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THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF HABERMAS

James L. Marsh

On four different levels, descriptive-eidetic, hermeneutical, structural, and political, I show the relevance of Habermas to religious thought. I argue against his negative judgment concerning religious belief, show how religious belief can enhance his own project, demonstrate the way his rationality can act as a critical leavening agent on religious belief, and finally argue for a reciprocity between Habermas and religious belief. Communicative action flowers in a religious commitment to God, and religious belief comes more into its own through encounter with the legitimate chastening, vivifying, purifying aspects of communicative action.

At first sight an essay on the religious significance of Habermas might seem to be at best irrelevant and at worst an impossibility. For Habermas often does not have much to say about religion, and when he does, his discussion is mostly critical. According to him, religious belief during the progress of modernity has been subject to a "linguistification of the sacred" in which its ethical core is cognitively redeemed in ethical praxis. Modernity represents an *Aufhebung* of religious belief in which its properly religious aspect is rejected and its ethical core retained and sublated into the higher viewpoint of communicative praxis.¹

Nonetheless, as I hope to show in the course of this essay, such skepticism is premature. Not only is it important for believers to ascertain the validity of his arguments for overcoming religion, but there is a relevance of Habermas' theory for religious belief itself, a form of religious ideology critique can enhance Habermas' own project, and there are positive openings in Habermas' thought that allow for a positive relationship to certain kinds of religious belief. There are, then, multiple lines of significance between Habermas and religious belief that need to be thematized and evaluated.

Habermas' social theory as a progressive, synthetic movement from abstract to concrete has four moments: eidetic-descriptive, hermeneutical, structural, and political. What are the different kinds of rationality as we experience, describe, and understand them essentially? What is the best interpretation of rationality as it develops, differentiates itself, and is twisted to serve class and group domination in modernity? What is the economic and political structure of late capitalism and to what contradictions does it give rise? What social movements have emerged in late capitalist modernity that



are or can be efficacious? Correspondingly this paper will have four parts in which I first lay out Habermas' thought and then positively and negatively evaluate his position in relation to religious belief.

The Structure of Communicative Action

The most abstract level of Habermas' work is his eidetic-descriptive account of communicative action, that is, his attempt to articulate the invariant universals in communicative action that we spontaneously employ and that are continuously present to us in an intuitive manner. Such a descriptive move becomes necessary in order to become clear about how we experience rationality in its various forms and serves to evaluate various one-sided accounts of rationality. If Husserl's own descriptive turn to "the things themselves" became necessary in order to avoid a "philosophizing from on high" proceeding from such questionable premises as the atomistic character of perception or the dichotomy of mind and body, then Habermas' descriptive turn in a post-modern climate of thought becomes necessary to avoid an "anti-philosophizing from on high" proceeding from such premises as "all judgements are expressions of power" or "all rationality is instrumental." Further theorizing is necessary and Habermas does plenty of that, but we "get our feet on the ground" philosophically through an initial description of how we employ different forms and kinds of rationality. In this way he avoids a facile reductionism.²

What first becomes apparent in communicative action is that it is governed by three validity claims, truth, sincerity, and rightness. When I converse with somebody, we presuppose that what we are saying is true, is sincere, and right or appropriate, in the sense that we are not trying to impose on each other arbitrarily or assume authority arbitrarily.³

Although in his later work at times Habermas seems to back off from using "transcendental" to describe such validity claims, they retain some of the functions of the transcendental in that they are necessary, putatively universal conditions of the possibility for communicative praxis. They make possible an "ideal speech situation," the projection of a regulative ideal of communication in which no objection, expression, or opinion is excluded from consideration, full symmetry, reciprocity, and equality reign among participants, and the only force is that of the better argument. Such an ideal speech situation is neither empirically real in the sense of being totally realized nor is it purely fictional, since it functions as an implicit norm and measure in the light of which we can spontaneously evaluate some conversations as closed and repressive and others as open and liberated.⁴

Related to the three main validity claims are three main possible kinds of sentences: constative, regulative, and expressive. The constative sentence, for example "John is five feet tall," makes truth claims about the objective world.

The regulative speech act, for example "Bush's intervention in the Middle East is unjust," articulates what is morally right. The expressive speech act, for example "I am happy that you won the award," expresses my subjective response to something. Each kind of sentence specializes in or emphasizes one validity claim, but the others are present as implicit presuppositions. For example, my expression of joy at your success presupposes my recognition that you have succeeded.⁵

Communicative action includes the above speech acts and their validity and is distinguished from an instrumental action oriented to success. Such action can only achieve its perlocutionary aims by keeping them secret, and always involves a kind of manipulation, coercion, or violence. Contrast the parent trying to convince his child to go into medicine in order to fulfill the secret needs of the parent for status or prestige with the parent who is honestly open with his son about his career choice, his own desires and expectations for his son, and his own commitment that the son do what best suits him and fulfills him. There is a non-violence and non-coerciveness about communicative action that instrumental action implicitly trades on and presupposes, even in arguing that "all communication is violent." For the claim to have any validity at all, it tacitly presupposes a non-violent process of persuasion in which the better argument wins. Otherwise the claim has no more validity than that of a Chilean prisoner tortured into making the admission that Pinochet is a just ruler.⁶

There are many positive merits to Habermas' conception of communicative action. Such a conception allows him to do justice to the different forms and kinds of rationality in a way that avoids modern and post-modern reductionisms. Nonetheless some reservations do arise. We may note the exclusion in Habermas of metaphysical-religious constative sentences such as "God exists," expressive sentences such as "I love God," and regulative sentences such as "God's will is that I do this." On a strictly descriptive level there seems to be no reason to exclude these sentences as legitimate examples of communicative praxis. Yet Habermas excludes them as legitimate because of presuppositions informing his descriptive account. Such presuppositions most likely include (and here I am interpreting and extrapolating) Kant's critique of metaphysics, Feuerbach's critique of religion, and Marx's critique of religion as ideology. More precisely Habermas' Marxism, albeit reconstructed, informs his descriptive account in a way that may prejudice it illegitimately.⁷

I hasten to add that there is nothing methodologically illegitimate in having such presuppositions, because I do not think that a totally presuppositionless account is possible. What is possible, however, in Habermas' own spirit in the context of the ideal speech situation is a questioning of such presuppositions. Do they withstand the force of the better argument? It shall be the burden of the rest of my paper to show that they do not.

I am raising at this point the hypothesis of a fourth domain, perhaps most adequately conceived not as running alongside normal constative, expressive, and regulative sentences indicating three different worlds, objective, subjective, and social, but as grounding, surrounding, and rendering completely intelligible these three worlds.

Adding to the plausibility of such a hypothesis is Arendt's criticism of Marxism in general and, by implication, Habermas in particular of being insufficiently attentive to and appreciative of the contemplative, too onesidedly focused on praxis in the threefold forms of art, political action, and labor informed by science. We question Habermas here for being too uncritically Marxist in focusing on objective spirit and excluding absolute spirit too much, especially its domains of religion and metaphysics. Is Habermas too uncritically interested in reason as a form of world *transformation* and not enough as a form of world *disclosure*? I am reminded here of Adorno's self-critique, insofar as he asks whether the Marxist utopia is just capitalist busyness and bustle democratized and more equally distributed? Perhaps true utopia is just closer to "Rien faire comme une bête, lying on water and looking at the sky, being nothing else, without any further definition and fulfillment."⁸

We have to be careful here to be fair to Habermas. He does admit to an aesthetic, contemplative component to rationality; also a form of discourse or conversation in the constative domain in which there is an aiming at the truth for its own sake, and, of course, science has a theoretical component. Nonetheless the questions persist. Is significant justice done to a kind of metaphysical-religious questioning of the whole? Do even the purely theoretical moments in Habermas arising in discourse about the moral, scientific, and aesthetic domains take their bearings too much from world-transforming praxis? Is there a danger on the descriptive level of excluding too much world disclosing forms of rationality (Arendt in her critique undoubtedly has in mind as an alternative a receptive, meditative Heideggerian *Denken* about Being) and emphasizing too much world transforming forms of rationality? Again on a strictly descriptive level there seems to be no reason for such exclusion and emphasis. Such contemplative, receptive, meditative questioning of Being does go on and needs to be described. Arendt does exactly this in her posthumously published work on thought and willing, in which such contemplation and thought serve as necessary complements to praxis in its different forms, political, aesthetic, economic.⁹

A related issue is whether Habermas' conception of individuality is too thin and impoverished. Using Mead's conception of socialization, Habermas distinguishes between a socialized "Me" and a creative, free "I" not reducible to the content of such socialization and able to resist it. Such a distinction suggests an opening into an existential phenomenological reflection on interiority, which Habermas does not take. Such a path of reflection articulates

a domain of human experience that itself can plausibly be said to open up to and be completed in a metaphysical-religious affirmation and commitment. Kierkegaard's account of the three states of existence, aesthetic, ethical, and religious; and Lonergan's account of conversion, intellectual, moral, and religious, are probably the best recent examples. We move from a finite individuality to existential-phenomenological explication of such interiority leading to metaphysical-religious affirmation and commitment as the fullest actualization and completion of such interiority. Not to make such an affirmation and commitment is to short-circuit and arbitrarily limit the fundamental human drive to intelligibility and value, or, in Habermas' terms, to introduce an arbitrary block and limit into the ideal speech situation, which requires that no *a priori* limits be put on questioning.¹⁰

Habermas, of course, has his own reasons for not using such an existential phenomenological account of subjectivity: the fascism of Heidegger, the validity of a shift from a philosophy of consciousness to one of language, and the link of phenomenology to constative or instrumental reason. These reasons do not seem cogent to me. The validity of phenomenology, even of Heidegger's, does not have to be rejected because of his fascism; there is a certain transcendence of the philosophy to the real person that for good hermeneutical reasons we need to affirm. It seems to me that Habermas overstates the significance of the linguistic turn insofar as he either denies or at least fails to thematize that there are mental acts such as understanding, judging, and choosing that are causative of and completed by external gestural or linguistic expression but are not reducible to such expression. The true reality, therefore, is "consciousness-expression."

It also seems to me that phenomenology is not inevitably monological or confined to instrumental reason. Schutz and others have developed a phenomenology of the social world, Husserl has criticized scientism and positivism for claiming to monopolize the definition of rationality, and Sokolowski has recently worked out a phenomenology of moral action. Properly understood, existentialism and phenomenology practice a descriptive, eidetic sensitivity to the multiple kinds of human rationality and action similar to Habermas'. They are allies, not adversaries.¹¹

To return to the main thread of my argument, I have developed elsewhere the idea of a domain of interiority that is structured by relationships of experience, understanding, judgement, and decision. For example, I see the apple fall, I formulate hypotheses to explain its falling, I verify these in experiments, and I decide to publish the results. I have argued, second, that such a transcendental structure is present in the various patterns of experience, aesthetic, scientific, moral, in a way that Habermas does not articulate. For example, I hear the poem read, I begin to grasp its meaning, I judge that my interpretation is true or that the poem is a good one, and I decide to read

more of this poet. There is thus a principle of unity between and among the various patterns of experience that Habermas misses.¹²

Third, questions concerning ultimate reality and meaning inevitably arise. In Lonergan's terms, "Is being ultimately intelligible?" or "Does an act of unrestricted understanding exist?" In Kierkegaard's terms, we might ask whether there is a Being whom I can completely trust and believe in and love, Who can satisfy completely my infinite passion, Who can deliver the aesthetic from its conflict with the ethical in me. Here I would insist that our commitment to the unlimited questioning of the ideal speech situation cannot exclude such questions as illegitimate. They are not meaningless because we can understand them, they are not absurd because they are not self-contradictory, and they are not illegitimate on positivistic grounds because Habermas has already rejected positivism. There is not just one form of rationality, scientific, but three. I would ask, "Why not a fourth?"¹³

Peukert has argued that Habermas' own project requires a "yes" to the above questions. Operating as a presupposition of Habermas' communicative ethic is unconditional solidarity with all other human beings, past, present, and future. Such solidarity is rooted in the temporal aspects of the ideal speech situation, as well as the recognition of the other as an equal partner in speech, inviolable and free. Imagine, Peukert argues, a situation in which the ethical demands of communicative action were realized in full economic, social, and political democracy. In this situation, how is solidarity possible with the dead, oppressed, and innocent victims of past generations? Short of some kind of present solidarity with them as currently existing, do they not become mere means to our happy socialist present in a way which contradicts the unconditionally and universality of communicative praxis? If we try to forget them to remain in such a present, do we not contradict again such unconditionality and universality? How can a happiness based on evasion be true happiness?

Only the affirmation of past victims of oppression as currently existing and God as the guarantor of such existence delivers communicative praxis from its own contradictions. "The reality disclosed in communicative action, asserted as the saving reality for others and at the same time as the reality that through this salvation of the other makes possible one's own temporal existence unto death, must be called God." Such an analysis of human action, Peukert goes on to argue, is barely conceivable without the Old Testament and New Testament as hermeneutic revelations of such a God.¹⁴

If this all too brief sketch of an argument with and against Habermas is correct, then the following seems to be true: 1) At the eidetic-descriptive level there exists a fourth realm, the metaphysical-religious, that serves to ground the objective, subjective, and social realms. 2) On the same descriptive level, there is a contemplative dimension to which Habermas does not do justice.

3) There is an existential depth to individuality that must be affirmed and that opens in its questioning and choosing onto the transcendent. 4) Communicative ethics finds its ultimate completion and fulfillment in the affirmation of and commitment to such transcendence.

Hermeneutics

Because of problematic decisions, presuppositions, and exclusions on the descriptive, eidetic level, Habermas is already predisposed to interpret modernity in a certain way as a “linguistification of the sacred” that separates out and cognitively redeems ethical content and leaves behind specifically religious reference, belief, and commitment. Those belong to a superseded pre-modern stage of history governed by metaphysical-religious worldviews. If one rejects Habermas’ problematic assumptions, then a different hermeneutical reading of modernity becomes possible. Habermas’ interpretation of modernity as a contradictory tension between forward moves in learning and a pathological colonization of life-world by system requires and implies a metaphysical-religious dimension.¹⁵

The key word in Habermas’ account of modernity is “differentiation” 1) among the spheres of aesthetic, scientific, and moral knowledge-cultural rationalization; 2) between cultural rationalization and social rationalization, in which purposive rational action, action utilizing technically chosen means ordered to technically achievable ends, is institutionalized in the economy and state; 3) between life-world and system, understood here as a functional connection among unintended effects of human choices (an economic crash or depression is a good example); 4) between a beneficial mediating of life-world by system and colonizing of life-world by system, in which the imperatives of capitalist or state socialist modernization impinge on, disturb, and corrupt spheres of the life-world. By “life-world” I here mean the social whole to which actors have access in a first person, intuitive manner. As I speak to you in this room, this room opens onto a corridor in a building, which itself is in a university in a city. You and I share a common language and traditions, cultural, political, philosophical, religious, upon which we draw when we communicate. “Life-world” is to “communicative action” as implicit to explicit, pre-thematic to thematic, taken-for-granted to questionable, context to figure, indeterminate to determinate.¹⁶

Modernity is a contradictory blending of progress and decline, enlightenment and pathology, rationality and irrationality. In Habermas’ view, his account is more comprehensive and nuanced than either an optimistic, harmonizing Parsonian account or a negative, post-modern account. Modernity is progressive in that forward moves in aesthetic, moral, and scientific learning have occurred and have been institutionalized. Modernity is pathological in that these very forward moves have been twisted in the interests

of class or group domination. Habermas' Marxism comes in here to save modernist rationality. It is not modernist rationality *as such* that is the problem but its misuse and narrowing in the service of class and group domination.¹⁷

We have, then, four possible ways of relating to the modern: conservative regression, liberal commitment to a contradictory status quo, post-modern transcendence, and a dialectical, Habermasian "critical modernism." If the first three are inadequate, then Habermas' is the most preferable. Modernity and the Enlightenment are projects which need to be completed and redeemed, not rejected and scorned. Although Habermas is somewhat vague and indeterminate about his political program, it, in keeping with his Marxism, points toward significant economic and social and political democratization. Because of the complex nature of modernity, such democratization will inevitably be accompanied by representation and expertise and elements of bureaucracy and market. Because differentiation of system from life-world is a positive, forward move in modernity and market and bureaucracy are elements of system, they would survive in any future democratization of society. There is a "Hegelian" realism that Habermas brings in here to qualify any naive Marxist hopes about total participatory democracy.¹⁸

As far as it goes, therefore, Habermas' account of modernity is illuminating and valid, a light shining in a darkness characterized by facile, contradictory attempts to transcend and reject the modern. But his account, in my opinion, does not go far enough and stands as inadequate by Habermas' own hermeneutical standards of comprehensiveness and respect for nuance. Taking a cue from Taylor in his recent, magisterial *Sources of the Self*, we may ask whether there is not a fourth strand of the modern that has been differentiated, the ontological-religious, in addition to the aesthetic, moral, and scientific. Once again quaternian rather than trinitarian thinking.¹⁹

Here I would have in mind the following phenomena, though I am not claiming an exhaustive description here: the separation of church from state and economy in a way that allows for the greater autonomy of the former, the emergence of distinctively modern metaphysico-religious forms of thought such as Kierkegaard, Marcel, Lonergan, Barthes, Gutierrez, and Tillich, the interaction between these forms of thought and the wider religious community, the mutual questioning of world by church and church by world such that the modern principles of freedom, reflexivity, and critique enter into the life of the churches and religious belief acts as a leavening influence on the world, allowing it to be more critical of the fetishes of money, sex, and power; and the emergence of distinctively modern political-religious movements led by such people as Berrigan, King, Day, and Camaro.²⁰

Habermas' reply to this claim, of course, would be his thesis of the "linguisticification of the sacred." There is an ethical core to religious belief that settles out in the course of modernity's development, leaving the proper

religious reference and meaning of such belief in the dustbin of an outmoded pre-modern age.²¹

But has such a discarding occurred? To read the writings of a Kierkegaard or Berrigan or Gutierrez or Moltman is to witness an ethics essentially linked to and profoundly involved with religious belief. Such belief has not dropped out but is the central motivating core. Maybe Habermas, because of the predilections mentioned in the first part of this essay, thinks that it should have dropped out or that it will drop out, but so far it has not. Without such predilections, does not a more comprehensive hermeneutic of modernity point to quaternity, not trinity? Is not the metaphysical-religious, if not alive and well, at least alive and kicking?²²

Here I would not reject the phrase "linguistification of the sacred" but would qualify and differentiate it: 1) As indicating a complete or mostly complete jettisoning of religious reference and meaning, the phrase is false. 2) As indicating a certain process of secularization, this phrase is legitimate. Such secularization, however, is the differentiation of the religious-metaphysical from other spheres of human endeavor and does not imply the denial of the metaphysical-religious. 3) As indicating a widespread theoretical and practical atheistic, reductionistic interpretation of such secularization, the phrase is true, but this interpretation is just one strand of the process of secularization. Another is metaphysical-religious. 4) As indicating that certain forms of metaphysics and religious belief deserve to die, those that are ideological, escapist, and do not relate sympathetically to and learn from legitimate modern discoveries about freedom, subjectivity, rationality, and critique, the phrase is true. For example, the true God is not the bourgeois God of the ruling classes or a God that despises women, racial minorities, or the poor. Rather, in keeping with legitimate feminist, post-modern, and Marxist discoveries and critiques of modernity, the true God is on the side of the oppressed. There is a "preferential option for the poor" that is essential to any properly modern form of religious belief.²³

5) The legitimate forms of religious belief that deserve to survive have learned from the modern and *vice versa*. Here I think of Lonergan's use of Kant, Kierkegaard's of Hegel, Metz's of Benjamin, Dussel's of Marx. In this sense of a mutual testing in which religious belief has passed through the crucible of modern questioning and critique, there is a "linguistification of the sacred." In my opinion, the best formulation of such religious belief is Tracy's "revisionism" in which there is total questioning of Church by world and world by Church. Religious belief allows itself to use and to be brought into question by modern questions, insights, and methodologies. At the same time religious belief functions as a transcendent reference point allowing us to be critical of simplistic forms of progress trampling underfoot the poor, the homeless, the oppressed.²⁴

The latter point is quite important and needs to be emphasized. Employed in the context of a critical modernist religious belief, even pre-modern religious texts do not have to be exercises in a conservative nostalgia trip, but are themselves sources of a dangerous memory bringing into question certain structures of modern domination. Thus Christ's description of the Last Judgment and those who will sit at the right hand and left hand of his Father brings into question modern tendencies to valorize too much the rich, the victorious, and the powerful and to ignore the poor, the defeated, the weak. Mary's contemplative, receptive "be it done unto me according to thy word" brings into question our modern fetishizing of productivity, business, "busyness," efficiency, usefulness. Christ's warning that it is harder for a rich person to get to heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle warns us about the dangers of reducing Christianity to the measure of the bourgeois, middle class subject.²⁵

Hermeneutic receptivity to religious sources, then, is essential but so also are suspicion and critique both of world and Church: critique of the world insofar as it deifies or fetishizes such finite realities as money, sex, and power; and critique of the Church insofar as its ideas, institutions, and practices conflict with the genuine prophetic content of Old and New Testaments. If Tracy is correct in asserting that there is an ideology critique internal to religious belief and texts, then such modern insights and methodologies of suspicion and critique can enhance, explicate, and serve such critique. For example, using the insights of feminism, can we not ask whether there is a solid theological basis for ordaining women, or is the justification for not doing so just a fancy, disguised form of male domination? Using the results of a liberation theology informed by positive appropriation of Marx and Western Marxism, can we not, as Boff has done, criticize many practices of the Catholic Church as undemocratic, dominating, and unjust?²⁶

Crisis Theory

Here we consider the economic and political structure of late capitalism and the contradictions to which it gives rise. There is a certain parallelism and connection as we move from abstract to concrete in Habermas' thought. In relation to traditional Marxism, his description of communicative action reduces science-technology, in itself and in its use by labor as a form of purposive rational action, to simply a part within a more comprehensive theory including the aesthetic-expressive and the moral-political. There is similarly a de-absolutizing but not a complete rejection of science and labor carried out in his reconstruction of historical materialism, in which moral-political learning becomes the pace-setter for historical development. Similarly on the level of a hermeneutic of modernity science is distinguished from morality and art as one form of rationality but not the only form, and purposive

rationality in social rationalization as that occurs in the economy and state is distinct from cultural rationalization. Labor and science, which in traditional Marxism too often tend to become the whole story, are subject to a general *Aufhebung* in Habermas, retention, negation, and transcendence.²⁷

This fundamental rethinking of Marxism that remains in some sense still Marxist continues on the more concrete, political level of crisis theory, in which Habermas develops an interpretation and critique of late capitalism. His theory of communicative action, theory of historical materialism, and hermeneutics of modernity give him the tools to reconceptualize the notion of crisis in a way that is fruitful. Here again there is a relativizing but not denial of the economic; other kinds of possible crises in late capitalism are rationality, legitimation, and motivational crises. Indeed late capitalism, because of its orientation toward total administration, creates the possibility for other kinds of crisis not envisioned by a more traditional Marxist analysis.

The pessimism in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, for example, about the possibility of meaningful social change may be seen from a Habermasian point of view as manifesting the deficiencies of traditional Marxism, even though Marcuse in many ways is not a traditional Marxist. Nonetheless he is wedded to a traditional account to the extent that if late capitalism seems to close off the possibility of economic crisis and to incorporate labor into its bosom, pessimism about the possibility of meaningful social change seems to be a logical conclusion. Habermas, on the other hand, is committed to a more dialectically hopeful account of late capitalism. His positive endorsement of communicative action, history and modernity prepares him to see positive elements in late capitalism not accessible to a more traditional Marxist account.²⁸

A rationality crisis, for example, is like an economic crisis in being a crisis primarily in system identity, a breakdown in late capitalism conceived as a well-running, functional, objective structure. Unlike economic crisis, however, rationality crisis is mediated by the state. Carter's inability simultaneously to control both unemployment and inflation is a rationality crisis.²⁹

Legitimation and motivation crises are crises in social identity based upon the willingness or unwillingness of people to support and actively participate in the social and political life of society. A legitimation crisis arises in the modern state because of the contradiction between the imperative to secure capitalist accumulation and the imperative to secure legitimation through recourse to a communicative ethic institutionalized to some extent in the democratic institutions and practices of the modern state. A contradiction arises between particular capitalist imperatives and universal criteria of a communicative ethic stressing the good of all. If, for example, some kinds of military spending very profitable for capitalist firms cannot be justified through rational discussion, then problems of legitimation arise for such spending.³⁰

For Habermas legitimation deficits finally are based on motivation crises that are endemic to late capitalism. Such crises occur through a negative erosion of attitudes favorable to capitalism such as a work ethic and individualism and asceticism and the positive emergence of values and practices in tension with late capitalism such as science, communicative ethics, and modern art. Their commitment to rational verification, normative universality, and disinterested aesthetic enjoyment are in fundamental tension with the limited arbitrariness, particularism, and utilitarianism of bourgeois rationality.³¹

Once again effectively operative in producing crisis tendencies are the same three elements of modern western rationality, science, morality, and art. Once again, rather than triplicity, why not quaternity? Could we not argue for enlightened religious belief and practice as another powerful source of motivation dysfunctional for the maintenance of the capitalist system? Consider the service of a Dorothy Day, the resistance of a Berrigan, and the protest of a King. Do we not have in the fidelity to the desire to know culminating in religious belief, in the religious preferential option for the poor, and in disinterested contemplative prayer powerful motives for resisting capitalism that complement, enhance and complete Habermas' communicative ethic? If some have found this ethic too formalistic, too lacking in content to be effectively motivating, is not such a metaphysical-religious motivation a marvelous, strong, additional and deepening form of motivation?³²

We have to be careful here. There clearly are certain forms of religious belief that act as ideological supports of capitalism reflecting and legitimizing its privatism, individualism, and conformism. Such forms of belief, however, are not only inadequate by the standards of the ideology critique, communitarianism and the solidarity present within religious belief itself, but also are inadequate by the standards of a critical modernity interacting creatively in mutual critique and enlightenment with such belief. As we have seen, certain forms of religious beliefs deserve to die because they have been untrue to their own radical prophetic substance. A Judaism or Christianity that has become merely ideological is untrue to itself as Jewish or Christian.³³

It makes sense here on this level to talk, first, about the way secular ideology critique can benefit religion not only by reminding it of its own radical, social, prophetic substance and giving it tools to articulate and deepen such substance, but also by purifying its notion of God. God is no longer a cozy father in the sky, an escape for neurotics, and a prop for the ruling classes, but rather a loving Freedom inviting me, you, us to become free in a process of individual and social transformation. Jesus Christ Liberator!³⁴

It makes sense also to discuss the way religious belief drawing on its ideological critical resources can itself contribute to and be ideology critique. If there is, as even Lonergan admits, a domain of freedom, love, and faith beyond rationality and cognition, then such faith oriented to its religious

“object” enables us to criticize tendencies on the part of rationality itself toward self-aggrandizement, domination and fetishization. Here I am thinking not only of obvious deformations of rationality such as technocracy, positivism, and scientism but even the temptation of a secular communicative ethic to set itself up as the sole guide and norm, to deify itself, to be insufficiently receptive to alien, irrational, aesthetic, revelatory aspects of self and world. One can with Habermas perform a rational interpretation and critique of capitalism. But what if reason itself becomes the problem? Reason criticizes the capital fetish or state socialist fetish but then sets itself up as a fetish or god.³⁵

To illustrate the role religious belief can play in a critique of society, we may compare Kierkegaard and Berrigan. Kierkegaard played a prophetic religious role in relationship to the nineteenth century Danish Church and society similar to that of Berrigan in relationship to the Catholic Church and American society in the twentieth century.

Kierkegaard’s critique of the homogeneous mass society and public of the “Present Age” parallels Berrigan’s critique of and resistance to the American-military industrial behemoth; both were forms of religious ideology critique forcing believers to ask themselves what happens when religion simply becomes a flatterer of the age, a servant of the status quo, a slave to current economic-political fashion. In their hands religious belief becomes a powerful source of critique and resistance to a corrupt economic-political status quo.³⁶

Habermas would reply, of course, that he can already affirm fallibilism and the aesthetic and nature from within the structure of his own theory. And there is all the difference as well between a “Protestant,” Kierkegaardian tendency to find secular, natural reason to be limited and sinful and a “Catholic,” Thomistic tendency to validate such a reason and to go as far as it will take one. Yet even a Catholic can ask whether there is not a natural pridefulness, if not in reason itself, then in the human being who tries to live rationally without faith? And is not this pridefulness a worm that can eat away at even the most righteous of social reform and revolutions? And even if Habermas can rightfully say that he builds fallibilism into his theory, is there not a difference between the conceptual recognition and the existential living out of that fallibilism? Does not communicative ethics itself, therefore, need to be subjected to a religious ideology critique and to incorporate that into itself or, more adequately, allow itself to be incorporated into that critique?³⁷

Social Movements

What social movements emerge from the contradictory structure of late capitalism that have a chance to bring about meaningful social change? We note here that just as there is a relativizing of the claims of labor and science on

descriptive, historical, and structural levels, so also is there on the level of concrete, political action. Like Marx, Habermas takes it to be a responsibility of critical theory to indicate systematically what groups or movements present the best possibilities for social change. For Marx, the answer was the working class; for Habermas it is social movements such as feminism, civil rights, ecology, anti-war, and anti-nuclear that burst into bloom in the 1960s and early 1970s.³⁸

Just as Habermas removes an economist, productivist bias from Marxism on the first three levels discussed above, so also on this level. Indeed this articulation of these first three levels prepares him to look for potentially liberating groups outside of and distinct from the economic sector. There is more than a suggestion, following Offe, that crisis is more likely the further away one is from the economic sector, especially the big monopoly portion of that sector. Capitalism has done so well in containing economic crisis that one could expect, on the assumption that capitalism is a unified, contradictory social system, contradictions to break out elsewhere. The events of the 1960s and early 1970s bear Habermas out. Universities, not corporations, were the more likely sources of conflict; students, not workers, were more likely agents of resistance to late capitalism and all of its pomps; feminist groups, not labor unions, are the leading progressive movement today; damage to the environment, not happiness in the workplace, is the more potent issue.³⁹

Habermas, and along with him Offe, has better than anyone else provided the revised conceptual, Marxist framework for understanding such events and movements. If communicative action is aesthetic and practical as well as scientific and technical, if moral-political learning is even more of a pace setter in historical evolution than scientific-economic learning, if modernity has institutionalized the differences among scientific, moral, and aesthetic learning, if crises can be legitimational and motivational as well as economic and rational, then it makes sense to expect that social movements are the most likely agents of liberating social change.

Capitalism has engaged in a colonization of the life-world, imposing its logic and commodification on spheres intrinsically alien to it such as education, art, culture, and politics. Thus the person most likely to make it to Harvard and Yale is not the best and the brightest but the richest and best-born. The program that is shown on television is not the most aesthetically stimulating and socially provocative, but that which is the least threatening and most profitable to the sponsor. Universities more and more are not places to pursue the examined life but rather launching pads for Greenwich and Wall Street. Politics more and more centers not on discussion of real issues but on "selling the President" or congressman or senator.⁴⁰

Thus, Habermas argues, if our life-world is colonized in this way, we would expect protest potentials to emerge not in an old politics concerned with

economic distribution but in a new politics concerned with quality of life, or as he puts it, "the grammar of forms of life." If one thinks, as I do, that the potential for economic and rationality crisis has increased since the early 1970s with such events as OPEC's raising of oil prices, recession, unemployment, and inflation, which all reflect a cessation in the expansion of late capitalism taking place from 1955 - 1970 and a contraction from 1970 to the present, then workers as workers might have more of a role to play. But, because of the changed structure of late capitalism, they are no longer privileged or even the most likely agents of social change.⁴¹

Habermas distinguishes here between more conservative movements such as proposition 13 in California based on defense of property and more progressive social movements such as the peace movement or feminism. Here we need only to add and emphasize, in a way that he does not, the contribution of religion to both of these tendencies. The Pro-Life movement, because of its unenlightened stance on life outside of the womb such as the poor, unemployed, African-Americans, women, and the victims of imperialism, would count as conservative. The religious contribution to the civil rights movement, peace movement, and ecology movement would count as progressive. Again the names of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, and Daniel Berrigan in the U.S. and the movements they have spawned come to mind, including the recent Plowshares movement which Martin Sheen has joined. Properly conceived, interpreted, and articulated, religious belief has been, is and can be a progressive force for social change. When we shift our gaze to the Third World in such areas as Latin America, then progressive movements for liberation become other obvious instances. As the film *Romero* showed, Archbishop Romero went through a radical political conversion in which he realized that the Christianity most worthy of the name is that which stands explicitly on the side of the poor and oppressed against the rich and the oppressors.⁴²

Conclusion

We have discovered multiple lines of significance between Habermas and religious belief. First of all, we have criticized his negative judgement concerning religious belief. Neither on descriptive nor hermeneutical nor structural nor political levels does his argument work.

Indeed we have discovered, second, that religious belief can contribute to Habermas' project, making it more consistent and comprehensive, supplying another resource for critique, providing a strong resistance to late capitalist exploitation, and acting as an ingredient in liberating social movements. Third, Habermasian modernity and rationality can act as a critical leavening agent on religious belief, enabling it to discover and enhance its own ideology critique, reflectivity, social consciousness, notion of God and option for the poor.

Finally, what the above points suggest is a reciprocity between Habermas and religious belief; communicative action flowers and completes itself in a religious commitment to God, "a being in love with God"; Religious belief comes more into its own through encounter with the legitimate chastening, vivifying, purifying aspects of communicative action.⁴³

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NOTES

1. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, II: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. 46-53, 77-78, 83-84, 88-93, 106-11, 288. Hereafter referred to as CFR.

2. Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, translated by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 278.

3. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 273-399, hereafter referred to as RRS. Elsewhere Habermas talks about a fourth and even fifth validity claim; see p. 123, where he mentions adequacy of standards of aesthetic value and comprehensibility of symbolic constructs. Truth, sincerity, and rightness are privileged because they are the basis for fundamental kinds of speech acts in a way that other validity claims are not.

4. RRS, p. 256. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 107-8. Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie Der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), pp. 101-41.

5. RRS, pp. 295-319.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-95.

7. See Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 95 for a definition of his Marxism as "reconstructed."

8. Hannah Arendt, *The Recovery of the Public World*, edited by Melvin Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 303-15. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1981), pp. 285-87, 390-98. Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), pp. 155-57, quotation taken from p. 157.

9. RRS, pp. 332-34. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, edited by Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).

10. CFR, pp. 71-76, 96-111. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 238-43. Soren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, translated by Walter Lowrie (New York: Schocken Books, 1967).

11. Michael McCarthy, *The Crisis of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 245-47. RRS, pp. 366-99. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 131-60. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University

Press, 1985). Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, translated by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

12. James L. Marsh, *Post-Cartesian Meditations* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 1988), pp. 45-72.

13. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1957), pp. 636-86. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 177-83. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 71-90.

14. Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology*, translated by James Bohman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 182-245, quotation from p. 235.

15. See footnote one.

16. RRS, pp. 113-97, 216-42, 332-73.

17. CFR, pp. 147-48, 332-73.

18. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 83-210, 238-93. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (New York, Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 156-65. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 182-88.

19. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 355-57, 398-401, 449-55.

20. Talcot Parsons, *The Evolution of Societies*, edited by Jackson Toby (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 182-214. John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1964).

21. See references in footnote one.

22. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965). Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, translated by Sister Cardida Inda and John Egelson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973). Daniel Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

23. John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 257-94. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Karl Marx, *Capital*, I, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 762-870. Peter Henriot, *Opting for the Poor: A Challenge for North Americans* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Concern, 1990). Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, translated by Robert Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 124-34.

24. Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 339-43. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 99-108. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, pp. 124-34. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, translated by David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), pp. 22-57.

25. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, pp. 88-89. St. Matthew, 25, 31-45; St. Mark, 10, 17-31; St. Luke, 10, 17-31; *The New Testament*.

26. Rosemary Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward A Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power*, translated by John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad Books, 1985). David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, pp. 390-98.

27. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, pp. 130-77, RRS, pp. 08-42, 216-42.
28. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 1-120. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 33-41, 57-58.
29. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 61-68.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-75. CFR, pp. 343-56.
31. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 75-92.
32. On this issue of formalism and motivation in Habermas, see Agnes Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," *Habermas: Critical Debates*, edited by John Thompson and David Held (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 22-41.
33. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, pp. 47-83, 371-98.
34. Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, translated by Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978). Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Christianity at the Crossroads*, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978). Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, edited by Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 213-22.
35. Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987).
36. Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace*. Soren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age*, edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Sociology," and James L. Marsh, "Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation," *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, edited by Robert Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 133-74. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 104-5.
37. On this issue of fallibilism, see Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 408-9, footnote 28, where he defends claims that are universal and fallible, against post-modernists like Derrida.
38. Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: The Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 179-82. CFR, pp. 391-96.
39. CFR, pp. 391-96. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 33-41. Claus Offe, *Strukturprobleme des kapitalistischen Staates* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972).
40. CFS, pp. 332-72. For an earlier version of colonization, although he does not call it by that name, see Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844*, edited by Dirk Struick, translated by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), pp. 165-69. Rather, he describes the rule of money in spheres whose intrinsic logic is alien to that of money. Thus, for example, an ugly man who happens to be wealthy can buy himself the most beautiful of women.
41. CFR, p. 392. Ernst Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, translated by Joris De Bres (London: New Left Books, 1972, pp. 108-46, 438-89. David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 141-97.
42. CFR, pp. 393-94.
43. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 104-7.