Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

10-1-1991

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Recommended Citation

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IN HABERMAS[1]

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This essay discusses the idea of covenant in Habermas' social philosophy. It does so by attempting to shed light on the kind of universality which Habermas claims for communicative reason and by examining the limitations of this universality. The metaphor of "atoning remembrance," as used by Habermas in the "Historians' debate," is also considered. The essay concludes with some observations regarding the relevance of the covenant idea for "public philosophy."

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* Jürgen Habermas offers a fascinating comparison between the binding force of communicative reason and the covenant made by Yahweh and the people of Israel. "Covenant" is not among Habermas' central metaphors; indeed he introduces it here only by way of a reference to another author. Nevertheless, as I will show, it is worthwhile exploring the significance that the covenant idea might have for Habermas' thought. What is implied when Habermas, the foremost defender of the Enlightenment project in the area of social philosophy, emphatically endorses the claim that the concept of "enlightenment" is only conceivable as a "covenant" or "confederation"? And what, if anything, can such a thought contribute to Christian social thought?

Exclusion and Inclusion

The passage in question occurs in Lecture XI of *The Philosophical Discourse.*[2] In one of the early sections of this lecture, entitled "Communicative *versus* Subject-Centered Reason," Habermas considers the kind of postmodern critique of the Enlightenment set forth by Foucault and others. This critique portrays the ideal of reason as inherently oppressive. Reason, the argument goes, can only exclude, and thus marginalise, everything that does not fit its mold. The critics accusingly point to the rationalist's depreciation of nature, the human body, fantasy, desire, and the feelings.[3]

Habermas sets up his defense against this critique by distinguishing between subject-centered reason and communicative reason. The postmoderns, he agrees, rightly criticize the "exclusion model of reason" (p. 306). However, he hastens to add, the exclusion model only applies to "subject-centered

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reason," i.e., reason reduced to the instruments of cognition and purposive action (pp. 305-14); or, put simply, the view of reason propagated by Descartes and his followers. In this sense, indeed, reason is "a product of division and usurpation" (p. 316). With respect to communicative reason, however, Habermas insists that it is based in the integrating powers of human communication, and that therefore the postmodern critique of this kind of reason is far off target. Its area of application thus enlarged, reason would not be divisive but community-building.

The integrating function of reason involves among other things the extension of the criteria of rationality from the cognitive-instrumental dimension to the moral-practical domain; rationality, then, is not just a matter of propositional truth, but also of normative rightness (pp. 314-15).[4] One example of the application of this norm is the distinction between successful and unsuccessful communication which we will meet at various places in this essay.

At this juncture, Habermas faces a new objection. How can communication be rational and still be conditioned by material life processes (p. 321)? Is not the whole idea of communication thoroughly idealistic? Obviously the postmodern critics are now being joined by his old Marxist friends. Has he not exchanged materialism for an idealism of universalistic validity claims (p. 321)? Habermas now needs to show that the "ideal" is not cut off from the "real." Successful interaction, he argues, requires ideal conditions; in particular it requires that there be no significant inequality between participants with respect to power. While engaged in communication one has to presuppose that these conditions have indeed been met: this much is implied by being under the sway of the norm of rationality. However, when viewed by outsiders—or, as he puts it, when viewed from a "third-person perspective" (p. 324)—one becomes aware of the actual limitations. In this respect no process of communication is ever without obstacles, such as asymmetric power relations, conflicts, etc. (pp. 322-24).

The distinction between successful and unsuccessful interaction is operative in yet another way. The objection that the tradition of rational thought, starting with Parmenides, has consistently discriminated between the "few who are in the truth" and "the many who stay behind in the darkness of their blindness" (p. 324) is part and parcel of the criticisms mentioned above. Replying to the accusation that the theory of communicative action remains caught in this elitism, Habermas retorts that it emphatically does *not* separate knowledge and ignorance in the Parmenidian sense of a hierarchy of two different communities. Those who do not live by the light of reason are not set apart in an inferior form of life. Rather, their "irrationality" is understood as "unsuccessful communication" which as such remains linked to "successful communication." Or put differently, Habermas tries to make clear that the

norm of rationality is not divisive. Its application does not result in two opposing forms of life: successful *and unsuccessful* interaction pertain to one "common form of life" (p. 324).

It is within this context that the terms "covenant" (*Bund*) and "confederation" (*Bundesgenossenschaft*) emerge (p. 325). It is especially intriguing that the text is not silent about the biblical moorings of the term "covenant." According to Klaus Heinrich, whom Habermas quotes here, the model of the kind of confederation which is meant here is the covenant of Yahweh with the people of Israel. Just as God's wrath against sin protects the covenant, so communicative reason has its own dialectic of "betrayal and vengeance." The confederation is "a potentially universal confederation against betrayal" (p. 325).

It is not easy to understand what exactly is meant by "betrayal" and "vengeance." Yet even at this early stage of our argument it is becoming clear that the emphasis is on *inclusion*. Those who do not live by the light of reason are not excluded and marginalised, but remain within its bounds. Let it be noted that the very idea of universality is inclusively conceived. The universal as it is meant here does not originate from the abstraction of all particulars. Rather, it results from the integration of the particulars. And there is even more to it than that. In keeping with dialectical thought in general, the inclusion is also meant to extend to those cases where the particular obtains the character of the negative, i.e., of something contradicting the ideal. To get clearer on this we will look at Hegel's account of the dialectic.

Hegel and Dialectical Inclusion

The idea of dialectical inclusion has found its most powerful expression in the thought of Hegel. He is the one who in *The Phenomenology of Mind* emphatically stated that the power of "spirit" does not take the form of "a positive which turns away from the negative"; but that "spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it"; "this dwelling beside," he continued, "is the magic power that converts the negative into being."[5] It is important to see that Habermas no longer believes in Hegelian magic. "Reconciliation" has become in his thought an ideal, rather than a reality. In this respect the distance between their philosophies is considerable. But in one important respect Habermas is still inspired by Hegel's vision: the "dwelling beside" spells out the essence of *solidarity*. Put briefly, Hegel's model of reconciliation forms the basis for understanding Habermas' affirmation of solidarity.

Habermas' main interest concerns one particular theme of the younger Hegel's. In *The Philosophical Discourse*, just after the extensive quotation from Heinrich's book, he notes that the dialectic of betrayal and vengeance has a close analogy in an early fragment from Hegel on crime and punishment (p. 325). In other places one finds similar references to this dialectic.[6] The

manuscript referred to is entitled *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*; it dates from 1798-99, i.e., some 10 years before *The Phenomenology* appeared (1807).

The fundamental assumption of *The Spirit* is that ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) forms a totality. Within its bounds communality is unavoidable. Committing a crime under these conditions means to alienate oneself from the ethical totality. Or put more strongly: it means to violate one's own life. As a consequence, the totality itself turns into an alien, punishing force. The destruction of life turns life into an enemy. Consequently, the criminal suffers because of his alienation.[7] Hegel illustrates the turning of life into an enemy by a reference to Macbeth. Macbeth kills Banquo, who had approached him as a friend; Banquo, instead of vanishing, returns as an haunting spirit. What is true of Macbeth holds for every trespasser: "In his arrogance he has destroyed indeed, but only the friendliness of life; he has perverted life into an enemy" (p. 229).

The dialectic of crime and punishment is itself part of a larger whole. The main subject of Hegel's manuscript is the reconciliation of "fate" in love. Fate is the alien, inimical aspect of reality. The manuscript opens with a chapter on the "spirit of Judaism." In Hegel's account, the Old Testament remains enclosed within the horizon of "fate." Israel is a people of slaves placed under a stern master who rules by command.[8] Rebellion against bondage can only have the fateful result of leading to a further destruction of the friendliness of life. It is at this juncture that Hegel for the first time introduces Macbeth. The fate of the Jewish people, he says, is similar to that of Macbeth, who "clung to alien Beings, and so in their service had to trample and slay everything holy in human nature" (p. 205).

In (neo-)gnostic fashion Hegel then contrasts the New Testament as the Gospel of love to the darkness of the Old Testament. Jesus frees us from fate; in love fate is reconciled (p. 232). The dialectical movement ends with the "reestablishment of the disintegrated totality."[9] "Life can heal its wounds again"; Hegel anticipates here (p. 230) his famous formulation in *The Phenomenology of Mind*: "The wounds of the spirit heal without leaving scars."[10] However, for Hegel a genuine reconciliation lies beyond the New Testament. In Jesus only an abstract reconciliation is attained, one situated in an ideal world: a kingdom *not of this earth*. His "tragedy" was that he could not free himself entirely from the fate of his people (p. 285); it was this fate that killed him.[11]

As indicated earlier, in *The Philosophical Discourse* Habermas repeatedly returns to the dialectic of ethical life. In responding to an interviewer's question, Habermas offers an interesting parallel.[12] Asked what animates his philosophizing, he refers to a "foundational intuition," *viz.*, that community and individuality are not *per se* at odds. This inspiring vision, he goes on to say,

is one of a communality in which the friendliness of life is experienced—
however, leaving room for conflicts. Once again Hegel is mentioned as one
source of such representations of successful interaction.[13]

Indeed, Hegel's significance for our theme is considerable, in at least two
respects. First, in both Hegel and Habermas the emphasis on communality is
part of an attempt to overcome a certain narrowness in the Enlightenment
tradition, especially as represented by Kant. In *The Spirit of Christianity*
Hegel contrasts the Gospel of love both with Mosaic law and with Kant's
ethics (pp. 213-14; 211n). Even though Kant is mentioned only a few times,
it is not an exaggeration to say that throughout this entire manuscript the
"Moses of modern ethics" is present in the immediate background. In fact,
within Hegel's development this essay represents the first clear attempt to
transcend Kant's ethics.[14] In a similar vein, Habermas presents "communica-
tive reason" as the answer to the limitations of the early Enlightenment,
especially the ideal of subject-centered reason which dominated the early
Enlightenment thought during the period, roughly speaking, from Descartes
to Kant.

Let it be understood, though, that neither Hegel nor Habermas wants to
abandon the Enlightenment project. In Hegel's case one could speak of a
radicalization. Kant had taught that for freedom to prevail, human inclina-
tions, emotions, and passions need to be brought under the rule of reason.
Hegel objects, however, that a person whose inclinations are in bondage to
reason is still a slave, though a slave to himself.[15] Freedom requires that the
hegemony of reason be replaced by the self-rule of love. Immediately, one is
aware of the parallel to the way in which Habermas faces the postmodern
critique of reason, *viz.*, by dissociating the rule of reason from all historical
connotations of hegemony, and by stressing instead that the binding force of
reason be understood as issuing only from the basic solidarity of people living
together.[16]

Second, it has become apparent that "the avenging force" is (for the most
part) modelled on Hegel's idea of the causality of fate. Both Hegel and
Habermas assume that ethical reality is, so to speak, responsive to human
action: to those who accept the ethical bond life shows its friendliness; to
those who, for whatever reason, become estranged from this bond or rebel
against it, it turns into an avenging force.

In all of this, though, both Hegel and Habermas remain true to the tenets
of the Enlightenment. Revenge, punishment, and the like, only appear to
come as heteronomous forces. In fact, the criminal punishes himself. Hegel
explains: "the sinner is more than a sin existent" (p. 238), i.e., the crime does
not exhaust the being of the criminal, for he remains part of the ethical
totality. Therefore, just as much as his crime turns against himself, his ethical
being turns against his crime. This then opens the way to a solution: the inner

conflict leading to remorse and to reconciliation. Similarly, as indicated earlier, Habermas places "betrayal" in the light of reconciliation. His aim is to formulate a model of dialectical inclusion in order to face the postmodern accusation of exclusivity.

Habermas, to be sure, is much less confident than Hegel was that reconciliation will *in fact* come about. Here the difference arises to which I alluded earlier. While "communality" may be unavoidable for Habermas, it does not lead automatically to the acceptance of "communal responsibility."[17] It requires people to make a covenant against betrayal.

Covenant and Betrayal

Even after a superficial reading of *The Spirit of Christianity* one notices that its author misunderstands the biblical portrayal of God's covenantal relationship with his people. Hegel simply takes the Old Testament as the embodiment of legalism.[18]

As indicated above, the metaphor of the covenant is introduced in *The Philosophical Discourse* not through Hegel but via a lengthy quotation from Klaus Heinrich.[19] Heinrich is a student of religion with a special interest in the relation of myth to revelation. His interpretation of both is inspired by Paul Tillich.

The first part of the quote introduces the covenant as a symbol. It leads up to an idea which we have already noted, betrayal as self-betrayal:

> Keeping the covenant with God is the symbol of fidelity; breaking this covenant is the model of betrayal. To keep faith with God is to keep faith with life-giving Being itself—in oneself and others. To deny it in any domain of being means breaking the covenant with God and betraying one's own foundation... Thus, betrayal of another is simultaneously betrayal of oneself. (p. 325).

Heinrich then argues that the biblical covenant is universal because in principle it excludes no one. The "prophetic tradition" from which it stems differs radically from Greek philosophy. From Parmenides on, Greek tradition sought the Good Life in an ideal realm, situated above or behind the ambiguities of everyday life. Heinrich presumes that this ideal issues from an ethos of resignation.

> ...and every protest against betrayal is not just protest in one's own name, but in the name of the other at the same time.... The idea that each being is potentially a "covenant partner" in the fight against betrayal, including anyone who betrays himself and me, is the only counterbalance against the stoic resignation already formulated by Parmenides when he made a cut between those who know and the mass of the ignorant (p. 325).

Heinrich's contention is that the European Enlightenment stands in this prophetic tradition. Basically, he argues, it is not after an esoteric knowledge

that is accessible to only an elite; it seeks to enlighten all. The final sentence of the quotation brings the argument to a climax: "The concept of enlightenment familiar to us is unthinkable without the concept of a potentially universal confederation against betrayal."[20]

Although it would be wrong to suggest that Heinrich's name occurs on every other page of Habermas' works, it is nevertheless significant that the attention *Philosophical Discourse* pays to him does have parallels in earlier works. As early as 1964 Habermas published a review of Heinrich's *Versuch über die Schwierigkeit nein zu sagen*. Some years later, in 1967, he included an excursus on Heinrich's ideas in his lengthy discussion of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.[21] In the 2nd edition of *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (1970) the original review was republished (pp. 322-29), to be reissued once more in *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (1981).[22]

There is much in the 1964 review with which we are already more or less familiar, especially the contrast between the Greek ideal of a harmonious totality on the one hand—a cosmos that is freed from the vicissitudes of everyday life—and on the other hand the commitment of the "prophets of Israel" to "a universal confederation" directed at the reconciliation of those who have betrayed the covenant.

In one respect the review is certainly illuminating: it makes us understand somewhat better the meaning of "betrayal" in this connection. "Betrayal" is linked to two forms of alienation affecting in our days the relationship of the individual to society (or to a segment of it). The first form is that of a complete identification of the individual with the collective. The second is that of isolation. Whereas the first leads to destruction of the individual self, the second leads to destruction of the social bond.

Habermas seems to have been attracted by the link here with language and communication. Heinrich argues that both identification and separation leave the individual speechless (*sprachlos*). Speech implies a difference between speaker and hearer, which disappears once complete identification prevails. But in a state of isolation the individual becomes speechless as well. One recognizes here, of course, the argument against the possibility of "private languages." A living language is a social phenomenon. To be human is to speak; to speak is to be related to a wider community. Hence, in both forms of alienation, to bring about healing it is necessary that communication be resumed. In communication dwells the power of reconciliation.[23]

Bit by bit we are getting a better grasp of what is meant by that mysterious word "betrayal." Identification and separation are the two shapes betrayal takes in our days. But one point still remains to be clarified. Who betrays whom? Who are the traitors? The individuals who isolate themselves, or those who disappear into the collective? Or aren't these individuals rather the victims of impersonal social forces?

Both Heinrich and Habermas evade the question of individual guilt. The reason, or so it seems to me, why they remain elusive in the matter of betrayal, is that both regard it as a collective phenomenon rather than as something to be imputed individually. Heinrich is reluctant to contrast covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers as two opposing groups of people. Significantly, the one great representative of the prophetic tradition, the prophet Jonah, is not unambiguously on one side of the line. Rather, he is portrayed as someone who himself betrayed the covenant. (Heinrich even speaks of a triple betrayal: of himself, by trying to escape his calling; of God; and of life, because he wanted to be dead.[24]) Hence Heinrich's preference for the phrase "context of guilt."[25] Habermas, in a parallel text of *The Philosophical Discourse*, states *expressis verbis* that "fault," *Schuld*, should be taken in an intersubjective sense only:

> that is, in the sense of an involuntary product of an entanglement that, how-
> ever things stand with individual accountability, communicative agents
> would have to ascribe to communal responsibility.

He illustrates this with the effects of suicide:

> It is not by chance that suicides set loose a type of shock among those close
> to them, which allows even the most hardhearted to discover something of
> the *unavoidable communality* of such a fate.[26]

It is certainly true that Habermas does not uncritically take his cue from Heinrich. His distinction between religious and philosophical languages is a sharper one. The notion of confederation (*Bundesgenossenschaft*) he characterizes as a "religious motif." This motif, he continues, has been raised to philosophical status in the (read: Habermas') theory of communicative action—as had been the case with pragmatism before.[27] As a consequence, his use of "covenant" and "confederation" is (even) looser than Heinrich's. To him these are helpful models illuminating certain intuitions, yet not requiring a religious commitment on the part of the users. Significantly, the indeterminate word "can" is used to indicate the relation of communicative theory to the Old Testament: this theory, Habermas states, is guided by an intuition that *can* be expressed in the concepts of the Old Testament. Apparently, it could be expressed in other concepts as well, with the help of metaphors borrowed from other religious sources. A case in point is his own use of the idea of an atonement of the past, a metaphor which, via Walter Benjamin, harks back (mainly) to Jewish mysticism.

The Historians' Debate: Solidarity and Distance

In the very first chapter of *The Philosophical Discourse* Habermas dedicates an excursus to Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"[28] at the center of which the idea is found that the past can and must be

reconciled through remembering. At an earlier stage this theme had already received some attention: Habermas' contribution to the volume *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt, 1972) focussed on the enigmatic thesis that "a weak messianic force has been given to us to which the past can lay claim."[29]

Note that this is only a *weak* messianic power: past unjustices cannot be made undone;[30] it is the "weak anamnestic power of a solidarity that later generations can continue to practice *only* in the medium of a remembrance...."[31] But it is *messianic* nevertheless: the past "can at least be virtually reconciled through remembering." Habermas also speaks of an *atoning* effect, as in a recent interview with Jean Mary Ferry: "We certainly cannot make past suffering and injustice good; but we do have the weak power of an atoning remembrance."[32]

The *historians' debate* was sparked off by an article published on June 6, 1986 by the German historian Ernst Nolte, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Nolte's contention was that the annihilation of the Jews had been a reaction to Stalin's Gulag Archipelago.[33] In this article, the uniqueness of the Nazi atrocities was reduced to the "technical procedure of gassing."[34] Habermas soon joined the debate. In an essay published in *Die Zeit* (July 11, 1986), under the title "Apologetic Tendencies," he accused Nolte, together with other historians of similar tendencies (e.g., A. Hillgruber, M. Stürmer, J. Fest), of an apologetic revision of the German past.[35]

Habermas does not want to relinquish in any sense the responsibility for the past. How could one, he asks, "become the legal successor to the German Reich and continue the traditions of German culture without taking on historical liability for the form of life in which Auschwitz was possible?"[36]

The only legitimate way to master the past is "remembrance, practiced in solidarity" (p. 236). It means keeping alive "the memory of the sufferings of those who were murdered by German hands." The "Benjaminian legacy" is the conviction that it is precisely "these dead who have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of solidarity."[37] What effects is historical solidarity supposed to have? What does reconciliation mean? Is it more than burning candles for the dead? Habermas offers several hints. At one point he asserts that those who do remember act "as though they could still somehow render the pastness of an irreparable calamity less definitive"[38]; elsewhere he states that without such an anamnestic solidarity his Jewish fellow citizens would not be able to breathe in Germany.[39] In the interview with Ferry he mentions that "this sensibility for innocent victims...produces a reflexive distance towards one's own traditions";[40] the latter statement has several parallels in *The New Conservatism* (pp. 205, 251, 262-63, 266). However important these clues prove to be, though, in order to clarify the picture we first need to determine the connection with our earlier discussions of Hegel and Heinrich.

Strictly speaking the relation between this new theme and the subject that

we have been discussing is indirect rather than direct. This is because the notion that we have a responsibility for what past generations have innocently suffered has no analogy in Hegel, either in his early works, or in his later writings. Nevertheless, there is a certain relationship between this new theme and what we have been discussing up to now. Habermas, in the present context, offers a new application of Hegel's idea of a totality of ethical life. He applies it, one might say, retrospectively to the past. Remembrance "ties up the present with the communicative context of universal historical solidarity."[41] By fusing Benjamin's theme of remembrance with Hegel's doctrine of the unavoidable communality of fate, he attempts to articulate the collective responsibility of the present generation for the Third Reich era.

Naturally, as an implication of the idea of an ethical totality one expects to find a parallel to Hegel's concept of a dialectical reconciliation. Indeed, in this context too reconciliation does have a dialectical moment. A case in point is Habermas' sharp distinction between two different attitudes towards national identity. While he feels that the patriotism of the apologetic historians rests in an uncritical, "immediate" identification with the so-called "national tradition," he himself advocates a critical weighing of traditions. The parallel is that "patriotism" in the latter case would imply the "reflexive distance" mentioned in the Ferry interview (see *supra*). Some qualifications indicating such a distance are "post-national,"[42] "post-traditional," and "post-conventional."[43]

Habermas' attitude towards patriotism also provides a basis for a comparison with Heinrich's views. Just as the latter, Habermas wants to steer clear of both "identification" and "separation." Whereas, on the one hand, he adamantly rejects any "immediate" identification with the German past, on the other hand he also turns against those who refuse to accept any responsibility. We are responsible for "those who were murdered by German hands."[44] One recognizes in the rejected positions the two shapes "betrayal" took in Heinrich's account. Heinrich, as will be recalled, linked "betrayal" to two forms of alienation. The first form was a complete identification of the individual with the collective, leading to a destruction of the individual self; the other took the shape of isolation ("separation") leading to a destruction of the social bond.

Yet with the idea of a "reflexive distance" Habermas introduces an element which has no parallel in our earlier discussions. Solidarity becomes restricted to certain groups and specific traditions. What is missing here is the emphasis on the universal, all-inclusive character of solidarity. As will be recalled, a major ingredient of the metaphor of the covenant was the universal character of the confederation against betrayal. Not even the traitors were excluded. In Hegel's dialectic of crime and punishment it proved to be essential that the criminal, through the causality of fate, is brought to a reconciliation with the ethical

totality. Strictly speaking, this universal intent is lacking in Habermas' stance in the historians' debate. There is no solidarity with either the Nazi criminals or with the apologetic historians. In fact, Habermas even excludes his own past from the atoning remembrance. Significantly enough, the final words of *The New Conservatism* are: "the renunciation of our own disastrous traditions."[45]

Covenant and Public Philosophy

It is not uncommon for the Enlightenment to be interpreted in terms of *contract* and as such to be set over against *covenant*-traditions. William Sullivan's *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* may serve as an example.[46] Following Robert Bellah's *The Broken Covenant* (1975), Sullivan sharply distinguishes between the tradition of the Enlightenment and the "civil tradition," and links the latter to both biblical and republican roots. He considers a fundamental trust which can only be brought about by means of a "civil covenant." Enlightenment liberalism in his opinion lacks this moral quality: it only recognizes well-defined rights and duties. Civil tradition is guided by the "moral imperative to live according to the principles of justice and mutual support grounded in civil covenant."[47] To put this in a different way: "Unlike the liberal idea of a contract, which emphasizes mutual obligations within clearly defined limits, a civic covenant is a bond of fundamental trust founded upon common commitment to a moral understanding."[48]

My impression is that Sullivan's approach is characteristic of much of North American "public philosophy." At any rate it is a salient feature of *Habits of the Heart*, which Sullivan co-authored with Robert Bellah and others. In this book the problem of North American society is diagnosed as the loss of a common public language. Individuals have become dependent on *contractual* forms of interaction, which cannot but undermine community life: "By its own logic, a purely contractual ethic leaves every commitment unstable. Parties to a contract remain free to choose, and thus free to remake or break every commitment, if only they are willing to pay the price for doing so."[49]

Important as this may be as a diagnosis of the present cultural predicament, our discussions point to one correction. The Enlightenment cannot be interpreted *exclusively* in contractarian terms. It is not insignificant that Jürgen Habermas, who strongly endorses the ideals of the Enlightenment, never employs its social contract imagery in his endorsement. The reason is not difficult to fathom. Habermas too—just like Sullivan, Bellah and others—starts from the norm of a basic solidarity. To articulate this he needs other metaphors than "contract": hence his sympathy for Heinrich's "covenant"/ "confederation," and Benjamin's "remembrance."

One can appreciate the fact that Habermas places so much emphasis on solidarity. I would insist even more strongly than he does that it be taken in

a universal sense. Responsibility does not exclude those who go divergent ways, who "betray" the causes we stand for. Although we argue against their convictions—or consent to their punishment in the case of crime (to return to Hegel's dialectic)—we do so because as fellow human beings we cannot stay indifferent to the public side of their lives. This "holding on to each other" I find attractive in the themes under discussion. Under conditions of religious-cultural pluralism, without such a "holding on" the fragmentation of societal life is inescapable. In the absence of such a public ethos it is difficult to see any future for our society. Is it not this very solidarity which is conspicuously lacking in Northern Ireland and Lebanon? And is not the same spectre of anarchy now coming *ex oriente* as well, from Russia in particular?

It is also important that the past not be excluded. Inspired by Benjamin, Habermas develops a similar theme to what *Habits of the Heart* has called "communities of memory." As indicated above, in Habermas choosing for solidarity with some traditions implies distancing oneself from others. Although this "reflexive distance" seems to be at odds with the universalism of his communication idea, one cannot but agree that adherence to a tradition should never be unconditional. Traditions themselves have to be judged in the light of such norms as justice and love.

Habermas makes no secret of the fact that his fundamental intuitions are of a religious nature. One can appreciate the fact that he does account for the extra-philosophical origins of the ideas he is propounding. For instance, in the context of Benjamin's "atoning remembrance" he openly acknowledges that "atonement" is a Christian term.[50] But does this mean that he breaks with the Enlightenment ideal of a philosophy which is self-contained, independent of religion? Passing from intuitions to philosophical articulations, there is no evidence of a breakthrough. Although it is clear that to him religion is not simply *passé*, and although he does occasionally express a personal attachment to the "Judeo-Christian" tradition,[51] he does finally insist upon the subordination of religion. In that section of *The Philosophical Discourse* where the main theme we have been concerned with is developed, he qualifies his agreement with Heinrich's views on "covenant" and "confederation" with the assertion that this "religious motif" is *raised to philosophical rank* in the theory of communicative action (p. 325).[52] The "raising to philosophical rank," of course, boils down to what Hegel meant with *Aufhebung, viz.*, a process in which religious truth is stripped of its religious form, and appropriated philosophically.

It is true that one significant difference remains *vis-a-vis* Hegel. The "Aufhebung" in Habermas' case is less definitive. The religious metaphors keep returning. In this respect, Habermas' philosophy is less "post-religious," and therefore more challenging, than I myself had long surmised. He warily accepts co-existence with religion: "As long as in its own search for founda-

tions it [i.e., communicative reason] can find no better words to say what
religion can say it will cautiously co-exist with the latter...."[53] But in fact
even a certain dependency obtains: as long as the point omega of total con-
ceptual transparence is not reached, his philosophy stays dependent on reli-
gious metaphors to articulate basic intuitions.

There is certainly something modest about this philosophy. It does not
pretend to be able to improve on the message of religion. In the final analysis,
however, this is just modesty and not genuine openness. The idea of commu-
nication remains as Habermas' horizon. It is equivalent to Hegel's "ethical
totality" both in scope and closedness. Although Habermas readily grants that
there is much within this horizon that (as yet) withstands full conceptualiza-
tion, he does not relativize the idea of communication as such. Charles Taylor,
in his recent *Sources of the Self*, rightly criticizes him on this score. Although
agreeing with Habermas that without language there cannot be a "self," he
rejects the claims made on its behalf:

> The fact that the self is constituted through exchange in language...doesn't
> in any way guarantee us against loss of meaning, fragmentation, the loss of
> substance in our human environment and our affiliations.[54]

One might object that at least at one point a specific qualification is intro-
duced, *viz.*, where Habermas brings in the element of "reflexive distance."
Did not Habermas in fact restrict the orbit of communication in the historians'
debate? Did not certain traditions and groups of persons become "ex-com-
municated"? Although in one sense I can appreciate this "reflexive distance,"
it is not an altogether positive factor. Critical reflexion appears to come from
the outside. Thus communication is being restricted externally, rather than
being opened up internally towards another reality.

Let me come quickly to my final point. Enlightenment is understood by
Heinrich/Habermas as a (potentially) *universal* confederation against be-
trayal. However, the historians' debate shows that Habermas is not really true
to his universalist creed. In remembering the victims of the Third Reich the
idea of universal solidarity collapses. The Nazi crimes form a kind of betrayal
for which there is no atonement.

Universal solidarity would require an openness which is lacking in
Habermas. Loving our enemies is only possible on the basis of something
originating from beyond our horizon: God's image—in criminals, too. Ac-
knowledgement of the *imago Dei* does not make crimes less serious, but it
does widen the scope of human solidarity. The late Meyer Smit, of the Vrije
Universiteit, put it this way.

> What takes precedence before all else, rather, is the reality of being created
> in God's image, of being placed in relation to Him: and man can never fall
> from this relation however deep he indeed may fall, which is to say that man
> can never lose or escape the meaning of history (see Romans).[55]

From this it follows that "holding on to one another" within the public realm requires a religious foundation. But since every appeal to a religious foundation is bound to meet with strong disagreement, one cannot but conclude that in the public realm universal solidarity and (recognition of) deep divisions go hand in hand. This indeed is my conclusion. I am not sure that both sides have been acknowledged fully in "public philosophy." As Charles Taylor suggests, there may indeed be a parallel between Habermas and Bellah on this score: "Habermas, rather like Bellah and his associates, elides the experiential problem under the public, as though the two could be solved for the price of one."[56] The "experiential problem" refers to the experience of fragmentation, divisions, and especially to the loss of meaning.[57] Rephrasing his argument in my own terms: recovering a public language by itself is not enough; one also needs to go back to, and live from the Root of solidarity.

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NOTES

1. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Judy A. Peterson and Richard J. Mouw, who helped in editing this paper, and Roger D. Henderson who translated two passages from *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*.

2. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

3. *The Philosophical Discourse*, pp. 303-6. Hereafter all references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

4. In fact, Habermas distinguishes *three* types of criteria for rationality, pertaining to three different domains: criteria for deciding in matters of propositional truth (i.e., the domain of cognition and purposive action), normative rightness (i.e., the moral-practical domain), and also subjective truthfulness and aesthetic harmony (i.e., the aesthetic-expressive domain). In this paper we will only be concerned with the moral-practical.

5. Quoted from Richard Kroner, Introduction to G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 53. Cf. *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952), p. 30.

6. Habermas explicitly deals with this dialectic in the following places: pp. 28-30, 316, 418(n).

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, pp. 226-30. Hereafter all references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

8. "Truth is something free which we neither master nor are mastered by; hence the existence of God appears to the Jews not as a truth but as a command" (p. 196). It is challenging (but beyond the scope of this paper) to contrast Hegel's view with Richard Mouw's recent *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

9. Habermas' formulation, *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 29.

10. *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 470.

11. Cf. Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg/Munchen: Karl Alber Verlag, 1973), Chapter B: "Hegel und die griechische Tragödie," p. 85: "Er verletzt das Leben, weil er es floh, und so musste das Leben als ein Schicksal gegen ihn aufstehen...."

12. "Dialektik der Rationalisierung," interview by Axel Honneth and others, in: *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), pp. 167-208.

13. "Vorstellungen von geglückter Interaktion," *ibid.*, pp. 202, 203.

14. See, for instance, Richard Kroner's introductory essay to *Early Theological Writings*, esp. pp. 8-11.

15. P. 211, editor's footnote.

16. In *Theorie und Praxis* he admits that hierarchical relations cannot be avoided entirely, *viz.*, in the sense of a certain superiority of educators *vis-a-vis* the not-yet-educated, of therapists over against patients, etc. He hastens to add, however, that this superiority has to be debunked immediately as fictive: *in a process of enlightenment there are only participants*. See: Introduction to the 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), p. 45.

17. *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 316. The German original has here *unausweichliche Gemeinsamkeit* and *gemeinschaftliche Verantwortung: Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), p. 368.

18. Otto Pöggeler has rightly stressed that Hegel remained blind to the intrinsic relation between truth and covenant in the Old Testament: *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 105.

19. Klaus Heinrich, *Versuch über die Schwierigkeit nein zu sagen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964).

20. Klaus Heinrich, *ibid.*, p. 20; *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 323. See also Heinrich's *Parmenides und Jona, Vier Studien über das Verhältnis von Parmenides und Jona*, esp. 111-125.

21. *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 2nd edition), pp. 260-61.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 445-52. I owe this reference to my colleague Jan Hoogland, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. A translation of this volume appeared some years ago: *Philosophical Political Profiles* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

23. *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, 2nd. edition, pp. 322-24. In his Gadamer-essay, while discussing Heinrich's ideas, Habermas broadens the context from individual persons to individual languages. Separation now denotes a fragmentation into a manifold of unrelated languages (language games, etc.). Translation is presented as the way to restore unity; the power of reconciliation inheres in it ("Der Uebersetzung wohnt die Kraft der Versöhnung inne," *Zur Logik*, pp. 261).

24. Klaus Heinrich, *Parmenides und Jona*, p. 118.

25. The German word is *Schuldzusammenhang*. Cf. Habermas' review in *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, p. 325.

26. *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 316.

27. "Peirce and Mead were the first to raise the religious motif of a confederation to philosophical status in the form of a consensus theory of truth and a communication theory of society. The theory of communicative action joins itself with this pragmatist tradition." *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 325.

28. "Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen," in *Schriften*, Band I.

29. "Uns ist wie jedem Geschlecht, das vor uns war, eine schwache messianische Kraft mitgegeben, an welche die Vergangenheit Anspruch hat," quoted by Habermas in his essay "Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik—die Aktualität Walter Benjamins," in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, ed. by Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), p. 186.

30. *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 15.

31. *The New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, edited and translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen; introduction by Richard Wolin (Cambridge [UK]: Polity Press, 1988), p. 233, my italics.

32. "Ethics, Politics and History. An Interview with Jürgen Habermas conducted by Jean Mary Ferry," in *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, ed. by David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 212.

33. See Richard Wolin's introductory essay to *The New Conservatism*, esp. pp. xvi-xvii.

34. *The New Conservatism*, p. 239.

35. See *The New Conservatism*, pp. 207-12, and Wolin's introduction, pp. xvi-xvii.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

40. *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, p. 212.

41. *The Philosophical Discourse*, p. 15.

42. *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, pp. 209-11.

43. *The New Conservatism*, pp. xviii-xx, Ch. 10.

44. *The New Conservatism*, p. 233.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

46. (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). I am quoting from the 1986 paperback edition.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

49. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 130.

50. *The New Conservatism*, p. 234.

51. See, for instance, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), p. 23, where Habermas states that *he* does not believe ("So glaube ich nicht....") that as Europeans we can really understand concepts such as morality and ethical life

(*Sittlichkeit*), person and individuality, freedom and emancipation, without appropriating the substance of the salvific-historic thinking originating from the Judeo-Christian origin ("...ohne uns die Substanz des heilsgeschicht-lichen Denkens jüdisch-christlicher Herkunft anzueignen").

52. The same is true for pragmatism: see *supra*, note 27.

53. "Solange sie im Medium begründender Rede für das, was Religion sagen kann, keine besseren Worte findet, wird sie sogar mit dieser, ohne sie zu stützen oder zu bekämpfen, enthaltsam koexistieren" (*Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, p. 185).

54. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 509-10.

55. M. C. Smit, *Writings on God and History*, Vol. 1, Harry Van Dyke, editor (Jordan Station (Can): Wedge, 1987), p. 202.

56. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 510.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 509.