stands in an inverse relation to the staged and manipulative effectiveness of a publicity aimed at rendering the broad population... infectiously ready for acclamation.[24]

> The collapse of ideology... seems to be only one side of the process.... The other side is that ideology... fulfills, on a deeper level of consciousness, its old function.... This false consciousness no longer consists of an internally harmonized nexus of ideas..., but of a nexus of modes of behavior.[25]

I do not object, of course, to exploration of how the contours of public discourse shift with changes in their technological and economic context, nor to how structural binds created by the expansion of capitalism squeeze the space in which public discourse appears. But the early Habermas—for his position, as we shall see, changes later—inflects the account of this history in a particular direction. Interpreted through the perspective advanced here, the early Habermasian formulations first extract a desiccated model of discourse from early-modern salon conversations and then re-present the elements purged from those representations as potent modes of destructive effectivity concentrated in the present. On the line of elevated extractions you find rational argument, true publicity, public opinion, collective consensus, and political action; on the remaindered line of correspondences you find management, manipulative effectiveness, staging, interest compromise, unstable settlement, behavior, and infectious acclamation. Indeed, the early Habermasian projection of a past and future model of public life from which the visceral element is purged depends upon playing up the negative potency of that very element in the present. For if the visceral dimension were treated as both inappropriate and ineffective, the most powerful contemporary impediments to actualization of the model of rational public consensus would disappear too. It would become more difficult to explain why the present is so degraded. The postulated potency of this dimension, then, might lead you to think that a reworked version of it should be folded into the ideal of discourse itself. But if the degraded element were reworked and incorporated into the model, the Habermasian imagination of sufficient and authoritative argument would be jeopardized. The early Habermasian contempt for existing public opinion is determined in part, then, by Habermas's infectious insistence upon an authoritative model of argumentation from which the visceral element is subtracted. The sufficiency of the secular model itself fades once the visceral element it can neither eliminate nor manage is folded back into it.

How might emendation of the secular be pursued? Such an attempt seems to require a series of revisions in secular simulations of public argumentation. In place of the Habermasian ideal of a consensus between rational agents who rise above their interests and sensibilities, you might substitute that of *ethically sensitive, negotiated settlements* between chastened partisans who proceed from contending and overlapping presumptions while *jointly* coming to appreciate the unlikelihood of reaching rational agreement on several basic issues; in place of a *reduction* of public discourse to pure argument, you might appreciate *positive possibilities in the visceral register of thinking and discourse too,* exploring how this dimension of subjectivity

and intersubjectivity is indispensable to creativity in thinking, to the introduction of new identities onto the cultural register of legitimacy, and to the possibility of contingent settlements in public life; in response to the quest for rational purity in moral motivation, judgment, and authority, you might explore an *ethic of cultivation* in which a variety of constituencies work on themselves to attenuate that amygdalic panic that often arises when you encounter gender, sensual, or religious identities that call the naturalness, rationality, or sanctity of your own identities into question, and in which each constituency works to cultivate generosity and critical responsiveness in its negotiations with alter-identities that help it to be what is; and in response to the secular demand to leave controversial religious and metaphysical judgments at home so as to hone a single public practice of reason or justice, you might pursue a generous *ethos of engagement* between a plurality of constituencies inhabiting the same territory and honoring different moral sources. And so on.[26]

I sense that amygdalic pressures working on secularists may push some to ignore the next point, but nothing in the above carries the implication of eliminating argument, rationality, language, or conscious thought from public discourse. It merely insists that these media are always accompanied and informed to variable degrees by visceral intensities of thinking, prejudgment, and sensibility not eliminable *as such* from private or public life. To participate in a multitrack model of subjectivity and intersubjective relations, then, is to work on each of these fronts in relation to the others, seeking to infuse an ethos of care for the plurovocity of being into partisan modes of thinking, discourse, and judgment. It is not even, as I will address shortly, that everyone would have to endorse *this* practice of care (for care can come from multiple sources) to participate in the pluralized public life endorsed here. It *is,* however, that most would come to appreciate the profound element of *contestability* in the practice they do endorse. And they would incorporate that recognition positively into the way they engage other visions of public discourse in actual public life. That cardinal virtue is yet to be folded into most models of secular discourse with which I am familiar. Indeed, the Kantian inspiration of much of modern secularism, in its ambition to enable (Kantian) philosophy to wrest public moral authority from ecclesiastical theology, militates against it. Neither Kantian philosophy nor the secularism that follows it is alone responsible for this effect. It also involves pressure from ecclesiastical forces upon secular practices. But once it is understood that secularism is a political settlement rather than an uncontestable dictate of public discourse itself, the possibility of reworking that settlement under new conditions of being takes on new significance.

Pluralizing the Secular

By the mid-1980s, the Habermasian version of secularism had become chastened and moved closer to the Rawlsian model. While Rawls now seeks to ground secular justice at least partly in an overlapping cultural consensus without invoking "controversial" religious and metaphysical conceptions, Habermas has moved more actively to a postmetaphysical stance. One can understand the pressures pushing each in that direction. While each had expected the fervor of religious controversies to abate as the years rolled by, it has in fact intensified. So by eschewing reference to controversial metaphysical assumptions in their own forays into public life, secularists hope to discourage a variety of enthusiastic Christians from doing so in turn. Sometimes, indeed, such an agnostic stance folds the admirable virtue of forbearance into public debate. But the cost of elevating this disposition to restraint into the cardinal virtue of metaphysical denial is also high. First, such a stance makes it difficult for its partisans to engage a variety of issues of the day, such as the legitimate variety of sexual orientations, the organization of gender, the question of doctor-assisted death, the practice of abortion, and the extent to which a uniform set of public virtues is needed. It is difficult because most participants in these discussions explicitly draw metaphysical and religious perspectives into them, and because the claim to take a position on these issues without invoking controversial metaphysical ideas is soon seen to be a facade by others. Academic secularists are almost the only partisans today who consistently *purport* to leave their religious and metaphysical baggage at home. So the claim to being postmetaphysical opens you to charges of hypocrisy or false consciousness: "You secularists quietly bring a lot of your own metaphysical baggage into public discourse even as you tell the rest of us to leave ours in the closet." Finally, metaphysical abstinence increases the pressure on secularists to pretend that actually operative reason, in one form or another, is sufficient to the issues at hand, even in the face of their own insights into how cultural specificities, contingent elements, and artificial closures help to set operative conditions for actual practices of discourse and judgment. Habermas, for instance, after eschewing the transcendental status of the Kantian supersensible, first underlines uncertainties and contingencies that rejection implies for his perspective and then tries to recapture the Archimedean point he has just let go:

> Transcendental thinking once concerned itself with a stable stock of forms for which there were no recognizable alternatives. Today, in contrast, the experience of contingency is a whirlpool into which everything is pulled: everything could also be otherwise, the categories of the understanding, the principles of socialization and morals, the con-

> stitution of subjectivity, the foundation of rationality itself. There are good reasons for this. Communicative reason, too, treats almost everything as contingent, even the conditions for the emergence of its own linguistic medium. But for everything that claims validity *within* linguistically structured forms of life, the structures of possible mutual understanding in language constitute something that cannot be gotten around.[27]

Habermas now acknowledges more actively the role of sensibility in reflection and the role of contingency in the formation of sensibility. But he still tries to preserve the Kantian effect by non-Kantian means, substituting the presumption of rational decidability built into the logic of linguistic performance for the necessary presupposition of the supersensible. But it is now fair enough to ask, Why is that condition of discourse the *only* one treated as if it "cannot be gotten around"? What about visceral and contingent elements within thinking and discourse? Can they be gotten around? Or that problematic relation between the unthought (which only a contestable metaphysical assumption could assure you is already preshaped like thought) and its *translation* into thought? If you were to say that all three of these characteristics form constitutive conditions of thinking and discourse, and if you then acknowledged, as Habermas now does, the ideal of rational agreement to be a counterfactual never actually realized in practice, you would already have the makings of a more robust, ambiguous, multivalent model of discourse. Its ambiguity would reside in the need to push on one dimension of discourse (say, hidden contingencies folded into an operative presumption of universality) just after you had played out another (say, the presumption of possible accord). Now a new Habermas could say: It is impossible to participate in discourse without projecting the counterfactual possibility of consensus; but, hey, since each attempt to interpret the actual import of that counterfactuality in any concrete setting is also problematical and contestable, this stricture does not rule out in advance religious or nontheistic metaphysical perspectives that exceed the terms of the postmetaphysical alternative my younger self endorsed as necessary.

What, then, is the thought behind the thought that drives the actually existing Habermas to give singular primacy to one dimension of discourse over all others? Perhaps, at a visceral level, it is a reiteration of the Christian and Kantian demands to occupy the authoritative place of public discourse. The imperative to occupy that place of authority may be bolstered by another preliminary drive, that is, *the political* sense that a non-Kantian, religiously pluralized world would fall into either disorder or religious tyranny if its participants did not endorse a single standard of rational authority, regardless of the extent to which such a standard can in fact be secured transcendentally.

In an age of globalization and the accentuation of speed in so many domains of life, a cultural pluralism appropriate to the times is unlikely to be housed in an austere postmetaphysical partisanship that purports to place itself above the fray. The need today, rather, is to rewrite secularism to pursue an ethos of engagement in public life among a plurality of controversial *metaphysical* perspectives, including, for starters, Christian and other monotheistic perspectives, secular thought, and asecular, nontheistic perspectives. A new modus vivendi is needed to replace the Kantian achievement in which a few fundamental differences *within Christianity* were relegated to the private realm in the name of a generic rational religion or a generic reason. Here pluralism would not be grounded in one austere moral source adopted by everyone (say, a universal conception of rational religion, or discourse, or persons, or justice). It would be grounded in an ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies honoring a variety of moral sources and metaphysical orientations. Such an ethos *between* interdependent partisans provides an existential basis for democratic politics if and when many partisans affirm without deep resentment the contestable character of the fundamental faith they honor most. Such reciprocal affirmations across considerable variety in faith and belief enable mutual forbearance in public debate and the periodic assembly of majority assemblages. Such reciprocal affirmations enable a generous ethos of public engagement, then, even more than they follow from it. Significant currents already operative in contemporary life point toward the possible consolidation of such an ethos, even as intense constituencies mobilize against that very possibility.[28]

Let us simulate modifications in the secular model of public discourse by pursuing points of connection among several academic perspectives that have tended to be insulated from one another heretofore. We draw Kantian philosophy, Habermasian thought, post-Nietzschean thought, and one form of Christian theology into engagement during a time in which Habermas circumscribes such engagements and Rawls doubts their desirability. We proceed, of course, in a partisan way, while simultaneously seeking to open up the terms of conversation with others.

In a recent essay titled *Postmetaphysical Thinking,* Habermas identifies metaphysics with the attempt to "secure the precedence of identity over difference and that of ideas over matter."[29] Such a definition places Plato under the rubric of metaphysics, as it does Christian philosophers such as Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, and Hegel. But what does it say about diverse non-

Platonic and non-Christian perspectives in the history of the West represented by such names as Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Levinas, Butler, and Deleuze? Are they metaphysical or postmetaphysical? Each conveys a set of fundamentals that differ from the set christened as metaphysical by Habermas, yet none, in the most obvious sense of these phrases, gives precedence to "identity over difference and . . . ideas over matter." Once you encounter these perspectives, and also keep in mind how each fundamental reading of the world is bound up with particular orientations to ethics, identity, and politics, the Habermasian constitution of metaphysics begins to feel provincial. And the pretense to be postmetaphysical now gives off a hollow sound.

Consider a Deleuzian metaphysic. It invokes a non-Kantian transcendental field of (as I call it) the infrasensible. The infrasensible, like the supersensible it tracks and challenges, does not *exist* in the world of appearance. As a virtual field made up of elements too small to be perceptible and/or too fast to be actual, it insists below and within culturally organized registers of sensibility, appearance, discourse, justice, and identity. The amygdala, for instance, subsists on this register, projecting effects into the world of conscious thinking, feeling, and judgment without itself being *in* that world. Thinking itself for Deleuze (and Epicurus, Spinoza, Bergson, Freud, and Nietzsche too) operates on more than one level; it moves on the level of the virtual (which is real in its effectivity but not actual in its availability) and that of the actual (which is available to representation, but not self-sufficient). Infrasensible intensities of proto-thinking, for instance, provide a reservoir from which *surprise* sometimes unsettles fixed explanations, new *pressures* periodically swell up to disrupt existing practices of rationality, and new *drives to identity* occasionally surge up to modify the register of justice and legitimacy upon which established identities are placed. Again, this is so because the swarm of intensities emanating from the infrasensible are too multiple, finely meshed, and fast to be captured entirely in the coarse nets of explicit identity, conscious representation, and public appearance.

How does Habermas relate to such a perspective? Unlike most Rawlsians, he does take note of its type. But he then delegitimates it through his typification of it. He subsumes it under the labels "irrationalism" and "negative metaphysics." Here Habermas recapitulates Kant beautifully, binding his attempt to defang Christian ecclesiastical metaphysics to an effort to push nontheistic/a-Kantian metaphysical orientations below the field of intellectual eligibility.

How does Habermas make this move? First, he equates such an orientation with a loss of bearings essential to political and ethical life. It is perceived as inherently pessimistic and despairing, even though its partisans seldom present it in that light.[30] Second, he projects onto it a claim to secure the certainty of its own stance that *is* operative in other metaphysical doctrines and in the Habermasian perspective. Thus: "Every comprehensive, closed, and final system of statements must be formulated in a language that requires no commentary and allows of no interpretations, improvements, or innovations that might be placed at a distance."[31]

Habermas, then, is postmetaphysical in that he places none of his basic assumptions—except one—above the possibility of modification or reconfiguration. But Deleuze and Nietzsche, whom I call non-Christian metaphysicians, take this perspective a step further. As I read them, they first treat their basic presumptions to be contestable suppositions and then strive to interpret and act through them. For, first, these fundamentals are antisystematic. They carry within them the expectation that no theoretical system will ever be complete; that every explanation will periodically meet with surprise; that each identity is to a considerable extent an entrenched, contingent formation situated at the tense nexus between the self-identification of its participants and modes of recognition institutionally bestowed upon it; that a formation typically contains internal resistances or remainders; and that it might become otherwise if some of these balances shift. Second, the Deleuzian metaphysic reconfigures the standing and shape of the Kantian transcendental field without eliminating it altogether. It is transcendental in residing above or below appearance, but not in being unquestionable or in authorizing a morality of command. This, then, is metaphysics without the claim to apodictic authority or epistemic certainty, a combination that eludes the Habermasian division between metaphysical and postmetaphysical thought.

Put this way, a couple of potential points of contact now emerge between these two different perspectives. Habermas plays up elements of contingency and uncertainty in a doctrine that transcendentalizes the linguistic presupposition of a possible consensus. And Deleuze acknowledges the need for rules and norms for discourse to proceed while thinking that surprising changes might unfold in rules now presumed by Habermas to be fixed. Yet this line of potential communication across significant difference—a line enlarging the field of discourse rather than curtailing it—cannot be pursued until the definitive barrier Habermas poses to it has been addressed. For, at precisely this point of possible connection between two opposing perspectives, Habermas pulls out the hangman's noose of critical philosophy and lowers it around the neck of the Deleuzian: "All such attempts to detranscendentalize reason continue to get entangled in the prior conceptual decisions

of transcendental philosophy, decisions in which they remain trapped."[32] "Negative metaphysics" has now been rendered null and void.

But is the noose tied that tightly? Most of those on the block already acknowledge how often they become entangled in the coils of paradox. Deleuze, for instance, insists upon it. But he also reads the anxious imperative to avoid paradox at all costs as a sign that the philosopher in question still treats Kantian models of recognition, common sense, and the upright character of thought as if they were apodictic. For only if they were apodictic would the encounter with self-referential contradictions and paradoxes necessarily show thinking to have gone awry. Does the Habermasian noose, then, muffle those who call into question the upright character of thought? For Deleuze, the encounter with paradox is sometimes a *sign* of the limit of thought and an *indication* of a reservoir of fugitive elements below and within thinking that might inspire creativity in thinking itself. This is the Deleuzian "field of immanence" upon which part of thinking is located. Deleuze, like Nietzsche, seeks to alter the mood or sensibility within which the encounter with paradox occurs. He welcomes the encounter in a way that both recalls one side of Kant and confounds the Habermasian attempt to secure the Kantian effect.

> Philosophy is revealed not by good sense but by paradox. Paradox is the pathos or the passion of philosophy. There are several kinds . . . , all of which are opposed to . . . good sense and common sense. Subjectively, paradox breaks up the common exercise of the faculties and places each before its own limit. . . . At the same time, however, paradox communicates to the broken faculties . . . , aligning them along a volcanic line which allows one to ignite the other, leaping from one limit to the next. Objectively, paradox displays the element that cannot be totalized within a common element, along with the difference that cannot be equalized or cancelled at the direction of good sense. It is correct to say that the only refutation of paradoxes lies in good sense and common sense themselves, but on condition that they are already allowed everything: the role of judge as well as that of party to the case.[33]

Once these different responses to the occasion of paradox become clear, Habermas can criticize and resist a Deleuzian metaphysic, but he may not be able to produce a postmetaphysical rationale to rule it definitively out of public discourse. If that is so, it now seems imperative, on Habermasian terms, to enter into dialogue with it, to pursue a critical dialogue in which neither party insists upon being the final judge above the fray as well as party to the case. Because Deleuze requires rules of discourse to proceed and Habermas increasingly acknowledges contingent elements in the conditions of discourse, a new avenue of communication opens up across differ-

ence. Each party, certainly, may press the other to clarify itself and, perhaps, to revise itself. The Habermasian charge of performative contradiction, for instance, presses Deleuzians to clarify their orientation to paradox.[34] By proceeding along a path of agonistic respect and selective indebtedness, these academic parties can now simulate an expansive practice of public discourse, one in which the number of parties grows, the issues expand, and the encounter with paradox has been decriminalized.

We can, then, simulate discourse in one direction beyond the parameters of Habermasian permissibility. But what about public engagements between those who bring religious faith with them into public debates and those who eschew reference to a personal god or rational religion. Rawls would rule that discussion out of public life; the postmetaphysical matrix Habermas invokes points more hesitantly in the same direction. "Communicative reason," Habermas says, is treated by "negative metaphysics" as "the colorless negative of a religion that provides consolation." But Habermasian reason neither shrieks out heroic slogans against a universe without consolation nor offers religious solace. It

> neither announces the absence of consolation in a world forsaken by God nor does it take it upon itself to provide any consolation. . . . As long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse, it will even coexist abstemiously with the former, neither supporting it nor combatting it.[35]

This seems to announce that while communicative reason would purge public discourse of post-Nietzschean perspectives (in the name of coherence) it would practice respectful coexistence with powerful institutions of religious consolation. That is a fairly good reproduction of the Kantian effect. But surely there is a less self-effacing way to engage theistic perspectives in public life. Only a colorless demand to be postmetaphysical would stop you from exploring them.

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze finds a way to engage Kantian and Kierkegaardian orientations to religious faith. There is a dramatic moment, he says, when Kant is poised between a critique of ecclesiastical theology and a defense of rational theology. In that fissure other nontheological alternatives flash by for a second, only to be forgotten through insistent Kantian presentations of recognition and common sense. To pursue one of those nontheistic paths would be to open a public dialogue with Kantian religion as well as with the ecclesiological doctrines Kant sought to contain. But Rawlsian and Habermasian versions of secularism refuse to walk through that door.

Let us address the Deleuzian engagement with Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard represents a phase in high Christianity after the necessity of Kantian ratio-

nal religion has been called into question. In Kierkegaard, faith relinquishes its mooring in a Kantian postulate of reason. It then seeks to make up that deficit through an increase in intensity. "Kierkegaard and Peguy are the culmination of Kant, they realize Kant by entrusting to faith the task of overcoming the speculative death of God and healing the wound in the self." Faith unavoidably changes its character in their hands. The experience of faith now becomes ambiguous: it is "no more than a condition by default, one lost in sin which must be recovered in Christ."[36]

This means, I take it, that the divine object of devotion is treated *as if* it were once there to faith in its fullness so that the faithful can hold themselves responsible for its loss and pursue an imagined future of its recovery. Faith now becomes ironized so that it can also be intensified. Such a movement backward and forward, the faithful disclose, makes a profound difference in your general bearing, your ethical conduct, and the rich horizon of being toward which you are opened. This is repetition with spiral effects, rather than bare repetition.[37] Kierkegaardian faith, however, repeatedly bumps into gaps or feelings of estrangement between repetitions, when traces of faithlessness intervene inadvertently and unintentionally. Perhaps such an effect is bound up with the very ground of Kierkegaardian faith, giving it its impetus to intense practices of faithfulness. Deleuze, the a-theist, pounces upon this trace of faithlessness between repetitions. I would do so too, not to purge faith from the faithful or disenfranchise expressions of faith from public life, but to open a window within theistic *representations* for appreciation of recurrent moments of difference in faith from itself. Now, alongside the difference between two practices of representation another more volatile difference is forming, a difference that also *has the potential to connect the contending parties.* Each practice of faith (theistic and nontheistic) may contain an element of difference within itself from itself that tends to be blurred or obscured by the representations it makes of itself to others.

This difference between faith and its representation explains why two devout believers "cannot observe each other without laughing." Such laughter testifies to breaches that unavoidably occur within the house of faith.[38] For

> there is an adventure of faith according to which one is always the clown of one's own faith, the comedian of one's own ideal.... Eventually faith reflects upon itself and discovers by experiment that its condition can only be given to it as "recovered" and that it is not only separated from that condition but doubled in it.[39]

Deleuze deploys this ambiguity to give more room to the nonbeliever. "We have too often been invited to judge the atheist from the viewpoint of

the belief or faith that we suppose still drives him... not to be tempted by the inverse operation—to judge the believer by the violent atheist by which he is inhabited, the Antichrist eternally given 'once and for all' within grace."[40] But, we can add, now a space also emerges to inform the dialogue between some *representatives* of theistic faith and some *representatives* of nontheistic gratitude for life. For if the true believer is a simulacrum of himself, in what relation does the nonbeliever stand to herself? Does the *nonbeliever* who, say, affirms a Deleuzian nontheistic transcendental often inadvertently project life forward *as if* it might perpetuate itself eternally? Epicurus, at least, thought so. This pre-Christian spiritualist, who treated the gods as if they were unconcerned with human life, counseled his followers to resist that recurrent moment when life projects its continuation after death so that they might overcome existential resentment against the contingency of life. Epicurus thus testifies to a visceral tendency to project life after death even before the advent of the Christian heaven. Do such projectionist tendencies reveal we who represent ourselves as nontheistic to be comedians of ourselves too, harboring truant moments of forgetful faith that belie the steadfastness we present to Christians and other monotheists whenever they press hard upon us? We too may exist in a condition that can "only be given... as 'recovered' and is not only separated from the condition but doubled over in it." Is it possible, then, for believers and nonbelievers from a variety of faiths to double over in laughter together on occasion across the space of difference? On principle? Doing so partly *because* each party harbors in itself an ineliminable element of difference from itself?[41] And partly because the dominant self-representation of each party contains within it an element of faith that is likely to remain contestable?

Yes, those differences within that support connections between tempt many to close off agonistic respect in this domain. But, still, the other possibility returns, to counter such a temptation—even if to pursue it we have to fashion reciprocal modifications in the very sensibilities in which theistic faiths and nontheistic faiths are set,[42] and even if the boundaries of secularism must be stretched to incorporate such relations into public life.

The step to which each party gives priority does have a distinctive effect on the type of character developed, the character of the ethic supported, the sources it draws sustenance from, and the political priorities supported, though none of these can be read from bare knowledge of the official stance. Repetition, in its spiral pattern, makes an important difference to the registers of belief, identity, and self-representation even while it does not erase all difference within these appearances. The earlier discussion of the multiple registers of intersubjectivity has already suggested this.

By placing a Deleuzian metaphysic and the temper in which it is set into conversations with Habermas, Kant, and Kierkegaard, we augment academic models of secular discourse. We also join Kant, Rawls, and Habermas in acknowledging the connection between models of academic discourse and conceptions of public life. We simply pursue that connection differently, stretching the parameters of secular discourse in a couple of directions without claiming the right to be final judge of each dispute as well as fervent party to the case.

2

Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming

Suffering and Ethics

People suffer. We suffer from illness, disease, unemployment, dead-end jobs, bad marriages, the loss of loved ones, social relocation, tyranny, police brutality, street violence, existential anxiety, guilt, envy, resentment, depression, stigmatization, rapid social change, sexual harassment, child abuse, poverty, medical malpractice, alienation, political defeat, toothaches, the loss of self-esteem, identity-panic, torture, and fuzzy categories. We organize suffering into categories to help cope with it, but often these categories themselves conceal some aspects of suffering, even contribute to them. This latter experience leads to the suspicion that suffering is not entirely reducible to any determinate set of categories. To suffer is to bear, endure, or undergo; to submit to something injurious; to become dis*organ*ized. Suffering resides on the underside of agency, mastery, wholeness, joy, and comfort. It is, therefore, ubiquitous. Severe suffering exceeds every interpretation of it while persistently demanding interpretation. Without suffering, it is unlikely we would have much depth in our philosophies and religions. But with it, life is tough—and often miserable for many.

Does the polycultural character of suffering reveal something fundamental about the human condition? And how contestable and culturally specific are the medical, psychological, religious, ethical, therapeutic, sociostructural, economic, and political categories through which suffering is acknowledged and administered today? Is "suffering" a porous universal, whose persistence as a cultural term reveals how conceptually discrete injuries, wounds, and