

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Research at Birmingham

Rowan Williams and Hans-Georg Gadamer contra Jürgen Habermas: rethinking the problem of religion for liberals as a problem of dialogue

Cruickshank, Justin

DOI:

[10.1108/S0278-120420160000035006](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0278-120420160000035006)

License:

None: All rights reserved

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Cruickshank, J 2016, 'Rowan Williams and Hans-Georg Gadamer contra Jürgen Habermas: rethinking the problem of religion for liberals as a problem of dialogue', *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, vol. 35, pp. 171-191. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0278-120420160000035006>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Final Version of Record published as:

Justin Cruickshank, (2016), Rowan Williams and Hans-Georg Gadamer Contra Jürgen Habermas: Rethinking the Problem of Religion for Liberals as a Problem of Dialogue, in Harry F. Dahms, Lybeck Eric R. (ed.) *Reconstructing Social Theory, History and Practice (Current Perspectives in Social Theory, Volume 35)* Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.171 - 191

Available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S0278-120420160000035006>

10.1108/S0278-120420160000035006

Checked 25/1/2017

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Download date: 01. Feb. 2019

Rowan Williams and Hans-Georg Gadamer *contra* Jürgen Habermas: Rethinking the Problem of Religion for Liberals as a Problem of Dialogue

Structured Abstract

Purpose

In this article I argue that the liberal problem of religion, which defines religion in terms of dogmatism or opaque justifications based on 'revealed truth', needs to be rethought as part of a broader problem of dialogue, which does not define religion as uniquely problematic.

Design / Methodology / Approach

Habermas argues for religious positions to be translated into 'generally accessible language' to incorporate religious citizens into democratic dialogue and resist the domination of instrumental rationality by enhancing 'solidarity'. I contrast this with Rowan Williams' and Gadamer's work.

Findings

Williams conceptualises religion in terms of recognising the finitude of our being, rather than dogmatism or opacity. This recognition, he argues, allows people to transcend the 'imaginative bereavement' of seeing others as means. Using Williams, I argue that Habermas misdefines religion, and reinforces the domination of instrumental rationality by treating religion as a means. I then use Gadamer to argue that the points Williams makes about religion can apply to secular positions too by recognising them as traditions subject to finitude.

Originality / Value

This is original because it argues that the liberal problem of religion misdefines both religion and secular positions, by not recognising that both are traditions defined by finitude. To reach, dialogically, a 'fusion of horizons' where religious and secular people are understood non-instrumentally in their own terms of reference, will take time and not trade on immediately manifest – 'generally accessible' - meanings.

Key words:

Dialogue, finitude, Gadamer, Habermas, Williams

Introduction

For Habermas, the potential problem of religion for liberals is threefold. First, religious citizens may have a dogmatic commitment to normative ends, taken to be absolutely true and in need of imposition. Second, even if a religious commitment was held in a non-dogmatic way, it could not be justified to secular citizens because its justification would be opaque, given that it appealed to subjective certitude about revealed truth. Third, one response to these problems is to confine religion to the private sphere. However, this could entail conflict stemming from religious citizens feeling harmed by marginalisation. Habermas (2006(a)) holds that despite expectations that religion would diminish in western liberal democracies, it has continued to exist and has had some resurgence, meaning that such societies are now 'postsecular', which makes the problem of religion more pressing. For Habermas (2003, 2006(a), 2006(b), 2008, 2010, 2011), the last two of these problems can be solved by translating religious arguments into 'generally accessible language' for the formal public sphere, where legislation will be influenced, and allowing untranslated religious arguments in the informal public sphere. This would reduce the potential for conflict stemming from marginalisation, and allow religion to enhance solidarity, with people valuing other people's well-being over the pursuit of self-interest, due to the transmission of 'desirable motives' concerning socio-political reformism. Religion has the potential, for Habermas, reduce the domination of instrumental rationality.

Williams (1988, 2012), an academic theologian who was the former head of the Anglican Church, challenges this way of framing the problem. Williams is influenced by Gillian Rose's philosophical engagement with Hegel (see Williams, 1995, 2007, 2012; and Fraser, 2008). One consequence of this is that Williams is concerned not with absolutist claims about *truth*, but with the recognition of our *finitude*. For Williams, religious arguments are not opaque, because instead of turning on subjective certitude about revealed truth, they can turn on recognition of our finitude. Williams argues we can

be aware of our limits and respond to these by thinking of a perspective other than our own valuing us and others (Williams, 2007, 2012; Goddard, 2013). Such an approach can overcome the '*imaginative bereavement*' caused by the domination of instrumental rationality, which makes people see others as means to exploit, or as potential threats. Untranslated religious arguments, based on the recognition of finitude, cannot be confined to the private sphere and must influence legislation, Williams argues, to reduce the domination of instrumental rationality.

Williams is used here to argue that Habermas's failure to recognise the finitude of being results in his position reinforcing the domination of instrumental rationality. This is because understanding religious citizens is not possible on Habermas's account and instead religion is used as a means. The problem with Williams' position though is that he cannot say how secular citizens could meaningfully engage with religious citizens, because the former would be defined by the imaginative bereavement. Gadamer (1981, 1998, 1999, 2008, 2013) is then drawn upon, to argue that secular citizens can also recognise the finitude of being, by recognising that we are constituted by socio-linguistically contingent *traditions* that define our 'horizons'. Recognition that our being is defined by contingent horizons furnished by a tradition can motivate dialogic engagement with others to arrive at a 'fusion of horizons', or shared understanding of each other's traditions (which is not synonymous with a consensus). By contrast, failure to recognise the finitude of our being entails the absolutisation of traditions, which precludes understanding the meanings that define and motivate others. Given these points, it is argued that it is more useful to rethink the liberal problem of religion as a problem of dialogue, in the sense that the issue is not that of religion presenting unique problems, given an opaque (or dogmatic) claim to truth. Rather, the issue to address is that of all citizens recognising their finitude, with this motivating meaningful dialogue that can resist the domination of instrumental rationality, by valuing and understanding others, rather than reducing them to means. Lawrence (2002, p. 184) notes, following Gadamer, that '[t]he chief issue for

theology today is whether theologians can listen openly and critically to their traditions'. Williams (2012) is important in showing how a major contemporary theologian recognises the issue as one of finitude, in contrast to religion being defined in terms of opacity and dogmatism. Gadamer is needed though to show how recognition of finitude has to be rooted in the recognition that all meanings and identities – both religious and secular - are located in socio-linguistically contingent traditions.

In an earlier critical exchange between Habermas and Gadamer, Habermas held that it is possible to transcend our location in traditions to assume an objective perspective. In the course of this, Habermas held that a psychoanalyst is in an epistemic hierarchy with the patient. Gadamer rejected Habermas's case, and held that psychoanalysis only works if the patient redefines their being using the analyst's tradition (1981, p. 79).¹ Now the issue is that of arguing that both religion and secularism are traditions and recognition of this is needed to motivate a dialogic fusion of horizons. This will facilitate understanding and help reduce the domination of instrumental rationality by treating people as ends to be valued and not means to be exploited.

Habermas and Religion

Habermas argues that the steering media of 'markets and the power of bureaucracy are expelling social solidarity (that is, a coordination of action based on values, norms, and a vocabulary intended to promote mutual understanding) from more and more spheres of life' (Habermas, 2006(b), pp. 45-46). This 'uncontrolled modernisation' corrodes the solidarity democracy needs and replaces it with 'isolated, self-interested monads who use their individual liberties exclusively against each other like weapons' (Habermas, 2008, p. 107). In North America and Europe this can entail Christian fundamentalism, with believers feeling under pressure from the corrosion of norms by an instrumental secularism seeking security through a literal reading of the bible. As 'uncontrolled

¹ See Gadamer, 1981, 1985, 2004, and Habermas, 1977, 1985, 1988.

modernisation' operates on a global scale though it can be the cause of terrorism too. The 'pain suffered through the disintegration of traditional forms of life' can produce 'speechless violence' against the west and the 'mute violence of terrorists and missiles' (Habermas, 2003, pp. 102-103). Here fundamentalist violence is seen by Habermas as 'exclusively modern phenomenon' caused by a 'time-lag' between 'culture and society', with modern means used to defend a traditional way of life felt to be under threat (Habermas, 2003, p. 102).

Habermas argues that in order to avoid conflict and be integrated into society, religious citizens need to: accept the existence of other religions; adapt to the 'authority of the sciences which hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge' (2003, p. 104); and accept the legitimacy of a secular state grounded in 'profane morality' (2003, p. 104; see also 2008, pp. 111-112). The 'burden' is not asymmetric because secular citizens need to realise that they live in a postsecular society. Habermas also argues that religion can be a 'pre-political source of motivation' that can 'nurture solidarity and normative awareness' (Habermas, 2008, p. 111; see also 2006(b), p. 46), by contributing 'to the reproduction of desirable motives and attitudes' (2008, p. 111). Religion can motivate people to engage in politics to reduce suffering and it can sensitize secular citizens to the suffering of others (Habermas, 2008, p. 111; 2008, pp. 266-267). Given this, religion can help resist the domination of instrumental rationality, which is harmful to all because it replaces solidarity with 'self-interested monads' (Habermas, 2008, p. 107), using each other as means. Habermas also holds that liberal democratic polities can generate their own forms of 'political' (secular) motivation concerning, for instance, campaigns about welfare (2006(b), pp. 31-32).

On the issue of religious citizens entering public dialogue, two key liberal works on the problem of religion that Habermas (2006(a), 2011) engages with are those of Audi and Wolterstorff (1997), and Rawls (1997). Audi and Wolterstorff (1997) argue that religion needs to be confined to the private

sphere, with religious citizens not only using secular arguments in the public sphere, but being motivated by secular reasons too, because otherwise the arguments put forward would be disingenuous. Having religiously motivated arguments in the public sphere was deemed illegitimate because they were taken to be intrinsically sectarian and illiberal. Habermas (2006(a)) argues that this prescription imposes too much of a psychological burden on religious citizens. Furthermore, main issue is the ability of secular citizens to understand the arguments of religious citizens via generally accessible language, irrespective of all the motives behind them (2006(a), p. 7).

Rawls (1997) advocated the use of 'public reason', which means that citizens should be able to justify their commitments in a language that is non-sectarian and meaningful to all. He allows a proviso here, which is that non-public reasons for issues of public concern may be initially advanced, but in the expectation that public reasons follow in due course. So, a religious citizen could not, for Rawls, offer a religious argument as a public reason because the justification for a law or policy that affected all would only be accepted by a minority. Private reason, concerning matters of faith, should not influence legislation. For Habermas this prescription is too restrictive and risks marginalising religious citizens. He argues that religious citizens should:

be allowed to express and justify their convictions in a religious language if they cannot find secular 'translations' for them. This need by no means estrange 'mono-glot' citizens from the political process [... because] they can, trusting that their fellow citizens will cooperate for accomplishing a translation, grasp themselves as participants in the legislative process, although only secular reasons count therein (2006(a), p. 10).

With Habermas's 'institutional translation proviso', religious citizens should be allowed to give untranslated religious arguments in the informal public sphere. He argues that:

The permissibility of non-translated religious utterances in the [informal] public sphere can be normatively justified not only in view of the fact that we must not *expect* Rawls's proviso to apply to those of the faithful who cannot abstain from the political use of 'private' reasons without endangering their religious mode of life. For functional reasons, we should not over-hastily reduce the polyphonic complexity of public voices (2006(a), p. 10. Emphasis in original).

Allowing untranslated arguments in the informal public sphere will avoid marginalisation and also allow for the reproduction of 'desirable motives', which can undermine the domination of instrumental rationality by enhancing solidarity. When it comes to the formal public sphere though, the legislative process can only be influenced by secular / generally accessible language. Therefore religious citizens will either need to find secular / generally accessible language for their religious arguments, that is, they will need to auto-translate or, if they cannot do this, because they are mono-glot, they will need to rely on secular citizens to perform the translation for them. In the latter case, they will not be marginalised and can still regard themselves as actively involved in the legislative process, because their position for or against a policy or law, will have been articulated, albeit via translation by others.

Habermas refers to his position as motivated by 'postmetaphysical reason'. This eschews certainty in the form of totalising metaphysical speculation and its antithesis in scientific reductionism.

Postmetaphysical reason is held to avoid the 'rationalist presumption' that philosophy can decide on

what aspects of religion are rational and irrational (2006(a), p. 17). Instead, religion exists externally to the domain for philosophical reflection: '[a]t best, philosophy circles but does not penetrate the opaque core of religious experience' (Habermas, 2006(a), p. 17).

Arfi (2015) argues that Habermas wants to accept that religions have truth content while also holding that because the source of justification is opaque the problem arises that such truth contents 'resist translation' into secular discourse (Arfi, 2015, p. 496). This means that a translation of religious language into secular language is not a translation in the normal sense of the term. Instead, the translation will be 'anasemic'. He argues that:

anasemic translation effectively prohibits the religious discourse from contributing to the deliberative process except by de-signifying its truth contents [...] and then re-signifying them into a new language that is non-religious, which Habermas calls generally accessible language. What effectively happens in this case is that religious contributions lose their identity because, in Habermas's corrective, they open themselves up to a type of interpretation – anasemic translation – which no longer allows the religious contributions to participate in formal politics as religious (2015, p. 499).

Cooke (2014) also criticises Habermas, arguing that the outcome of the dialogical process is not one that is open, but one that presumes that the terms of the dialogue have to be set by secular citizens. To those religious citizens who wish to speak as religious citizens the political process therefore remains closed and possibly illegitimate. Cooke argues for an alternative to Habermas's approach to truth, which is that of truth as 'disclosure'. This is 'understood as a matter of creatively rearticulating the inspirational contents [of religion] in a way that produces subjective experiences in which truth

is manifested anew' (2014, p. 8). Key here would be the ability of 'poetically gifted' writers to 'enable us to feel the normative force of exemplary acts' (2014, pp. 11-12). Arfi argues though that this returns to anasemic translation, because it denies the radical incommensurability of the different languages (2015, p. 501).

Williams and the need for Procedural Secularism

Williams (2012) draws a distinction between 'procedural secularism' which would allow untranslated religious arguments to play a role in the formal public sphere concerning legislation, and 'programmatically secularism' which would require that religious arguments within in the formal public sphere are translated. With programmatic secularism, the world becomes defined by what Williams (2012) terms 'functionalism', that is, the domination of instrumental rationality. Functionalism is 'violent', in the sense that 'contests of power' are the 'basic form of social relation' (2012, p. 15). Consequently, other people become perceived as threats. As Williams puts it, in modern conditions of 'cultural fragmentation and consequent mistrust' we 'constantly feel the need to know more of the other because some directness, some presence or certainty eludes us, and that lack menaces us' (1988, p. 42). To deal with this, some thinkers defined human being in a fashion analogous to a 'code' that needed to be cracked to remove this sense of threat. Drawing on Ricoeur (1970), Williams refers to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as the 'masters of suspicion', with their 'hermeneutics of suspicion' being an expression of this general sense of threat. Marx and Nietzsche explored how power relations shaped subjectivity. Freud turned to the unconscious. Williams (1988) accepts Wittgenstein's (1966) critique of psychoanalysis, which is that while oneiric language is decoded into ordinary language, the reverse is not possible, which shows that a translation does not actually occur. Instead, the objective is to decode the self to fit a doctrine, with aspects of selfhood that do not fit being ignored. As Williams puts it, for Wittgenstein, Freudianism is 'the flight from

particularity and the endlessness of difference [...] and so obstinately disconnected from finitude' (1988, p. 40).

In societies characterised by functionalism, the condition of imaginative bereavement is ubiquitous (Williams, 2012). Here knowledge exists as a means to find the most effective way to use people, with people being perceived either as of value if they can be exploited as means, or as a threat if their code is uncracked. One consequence of the imaginative bereavement is that, as Williams (1988, p. 42) argues, drawing on Cavell (1979), people convert 'metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack'. What this means is that failure to possess knowledge as a means would be felt as a lack, but this prevents people recognising that our being is not analogous to a code. For Williams (1988, 2012), our being is subject to finitude, making us ultimately 'obscure' to ourselves and others obscure to us. The acceptance of the obscurity of others is not a lack that threatens us. Rather, recognising the finitude of being can encourage us imaginatively to take time to think about perspectives other than our own, beyond the limits that define us. For Williams, the recognition of finitude ultimately entails a turn to religion, and the sense that a transcendent and inaccessible perspective values us and others. He explains this initially by turning to aesthetic experience.

Williams argues that art entails:

a willingness to see things or other persons as the objects of a sensibility other than my own. [...]. Imaginative construction, verbal or visual, works to present an aesthetic object that allows itself to be contemplated from a perspective or perspectives other than those of the artist's own subjectivity. Art makes possible a variety of seeings or readings; it presents something that invites a time of reception or perception, with the consciousness that there is always another possible seeing / reading. Imaginative construction begins in the sensing of the world in this way, a field of possible readings, therefore never reducible to an

instrumental account – related to one agenda, one process of negotiation at a time. Instead, there is an indefinite time opened up for reception and interpretation: the object is located outside the closures of specific conflicts and settlements of interests. The non-secular character of art, in this context, is its affirmation of inaccessible perspectives. It would not be too glib to say that this somehow constituted art as a religious enterprise (2012, pp. 13-14; see also 1988, p. 49).

Turning to religion more directly, he argues that:

I have been given time to learn what to say, with the help of the language of praise; because this is a language in which my finitude and limit are affirmed at the same time as my freedom and value. [...] Religious interiority, then, means learning the patterns of behavior that reinforce the awareness of my finite and provisional status, my being in time. It is neither a flight from relation nor the quest for an impossible transparency or immediacy (1988, pp. 50-51).

For Williams (2012), we need to move from programmatic to procedural secularism. In place of functionalist *negotiation*, the formal public sphere needs *dialogue*, based on the recognition of finitude, with this transcending the condition of imaginative bereavement, to raise ‘foundational’ questions about the values politics is based on. This would mean recognising that as there was a transcendent perspective that valued all people as ends in themselves, the flourishing of one depended on the flourishing of all, and that confining politics to the means to regulate self-interest would be detrimental to us (Williams, 2012).

Whereas Habermas sees fundamentalism as a reaction to 'uncontrolled modernisation' undermining religion, Williams regards fundamentalism as a modern approach to religion. Williams argues that:

Secularism as I have been defining it – a functional, instrumentalist perspective, suspicious and uncomfortable about inaccessible dimensions – is the hidden mainspring of certain kinds of religiousness. When religious commitment is seen first as the acceptance of propositions which determine acceptable behaviour – the kind of religiousness we tend now to call fundamentalist – something has happened to religious identity. It has ceased to give priority to the sense that God's seeing of the world and the self is very strictly incommensurable with any human perspective, and is in danger of evacuating religious language of the pressure to take time to learn its meaning. [...] All the major historic faiths, even Islam, which is closest to the propositional model at first sight, assume in their classical forms an interaction between self-imagining and self-interpreting, through prayer and action, and the formal language of belief, that language works not simply to describe an external reality, but to modify over time the way self and world are sensed (2012, pp. 15-16).

Williams (2012; see also Goddard, 2013) also criticises institutional religion, arguing that it has often been characterised by internal politics treating normative issues as a means, for one group to gain ascendancy over another. Drawing on Shanks (2001), Williams (2012, pp. 20-21) refers to this as institutional religion's failure to be 'religious enough' and think beyond functionalism. Williams (1988) also accepts that religious citizens may fail to be aware of their finitude, and see their being in terms of a religious code defined by normative commitments with immediacy of meaning, requiring no taking of time to try and think beyond the limits that define us.

Criticising Habermas's Programmatic Secularism and Williams' Procedural Secularism

Habermas's solution to the liberal problem of religion and his solution to the problem of what Williams' (2012) calls functionalism, argues for programmatic secularism, and consequently Habermas's arguments would reinforce the imaginative bereavement. Habermas argues, as we saw, that in uncontrolled modernity, people weaponise their liberties (2008, p. 107). That is, people perceive others as threats and engage with them in what Williams (2012) would call violent relations. In this context, finitude is not recognised, and not knowing others' motives would be felt as an epistemic-strategic lack, because one would not have the knowledge-means to advance ones' interests in negotiation as effectively as one may wish. Religion thus comes to be perceived as a unique problem for public life because religious citizens are seen to be defined by an opaque code and a propensity for conflict stemming from dogmatism or marginalisation. Habermas (2003, 2008) responds to this with: his stipulations that religious citizens need to accept religious pluralism, the authority of science in secular knowledge, and the legitimacy of the secular state; and the argument for decoding through translation, with inclusion in dialogue being a means to avoid conflict stemming from marginalisation. It may be objected that Habermas does value religion, as seen by his comments about desirable motives. However, the key issue is that at no point does Habermas hold that religious citizens can be understood in themselves and instead the argument turns on how religion may be used as a means. His approach to defining the problem and its solution is ultimately instrumental.

Here we can consider how religious citizens may engage with Habermas's programmatic secularist solution to the liberal problem of religion, as he defines it, starting with the use of untranslated arguments in the informal public. When it comes to religious citizens using untranslated arguments in the informal public sphere, the problem arises that if we accepted Habermas's conception of

religion then, as such arguments would be opaque, such citizens could not meaningfully engage with other citizens. There would be no public dialogue and such citizens may feel marginalised and subject to a *de facto* restriction to the private sphere. By contrast, turning to Williams, we can say that those religious citizens who were aware of their finitude would want procedural secularism. However, it is possible, as Williams (1988) accepts, that religious citizens may not be aware of their finitude. On this, Williams' (1988) discussion of the confessional is of use. Williams argues that the person who seeks recognition through confession becomes the 'virtuoso of confession', with the confession being a 'spectacle' and not an 'invitation' to take time to understand the finitude of oneself and others through dialogue that changes how we see and sense ourselves and others (Williams, 1988, pp. 49-50). Williams' point here is that the confessing self, is actually a constructed self, because as there is no inner code to confess, the confessing subject actually constructs their self to fit the terms of reference of the audience.

The religious citizen who was unaware of their finitude may see their self as defined in terms of a commitment to a set of discrete norms, which were taken to be immediately knowable. Such norms could be communicated to secular citizens by saying, for example, that murder was wrong because God defined it as a sin. If asked why the appeal to God justified the normative commitment, the rejoinder may be that such a commitment stemmed from their faith and, if pressed, the religious citizen may then just say they have faith that God exists because they have faith that God exists. Similarly, existing forms of inequality may be described as wrong because greed is wrong and suffering is to be alleviated, with this stemming from faith which has a circular justification. This would actually be similar to secular citizens accepting normative positions by holding, for example, that poverty is judged negatively and, when asked why, appealing to a general normative position about human suffering being bad because it is, or fairness being good because it is. There may be circularity where the regression of justifying one claim by appeal to another ends with an abstract

appeal to faith, but this is no more opaque than the secular citizen making an abstract appeal to harm being bad in itself or fairness being good in itself. A reference to God is meaningful to secular citizens because they can meaningfully argue against a belief in God. Similarly, against the charge of sectarianism, the religious citizen in this situation would be no more sectarian than a secular citizen appealing to a normative position, providing the benefit was meant to be for all, with, for example, murder or poverty being deemed wrong. So, the religious citizen using untranslated religious arguments would be the akin to the confessing subject, who would not actually be rendering public a private code that was hitherto cracked to them but opaque and uncracked to others, but rather constructing a public self, from terms of reference influenced by functionalism's demand for immediacy and transparency. Although Williams does not use this terminology, we may say in such circumstances that norms become reified, with a commitment to putatively self-explanatory norms lacking any imaginative reach to think beyond such 'things', because possession of such self-evident things helps remove a sense of lack.

The problem here is that even if such religious citizens entered (putative) dialogue with secular citizens with 'political' motivation to enact reformist values, rather than self-interested citizens, the terms of their interaction could not ultimately transcend the imaginative bereavement. Norms for reform may be discussed, and that would be positive, but the wider problem would be that the prevailing functionalist approach to meaning persisted. This would, as a consequence, undermine the possibility of there being genuine dialogue, motivated by the recognition of finitude, that took time imaginatively to try and think beyond the limits that currently define us. That is, reification would ultimately preclude others thinking beyond the limits of norms, to undecodeable people remaining obscure to us and being valuable as ends in themselves.

Now we can consider those religious citizens who, unaware of their finitude, sought to engage in auto-translation, to enter (putative) dialogue in the formal public sphere. This would entail moving from one value commitment which would be understandable by all (for the reasons given above), but which was deemed illegitimate in the political process, because it was labelled religious, to another one which was acceptable to all, because it was labelled secular. The interaction here could not be based on dialogic understanding because there would be no attempt to understand the original religious position, and instead it would be instrumental. A secular proxy would be chosen as a means to help advance a position, with regard to a law or policy. As the purpose of the secular argument was instrumental, it would be instrumentally rational to choose the most effective argumentative-proxy means to help secure the outcome desired. In other words, this would be a process of functionalist negotiation not dialogic understanding.

Ironically, even though the untranslated religious argument may be communicated to secular citizens, if it was characterised by the imaginative bereavement, it would not be, and therefore the sense of threat from what may be perceived as an undecoded other remains. The process of inclusion to overcome a sense of lack would ultimately fail. Now, Habermas (2006(a)), in rejecting the argument Audi and Wolterstorff (1997), could be seen to be holding that he knew the code that defined religious citizens was benign. In this case, the assumption would have to be that the opaque code that defined religious citizens was benign, because although one lacked the epistemic-semantic means to decode it, one could infer that citizens engaging in (putative) dialogue had accepted the three stipulations Habermas made (2003, 2008), noted above, for religious citizens to accept. However, the problem here may not be dogmatism stemming from opaque commitments, but instrumentalism, with the real strategizing behind the instrumental selection of proxies, by religious citizens unaware of their finitude, remaining unknown. Liberties may be instrumentalised, even if not weaponised.

For mono-glot citizens to participate in the formal public sphere, secular citizens are required to undertake translation for them (Habermas, 2006(a)). Obviously given Habermas's definition of the problem, such a solution is untenable, for a secular citizen would be unable to crack the opaque code. Given this, the secular citizen would have to ask the religious citizen to choose secular proxies for their putatively opaque position, which would return us to the problems discussed above and make the role of the secular citizen-translator redundant. If the secular citizen did attempt this though, the outcome would be akin to Wittgenstein's critique of Freud, on oneiric language, that Williams (1988) discussed, and Arfi's (2015) critique of anasemic translation. This is because the secular approximation could not be translated back into religious-opaque language, given that it imposed an approximated meaning on what was taken to be an ultimately opaque and thus unknowable language. In such circumstances the mono-glot citizen characterised by, *ex hypothesi*, opaque language, may well withdraw from the public sphere, because they would not be understood by secular citizens. At best the translation offered may approximate to a position they supported, albeit for different reasons, and at worst, the approximation developed may be used as a means by the secular translator to support a position they were committed to advancing.

In addition to translation to include religious citizens in public dialogue, Habermas also talks of solidarity being increased by religion being able to foster the development of desirable motives. Two points can be made in relation to this. First, if religion is seen in terms of opacity then this may not be possible, for the real motives / code of religious citizens would not be knowable. If one switched though to the perception of religious people being altruistically motivated to reduce the suffering of others, then the problem would arise that they, along with secular-reformist citizens, may be seen as irrelevant or operating on 'unrealistic' motives by those citizens influenced more heavily by functionalism. After all, secular reformist citizens have failed to undermine the domination of

instrumental rationality, and their actions are, *ex hypothesi*, potentially more 'understandable' than those of religious citizens. Second, the domination of instrumental rationality does not create a normative void, but a situation where norms – like liberties - can be used as means. Bernstein (2005) discusses this using the term 'abuse of evil'. His case is that in conditions where instrumental rationality is dominant, religion can be mobilised as an emotive and thus efficient means by politicians, to win support. He cites the example of President Bush using Christianity and talking of a 'crusade' and 'War on evil', with any dissent being labelled as evil or naïve and ignorant. Religion was used as a means to foster support for the war in Afghanistan and to shut down dissent with a simplistic binary opposition between good and evil. The concept of evil was abused by being treated as a means to foreclose critical thinking and manipulate public opinion. Williams (2012, p. 11) is alert to this too, arguing that under functionalism '[e]vil becomes a trivially emotive way of referring to what we hate or disapprove of (in the style beloved of American presidents)'. A reified norm-thing, separated from the need imaginatively to think beyond our defining perspectives, was used effectively as a means in the condition of imaginative bereavement. Consequently, there is a danger in functionalist – programmatically secular societies, of any potential religion has to foster solidarity being undermined by politicians using it as a divisive means. Habermas's hope that religion could foster desirable motives while not being understood indicates that he saw religion to be used, ironically, as a means to challenge the domination of instrumental rationality but, such a reduction and such a failure to recognise finitude, results in norms being easily manipulated for they can have little traction.

While Williams was correct to shift the terms of the debate about religion away from defining religion in terms of opacity and the risk of conflict stemming from marginalisation and dogmatism, and to the recognition of finitude, his argument for procedural secularism entails problems. He cannot ultimately shift the debate from Habermas's definition of the liberal problem of religion, to

the problem of dialogue, because he cannot say how secular citizens can engage in meaningful dialogue with religious citizens. This is because Williams's presents secularism as a position that is evacuated of substantive meaning, with the imaginative bereavement then defining the way secular citizens think. The domination of self-interested means fills the void left by the loss of substantive meaning, that occurred with the turn away from religion. As regards art, Williams's (1988, 2012) approach is not that this can inspire the recognition of finitude in equal measure, for religious and secular citizens, but that it ultimately assists people who are already religious in thinking more of the finitude of being. We can now turn to Gadamer to see how meaningful dialogue between religious and secular citizens and between secular citizens is possible.

Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons

The Enlightenment juxtaposed individual reason to authority and prejudice, holding that whereas the former was free, the latter limited and distorted thought. Against this, Gadamer (2013) argues that there is no ahistorical and asocial self that transcends its contingent location. To understand how we achieve thought, we need to understand our being correctly, and this means turning to tradition. Traditions need authority, and this authority means that the 'prejudices' furnished by tradition have significant traction. These prejudices define our limits – or horizons – and thus define our being. Whereas the Enlightenment had a 'prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 283), we need to 'rehabilitate' the notion of prejudice to 'do justice' to our 'finite, historical mode of being' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 289). To understand our being we need to recognise that it is characterised by a condition of finitude because it is delimited and thus defined by its location within a tradition and the prejudices that stem from that.

This means recognising that our '[u]nderstanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated (Gadamer, 2013, p. 302). As Dostal (1990, p. 65, emphasis in original) notes, 'Gadamer avoids the words *creativity* and *creative* because they exaggerate the power and authority of the interpreting subject'. Thus Gadamer argues that:

a genuine conversation is never one we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation. [...] No one knows in advance what will come out of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. [...] All of this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that it allows something to emerge which henceforth exists (2013, p. 401).

To the claim that this entails 'Romantic' irrationalism, Gadamer argues that '[e]ven the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and [...] preservation is an act of reason' (2013, p. 293). In other words, accepting the authority of tradition does not entail a passive conception of agency, because people need actively to rework a tradition to keep it alive. This, in turn, means recognising that the tradition and its prejudices define us and our horizons, which means recognising our finitude. This is because recognising our finitude will prevent us from absolutizing and universalising our prejudices, and will motivate us to work with others to arrive, through dialogue, at a 'fusion of horizons'. An awareness of the contingent limits that define us can motivate us to change those limits by interacting dialogically with others defined by different limits. In talking of a fusion of horizons, Gadamer (2013) is not saying that a consensus is the necessary outcome of a dialogue, with two traditions merging into one new one, but rather, a fusion of

horizons is the ability to be aware of other people's defining limits, by changing, over time, one's own prejudices and thus changing one's being. A fusion of horizons can entail disagreement, but disagreement based on understanding other prejudices that were alien to one before the dialogue, with that understanding stemming from the recognition that one's own position is delimited by prejudices and not absolute or universal (Di Cesare, 2007).

As Lawrence (2002, pp. 188-189) argues, there is a strong affinity here between Williams and Gadamer, because both argue that human being is to be understood in terms of finitude. Moreover, Gadamer (1998, 2013), like Williams, holds that art can make us aware of our finitude. Gadamer (1998) agrees with Benjamin (2008) that art has an 'aura'. Benjamin argued that this was undermined in the 'age of mechanical reproduction', where all images were commodified. Gadamer recognises a similar problem, arguing that the 'instantly available channels of cultural communication' that appear with the mass media induce a passivity that runs against the recognition of art's aura or our finitude (1998, p. 51). However, for Gadamer, we still retain the ability to recognise the power of art. Art had 'ontological plenitude' and thus signals an 'increase in being' when recognised, for it opens up a multiplicity of meanings, and forces us to take time (Gadamer, 1998, pp. 34-35). As Gadamer puts it: '[w]hen we dwell upon the work there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us' (1998, p. 45). This 'shakes us' because we cannot fit it into pre-existing schemes and become abundantly aware of our finitude (1998, p. 37). Religious art, even for secular citizens, is held by Gadamer to be 'exemplary' because it shows that a picture 'is not a copy of a copied being, but is in ontological communion with what is copied' (2013, p. 143). Religious art, for Gadamer, is exemplary in making us realise our current horizons are not definitive of being.

Whereas religious art can make us aware of ontological plenitude, the post-Enlightenment scientific tradition is *dogmatic*, because it refuses to be seen as a tradition which is characterised by finitude. It is unaware that it has prejudices which define its horizons. Gadamer argues that:

The shadows thrown by the scientific approach to the world truly reach beyond all limits. Insofar as science views everything that can be experienced as its possible object, it must from that point of view consign everything 'beyond' to the subjective side. Precisely in doing so it must make these subjective modes of comportment once again into objects (1999, p. 121).

He continues thus:

the modern scientific enlightenment presents only a partial view of the world, one that occurs only to someone with a universal faith in science and that is therefore ideologically suspect. Evidence of this is that virtually everything opposed to such one-sidedness is driven out, as if my misdirected religious energy (1999, p. 123).

With this approach, religion is defined as an 'illusion' and the task then becomes that of explaining why people are caused to believe in illusions (Gadamer, 1999, p. 123). Another way of putting this is to say that the tradition bequeathed by the Enlightenment is unaware of its own finitude and, seeing no horizons, tries to decode all aspects of being to fit its prejudices which are absolutized.

Nonetheless, Gadamer does not think that the post-Enlightenment tradition has removed all recognition of finitude. In addition to the potential for art to make secular citizens recognise the finitude of being, Gadamer (1996) argues that successful medicine is based on this recognition. Gadamer argues that the medic does not remove illness and create health. Rather, the medic's 'intervention cannot be properly understood simply as making or effecting something, but must rather be principally be seen as a case of supporting those factors that help to sustain equilibrium' (Gadamer, 1996, p. 37). The 'art of healing' is recognising that health occurs when an equilibrium is restored, and knowing when to withdraw. This means that medical '[p]ractice has a relationship to a person's "being" . [...] Science is essentially incomplete; whereas practice demands instant decisions' (1994, p. 4). This requires phronesis and not just techne. Techne means applied, technical knowledge, and this type of knowledge is necessary but insufficient because the medic needs to know not just how to intervene to effect a bodily component, but also knowing when to withdraw to allow equilibrium to occur. For this phronesis is needed, which is defined as:

not only the clever, skilful discovery of means for meeting specific tasks [...] but also as the sense for setting goals themselves and taking responsibility for them. The concept of phronesis therefore acquires, and this is what is important, a substantive determination (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 47-48).

Phronesis requires wisdom and a sense of the 'broader picture', and the practice of phronesis requires the medic to take time to understand the patient. So 'dialogue between the doctor and patient must [...] be seen as part of the treatment itself' (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 128).

Gadamer therefore correctly defines and solves the problem of dialogue. Meaningful dialogic communication can resist the domination of instrumental rationality, by basing interaction on a non-instrumental basis, with people aware of the finitude of being seeking a fusion of horizons. The absolutisation of a tradition, whether it is religious or the post-Enlightenment tradition, which leads to a failure to understand others, would be eschewed, in favour of taking a rational approach to tradition, by redefining its horizons through an increased awareness and understanding of others. Whether the issue is dialogue between secular citizens, religious citizens or secular and religious citizens, it would be the recognition of finitude that motivated understanding and removed the potential for conflict stemming from the absolutisation of any tradition, whether it is secular or religious.

Understanding the solution to the problem of dialogue being that of the fusion of horizons means reframing the problem away from the issue of translation, which was raised by the liberal problem of religion. The critiques of Habermas by Arfi (2015) and Cooke (2014), and Williams' argument too, for untranslated religious arguments, thus are in error, in their framing of the issue to tackle. With translation there can either be symmetry or asymmetry. Arfi argued that anasemic translation would be asymmetric with secular language being privileged over religious language, resulting in the latter being stripped of its original meaning. Cooke argued for symmetry, but this would end up pushing the problem back a stage, with religious language translated into secular-poetic language, which may then need to be translated into non-poetic language. This would then encounter an asymmetry between the poetic and non-poetic language, with the privileged former losing at least some of its meaning when translated into the latter. And Williams argued for an asymmetry that privileged untranslated religious language because it transcended the imaginative bereavement, without being able to say how secular citizens could then translate this into their language, given that their language and thinking were defined by the imaginative bereavement. Against these approaches,

there can be no pure symmetry with the fusion of horizons, and seeking asymmetry by privileging one language would stem from absolutising one's prejudices, so the outcome of successful dialogue is shared understanding, with changed prejudices. Horizons change but that does not entail transparency of meaning between traditions or epistemic-semantic hierarchies. To recognise the finitude of being means seeking a fusion of horizons in place of translation.

Bibliography

Arfi, B. (2015). Habermas and the aporia of translating religion in Democracy. *European Journal of Social Theory* 18 (4), 489-506. Doi: 10.1177/1368431014562703

Audi, R. and Wolterstorff, N. (1997). *Religion in the public sphere*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Benjamin, W. (2008). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. London: Penguin.

Bernstein, R.J. (2005). *The abuse of evil: The corruption of politics and religion since 9/11*. Cambridge: Polity.

Cavell, S. (1979). *The claim of reason: Wittgenstein, skepticism, morality, and tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cooke, M. (2014). The limits of learning: Habermas' social theory and religion. *European Journal of Philosophy*, published online early, 29 July 2014. DOI: 10.1111/ejop.12099.

Di Cesare, D. (2007). *Gadamer: A philosophical portrait*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Dostal, R.J. (1990). Philosophical Discourse And The Ethics Of Hermeneutics. In K. Wright (Ed), *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's work* (pp. 63-88). Albany (NY): State University of New York Press.

Fraser, G. 2008. Foreward. In A. Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's reception of the gift of faith* (pp. vii-xii). London: SCM Press.

- Gadamer, H-G. (1981). *Reason in the age of science*. London: MIT Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1985). The Historicity of Understanding. In F. R. Dallmayr and T. A. McCartney (Eds), *Understanding and social enquiry* (pp. 256-292). London: University of Notre Dame.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1996). *The enigma of health*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1998). *The relevance of the beautiful and other essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1999). *Hermeneutics, religion and ethics*. London: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2008). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. London: University of California Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2013). *Truth and method*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Goddard, A. (2013). *Rowan Williams: His legacy*. Oxford: Lion Books.
- Habermas, J. (1977). A review of Gadamer's 'Truth and Method'. In F. R. Dallmayr and T. A. McCartney (Eds), *Understanding and social enquiry* (pp. 335-363). London: University of Notre Dame.
- Habermas, J. (1985). On hermeneutic's claim to universality. In K. Mueller-Vollmer (Ed), *The hermeneutics reader* (pp. 293-319). New York: Continuum.
- Habermas, J. (1988). *On the logic of the social sciences*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (2003). *The future of humanity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (2006(a)). Religion in the public sphere. *European journal of philosophy* 14 (1), 1-25.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x
- Habermas, J. (2006(b)). Pre-Political foundations of the democratic constitutional state? In J. Habermas and J. Ratziner, *The dialectics of secularization: On reason and religion* (pp. 19-52). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

- Habermas, J. (2008). *Between naturalism and religion*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (2010). An awareness of what is missing. In N. Brieskorn, J. Habermas, M. Reder, F. Ricken, J. Schmidt, *An awareness of what is missing: Faith and reason in a post-secular age* (pp. 15-23). Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (2011). 'The Political': The rational meaning of a questionable inheritance of political theology. In J. Butler, J. Habermas, C. Taylor and West, C., *The power of religion in the public sphere* (pp. 15-33). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lawrence, F. (2002). Gadamer, the hermeneutic revolution, and theology. In R. J. Dostal (Ed), *The Cambridge companion to Gadamer* (pp. 167-200). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, L. (1997). The idea of public reason revisited. *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64: 765-807.
- Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. London: Yale University Press.
- Shanks, A. (2001). *What is truth? Towards a theological poetics*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, R. (1988). The suspicion of suspicion: Wittgenstein and Bonhoeffer. In R.H. Bell (Ed), *The grammar of the heart: Thinking with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein* (pp. 36-53). London: Harper Row.
- Williams, R. (1995). Between politics and metaphysics: Reflections in the wake of Gillian Rose. *Modern Theology* 11 (1), 3-22. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0025.1995.tb00050.x
- Williams, R. (2007). *Wrestling with angels: Conversations in modern theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Williams, R. (2012). *Faith in the public square*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1966). *Lectures and conversations on aesthetics, psychology and religious belief*. Oxford: Blackwell.