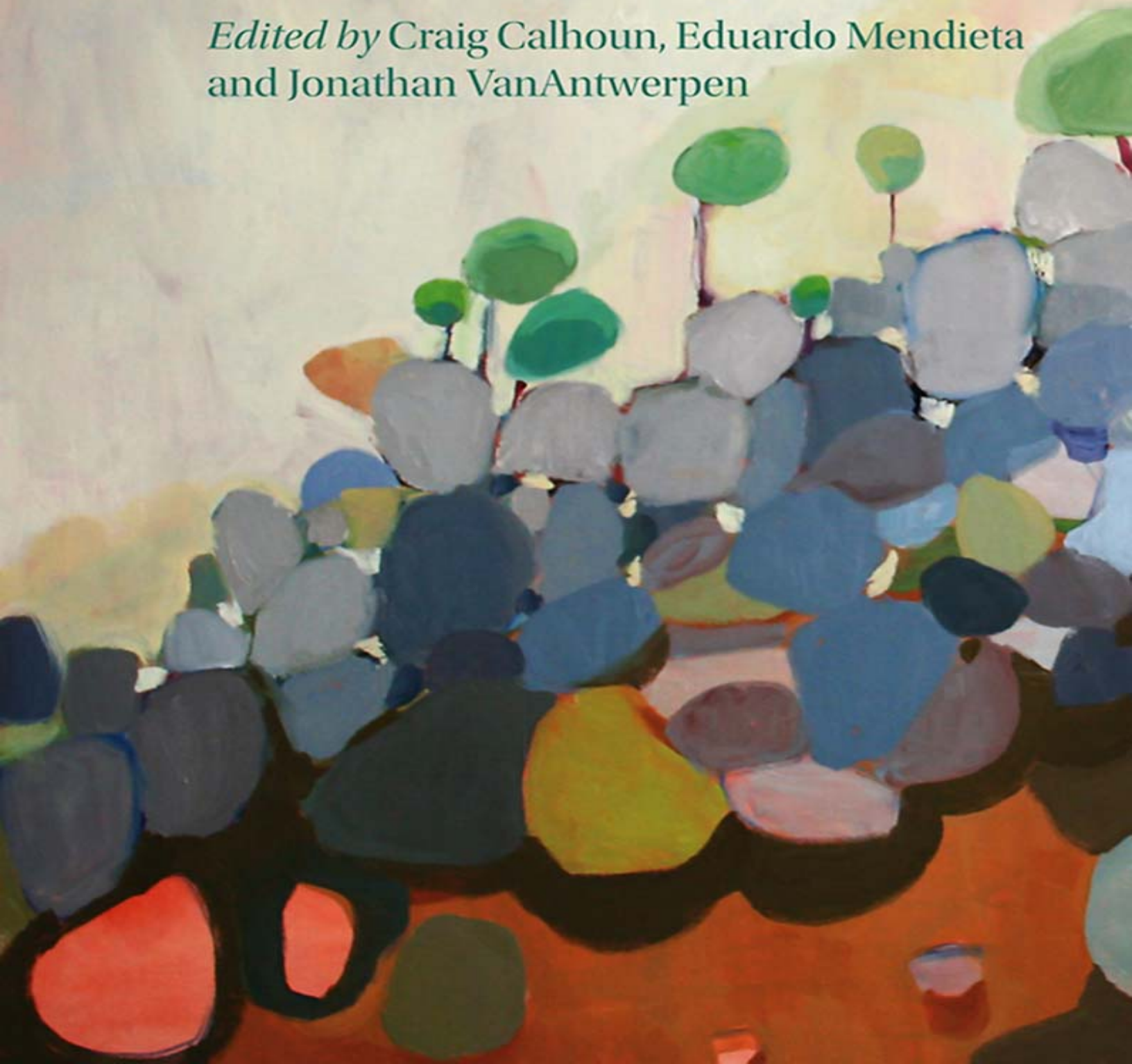
Habermas and Religion

Edited by Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen



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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited works by Jürgen Habermas. Full bibliographical details can be found in the Bibliography. Dates in square brackets are the dates of publication in English.

AWM	*An Awareness of What is Missing* (2008 [2010])
BFN	*Between Facts and Norms* (1992 [1998])
BNR	*Between Naturalism and Religion* (2005 [2008])
CES	*Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976 [1979])
CEU	*The Crisis of the European Union* (2011 [2012])
DS	*Dialectics of Secularization* (2005 [2006])
DW	*The Divided West* (2004 [2007])
EFK	*Essay on Faith and Knowledge* (n.d.)
EFP	*Europe: The Faltering Project* (2008 [2009])
FHN	*The Future of Human Nature* (2001 [2003])
FWL	"From Worldviews to the Lifeworld" (n.d.)
HE	"History and Evolution" (1976 [1979])
IO	*The Inclusion of the Other* (1996 [1998])
JA	*Justification and Application* (1991 [1993])
JS	"Justice and Solidarity" (1990)
KHI	*Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968 [1971])
KV	*Kritik der Vernunft* (2009)
LC	*Legitimation Crisis* (1973 [1975])
LPS	*The Liberating Power of Symbols* (1997 [2001])
MCCA	*Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*

(1983 [1990])

NC *The New Conservatism* (1985/1987 [1989])

OPC *On the Pragmatics of Communication* [1998]

PC *The Postnational Constellation* (1998 [2001])

PDM *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985 [1990])

PF *The Past as Future* (1993 [1994])

PMT *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1988 [1992])

PPP *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (1981 [1983])

PSI *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction* (1984 [2001])

RPS “Religion in the Public Sphere” (2006)

RR *Religion and Rationality* (2002)

STPS *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962 [1989])

TCA *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981 [1984/1987])

TJ *Truth and Justification* (1999 [2003])

TRS *Toward a Rational Society* (1958/1968 [1970])

Editors’ Introduction

For social and political theorists – both philosophers and social scientists – religion was long an easy subject to ignore. Or, if it wasn’t ignored, its importance was minimized. It was treated as a fading phenomenon, a survival from earlier history, not really a part of modernity. Great figures of modern social theory such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim all expected religion to lose its grip in the face of trends like capitalism, reason and rationalization, the growing complexity of social organization, and cultural pluralism. Religion demanded attention because it held back progress – not least as “the opium of the people” – or because it played a temporarily crucial role in early modern transitions before the process of secularization marked its decline, or because as it disappeared an absence was noticed, a need for new forms of ritual and new sources of social solidarity and cultural integration. These were not just nineteenth-century ideas; they remained prominent throughout the twentieth-century history of political philosophy and social theory. To be sure, there were ebbs and flows of attention to religion. There was something of a flourishing early in the twentieth century and another in the period just after World War II. But the overall pattern remained intact, and indeed religion was particularly off the agenda for philosophy and social science during the last decades of the twentieth century. This coincided with a decline in certain forms of religious practice (a decline meticulously tracked by researchers). Mainline Protestant denominations in the US lost members continuously, while newer forms of religious practice blossomed throughout the

world; religious practice plummeted even more markedly in Europe. To be sure, some researchers noticed, and puzzled over, a resurgence of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, not just in the US but throughout the world. It is for this reason that sometimes social analysts refer to this global phenomenon as the "revitalization" of religion. This received attention especially as it shaped politics – a "new religious right" – notably in the US (where, a few observers reminded us, religion hadn't faded as much or as fast as in Europe). But these observations were slow to gain center stage in most of philosophy and social science. They gained more traction in anthropology and history, perhaps, than in other disciplines, but almost everywhere the dominant intellectual framework remained the expectation of secularization.

What was widely called "the secularization *hypothesis*" became instead more of an assumption in most of political philosophy and social theory. If religion mattered, it was because of its influence in the past, and as a survival out of step with the dominant patterns of progress. This was evident not least in the work of Jürgen Habermas, perhaps the most distinguished and enduringly influential figure in these fields during the late twentieth century and to the present day.

Quite remarkably, Habermas has been at the forefront of debates since the early 1960s. He was the foremost representative of the Frankfurt tradition of critical theory, but he also engaged in extended debates and reciprocal learning with Niklas Luhmann, Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Rawls, Robert Brandom, and others of the most influential thinkers in philosophy and social science. He wrote fundamental work in philosophical anthropology and epistemology; he put the idea of the public sphere at the center of thinking about democracy; in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, he produced the most important analysis of reason and rationalization since Weber and the most influential synthesis of action theory and systems

analysis since Parsons. And, in keeping with the philosophy and social theory of his era, he did all this with what for a long time seemed like no more than passing attention to religion.

This changed, modestly in the 1990s, then with major emphasis since the beginning of the current century. The change was driven not so much by concern over past neglect or a sense of intra-theoretical need; it was driven by attention to troubling dimensions of contemporary affairs. Throughout his career, Habermas had been actively engaged in political debates, not only offering his theoretical work to help in resolving them but accepting the challenge to innovate in response to shifting public concerns and evident transformation in society. Still, it was impressive to see one of the world's most famous thinkers resist the temptation simply to defend his established views and instead take up issues that posed challenges. And Habermas's engagement with religion has demanded not just the application of his existing theory but innovation of it, and even restructuring of its fundamental assumptions.

First, Habermas was pushed by genetics and other innovations in biotechnology to ask anew about the core nature of the human (*FHN*). This led him to examine the inheritance – often left tacit – of metaphysical notions that understood the human essentially in relationship to the divine and to Creation. Habermas was disturbed most by what he saw as a potential renewal of eugenics, driven by an unchallenged technological impetus and unclarified assumptions concerning individuality and political liberty. Instead, Habermas situated his analysis of the dangers of liberal eugenics in an exploration of the moral nature of the human and human self-development. This built on Habermas's earlier work on communicative action, especially as it related to philosophical anthropology and an evolutionary theory of human capacities for social self-organization and incremental advancement of what in a

Hegelian-Marxist vocabulary might be considered “species-being.” Centrally, Habermas argued that much of the semantic import of the idea of divine Creation could be and indeed was rendered in secular terms as the idea of human dignity. Religion, Habermas suggested, was a crucial source for convictions at the heart of notions like human rights, but meaning drawn from religious faith could be translated into terms accessible to those without such faith and on the basis of reason.

Second, like many, Habermas was shocked by the 9/11 attacks. He was troubled by the fundamentalist convictions that informed some terrorist actions. This drew him into an unexpected dialogue with Jacques Derrida, a post-structuralist thinker with whom he was in many ways philosophically at odds but with whom he found impressive commonalities in analysis of the ethical and political implications of both terrorism and the US-led War on Terror (see *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*). He was also astonished and disturbed by a US President who invoked religion in framing his response and who made a public point of praying in Congress as he took the country and the world to war. Rather than just condemning what he didn’t like, Habermas struggled to articulate a theoretical account that would make sense of sharing citizenship with those who offer reasons rooted more in faith than reason and who sometimes reach troubling, literally terrifying conclusions. He repeatedly engaged Kierkegaard, a central figure in both religious and secular philosophical thinking about faith and knowledge, but even more drew on Kant and a tradition he construed as advancing a procedural approach over the search for prior substantive commonalities as a basis for collective life (*BNR*). Habermas also notably situated the rising prominence of religion in the public sphere in relationship to “the epoch-making historical juncture of 1989–90” as well as more recent events (“Religion in the Public Sphere,” *BNR*, 114). It reflected not only age-old

questions about faith and knowledge, but also a specific historical period shaped by geopolitical chaos and a weakening of apparent alternatives to capitalist domination.

Third, and at the same time, Habermas was worried by the difficulties of integrating a growing and increasingly visible Muslim minority into the European public sphere. This worry was reinforced by efforts to make official declarations of Europe's Christian identity, for example, in proposals for the Basic Law. It intensified more general concerns over strains in the European Union that had drawn Habermas's attention for several years. A strong supporter of the European project, he called for a constitution that would provide the procedural basis for mutual ethico-political commitments ("Why Europe Needs a Constitution," *New Left Review*, 2001, and widely reprinted). Europe offered a prime example of the kind of "complementary learning process" he thought could drive progress generally, and specifically both overcome animosities that had recurrently driven the continent to war and build institutions that would provide for democracy and social welfare. He was predictably troubled when neo-liberal ideologies brought the hollowing out of such institutions, and he saw in this one reason for the growing fragility of Europe's public sphere. He saw resurgent projects of ethnic identity as threats to Europe's collective learning process and argued for "constitutional patriotism" that would unite Europeans on the basis of commitment to procedural norms for living together and reaching common decisions despite difference (*PC*, *EFP*, *CEU*). He was particularly aghast at what he saw as efforts to rehabilitate deplorable dimensions of Germany's past (*NC*, *PF*). This may help explain his surprisingly harsh response to Charles Taylor's articulation of a politics of recognition (*IO*, 8; see also *BFN*). Habermas's strong commitment to procedural rather than culturally substantive grounding for shared citizenship encouraged him to approach religion in the public sphere mainly as an

occasion for tolerance. But he was to deepen this view and introduce considerable complexity.

Both the influence of religion in American politics and the hostility to Muslims in Europe were for Habermas first and foremost questions about the public sphere. In his theory, mutual public engagement underpinned the capacity to shape forms of social organization and solidarity democratically. For this to be democratic depended on recognizing and hearing the voices of all citizens. Religion thus posed questions about inclusion and exclusion that were already on Habermas's agenda through consideration of other forms of cultural difference (see *IO*). And he was alarmed to find some secularists as intolerant toward religious voices in the public sphere as the fundamentalists they condemned. Religion also renewed questions that had long engaged Habermas about the processes by which reasoned critique and communication oriented to producing common understanding might guide both intellectual and social progress (*MCCA*, *TCA*, *JA*, *BFN*). If religious reasons depended on different intellectual and personal bases from those of others, this was potentially a limit to democratic participation guided by rational-critical discourse. Habermas came to rely on a version of Rawls's notion of translation: the obligation of citizens reciprocally to render their arguments in terms accessible to each other, and to make their best efforts to understand each other on the basis of what was common to their thought. To this he added the idea of complementary learning processes that went beyond mere translation, as citizens gained semantic content from and possibly were changed by their interactions. In each case, thinking about religion pushed Habermas further, partly because he saw more potential for the bridging of other divides through practical reason, and saw the differences between religious and secular reason as more profound.[1]

At the same time, Habermas entered into increasingly prominent public dialogues with religious thinkers – including then Cardinal Ratzinger, who was to become Pope shortly after their much publicized encounter. These actually built on a longer history of discussions, for example, with the theologian Johann-Baptist Metz. Theologians had shown considerable interest in Habermas's work for many years, and their interest solicited response and dialogue.

Habermas's exploration of religion in the public sphere created a stir, and even shocked and disturbed more than a few of his followers. The level of interest – and unease – reflected both Habermas's enormous intellectual stature and the extent to which his work had previously not just been secular but typical of lines of thinking that at first blush seemed to ignore religion. It is in light of his recent and more explicit engagement with the question of religion that his early views on the matter have been discerned and tracked (as Eduardo Mendieta does in some detail in the Appendix to this volume).

This book responds to the rich intellectual debates that have accompanied Habermas's engagement with issues of religion. Its authors are among the most prominent philosophers and social and political theorists in the world. For some, religion is a primary concern. For others, it is a secondary dimension to their interest in ethics, public discourse, social solidarity, or social conflict. They are concerned less with a specialist understanding of religion than with exploring how different understandings of religion should fit into and inform broader perspectives on society and social change, on knowledge and human existence. Some write from perspectives informed by religious belief; some are sharply antagonistic to theocentric theories. What unites them are the convictions that how we think about religion is centrally important today, and that the writings of Jürgen Habermas are exceptionally helpful stimuli to better thinking.[2]

Habermas Takes Up Religion

Habermas has shown a serious interest in religion for at least the last twenty years. To be sure, he gave attention to Weber's account of both the role of religion in producing modernity – especially the Protestant Ethic (see *TCA*, vol. 1, ch. II). And he attended to some religious thinkers like Gershom Sholem (1978 in *PPP*; 1997 in *LPS* and *RR*), and to the religious influence of Jewish philosophers on members of the Frankfurt School, in particular, and German idealism, in general (*PPP*). But religion figured in rather more secondary and subterranean ways in Habermas's core philosophical and sociological analyses. It appeared to be neither an important topic for attention nor an important intellectual source. This assessment is now being revised from the perspective of Habermas's increasing interest in "faith and reason."

Indeed, Habermas produced accounts of the Enlightenment and modernity generally from which religion was remarkably missing. In this he was not entirely out of step with contemporary theorists, but the pattern was striking, especially considering the capacious, encyclopedic nature of his writing and theory-building. It is remarkable that religion is not considered seriously in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and that religious thought is not taken up as such in *Knowledge and Human Interests.*

Even Habermas's engagement with Kant, which was formative for his mature work, did not initially address Kant's philosophy of religion – or his complex relationship to religion – with much depth. This did of course change, in the case of Kant most prominently with "On the Boundary between Faith and Knowledge" (chapter 8 of *BNR*). Most of Habermas's early discussions of religion were contained and constrained by the assumptions of secularism; indeed, this personal overcoming of the limits of inadequately reflective

secularism may be one of the most basic meanings of his controversial term “postsecular.” But not only did Habermas expect more reduction in religion’s role through the course of modernity than actually occurred; he also saw less of religion’s role in the constitution of modernity throughout its history than we, or perhaps he now, might have wished. We can see early examples of his changing perspective in his considerations of transcendence and anamnestic reason (overcoming forgetting) during the 1990s (reprinted in *RR*).

One of Habermas’s most famous early books, namely, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, is an example illustrating that perhaps the most central ways in which religion has come to the forefront of contemporary debates – and Habermas’s attention – is through challenges to the liberal institutionalization of the public sphere. The nearly 30-year delay before it was published in English translation meant that it had a sort of second life after it appeared in 1989.[3] This not only associated it with new developments in political theory, like the idea of deliberative democracy, but with momentous public events like the crises of communist states, worldwide protest movements like Solidarity in Poland and the Tiananmen Square democracy movement in China, as well as the eventual unification of Germany. And, as newly published, Habermas’s intellectual framework became basic to efforts to understand the new roles religion played in contemporary democracies.

Yet religion simply doesn’t figure in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, 1989b).[4] This is not just a matter of skewed examples, but of the overall structure of the book. An account of the formation and transformation of the European public sphere might very plausibly have begun with the Reformation. This was when print publics first emerged; in many countries this was the first time intellectual debates were conducted in the demotic European languages and galvanized large

populations. The Reformation overlapped the Renaissance and both are arguably eras in the history of secularism as well as religion. But the crucial point is simply that a history and social theory of the public sphere that started by recognizing the intertwining of political discourse (and indeed social and economic discourse) with religious debate in early modern Europe would have made for an importantly different perspective on the public sphere.

Something of the same thing could be said for Habermas's major engagements with questions of political legitimacy and institutional change (*LC*) and law and democracy (*BFN*). Religion does get some attention in his magnum opus, *Theory of Communicative Action*. But it appears mainly as central to the enchanted worldview (in Weber's term), a worldview from which communicative action, reason, and social progress free people, not as itself advanced through communicative action; or, following Durkheim, as the precursor to a social solidarity and universalistic moral attitudes, but destined to be assimilated *in toto* in the glue of society. It matters more for motivation than meaning. Religion is, in the sense mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, of *transitional* interest as it figures in early phases of modernity. Part of Habermas's shift in thinking in the last two decades comes with his recognition that religion's significance has remained great and that it includes possibly under-recognized potential.

There is, thus, a certain analogy between Habermas's engagement with religion late in his career and his engagement with the category of the public sphere near its start. In each case, he focused on an aspect of modern society that was dismissed and sometimes even attacked by much of the left (with which he otherwise identified). In the early 1960s, it was common for Marxists to denigrate "mere bourgeois democracy" as at best of tactical utility, possibly helpful in bringing about a transition to socialism, but not valuable in and of itself. And the 1950s did reveal at best a

conservative and highly managed version of democracy, not least in the quietist, unreflective Adenauer era in Germany. Yet Habermas argued that even though the public sphere was a category of bourgeois society, limited in its bourgeois forms and distorted by its actual institutional history, it was nonetheless one with great potential for advancing transformative struggles and bringing greater human liberation. The aged Max Horkheimer criticized Habermas's treatment of the public sphere for what he saw as an invitation to renew popular, possibly popul*ist* struggles that he feared (remembering the rise of National Socialism) could be potentially dangerous. Habermas's book was much more positively received by the new left, and it did indeed breathe new life into democratic struggles. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, though, Habermas was increasingly concerned by an apparent exhaustion of these struggles. The left seemed to have lost intellectual creativity as well as momentum. Not just the radical left but democratic liberalism itself needed an infusion of new thinking, new sources of meaning, and better ways of connecting enduring values to new issues. And here Habermas saw semantic potential in religion. Religious ideas and language had been important throughout the history of struggles to improve human life and society. Not only had religious movements been part of that history, but words and concepts, utopian ideals, and habits of solidarity had migrated from purely religious usage to broader and sometimes secular usage. Some in a sense had been "translated." Many had brought new infusions of meaning, with new capacities for creativity and understanding.

Though Habermas's interest in religion had been growing for a decade, the depth and extent of his engagement came as a surprise to many early in the third millenium of the Common Era. More than any other single work, his lengthy essay on "Religion in the Public Sphere" provoked wide-

ranging responses. The text appeared in several versions in different contexts, from the European *Journal of Philosophy* to a range of online versions linked to different oral presentations, and inclusion as a chapter in Habermas's book *Between Naturalism and Religion*. Militant atheists decried it as evidence that Habermas was growing soft on religion. Thoroughly secular critical theorists were unsure just what to make of it. Some religious thinkers embraced it as a welcome sign of constructive dialogue, though many were also critical of specifics and some accused Habermas of continuing secularist prejudice against religion. It is possible that Habermas surprised himself. When he began to ask more indepth questions about religion, these raised issues for other themes in his work. Religion pressed him to think further about philosophical anthropology, about the prepolitical bases for democratic politics, about the relationship between personal and cultural identity and citizenship, about procedural ethics and substantive morality, about tolerance, about the relationship between faith and knowledge, and about liberalism and its limits. It entered into his examination of the importance and problems of European unification, of differences between Europe and the US, and of the problems of both terrorism and the War on Terror.

Habermas's work on religion is shaped by both immediate public affairs and deep roots in philosophy and social theory. It informs both areas in important ways. In the remainder of this introduction, we offer an orientation to the contributions of the chapters that follow. In each of these, distinguished contributors take up Habermas's more recent work in relation to their own disciplines, perspectives, and sense of what is vitally important. Together they offer a guide not just to reading Habermas, but to making sense of today's major arguments over the place of religion in philosophy, political theory, and critical social thought.

The Contents of the Book

In the book's opening chapter, sociologist **José Casanova** offers one of the most synoptic and incisive discussions to date of the multiple and contested meanings of secularity and secularization, constructing a typology of the different ways in which they have been and can be understood, to which he correlates a range of senses in which, in turn, the postsecular may be thought. First there is what Casanova calls "mere secularity," in which the secular refers simply to the time before the advent of the kingdom of God. Secularization, from this perspective, refers to two processes: the disenchantment of the temporal and the laicization of the spiritual. Accordingly, the postsecular would imply their reversal: a re-enchantment, or re-spiritualization, of the mundane world as well as a de-laicization of religion. This, however, is not what Habermas means by postsecular, Casanova avers. A second meaning of secularization, then, is what he calls "self-contained secularity," best illustrated, perhaps, by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (2007). For Taylor, religion has become but one among many possible and permissible moral and cognitive orientations within the "immanent frame" of modern society and subjectivity. Corresponding to this version of secularity is a concept of postsecularism that would suggest something like "secularization in reverse." But, as Casanova notes, this is simply not borne out by empirical observation.

Nor does Habermas seem to subscribe to this sense of postsecularism. There is, finally, a third meaning of the secular, Casanova's "secularist secularity," or "secularism as stadial consciousness" – the naturalization of secularity by a philosophy of history that hypostatizes secularization as a universal process of human development, the teleological movement of which culminates in the abandonment of childish belief and the ascension to mature

unbelief. It is this understanding of secularity to which Habermas opposes his concept of the postsecular, inasmuch as secularist secularity, qua philosophy of history, is an ideology that relegates “religion” to a primitive stage of human development. Here, postsecularism is a challenge: the ideological insouciance that assures a certain West of its alleged superiority over other cultures, not least within its own borders. In the second section of his chapter, Casanova, with characteristic acuity, advances his case for disaggregating our understandings of secularity and secularization by way of a comparison of the divergent paths toward secularization taken respectively by Europe and the United States. In the third and final section, he turns again to Habermas’s affirmation of a postsecular attitude, contextualizing it in relation to some of the most pressing challenges of contemporary global politics.

In chapter 2, **María Herrera Lima** identifies two different ways of reading Habermas’s recent work, and seeing it as addressed to two different sorts of problematics. On the one hand, Habermas’s work can be seen as addressing a set of political and legal issues, related to the conditions for mutual coexistence of secular and religious communities under conditions of what John Rawls has called “reasonable” pluralism. On the other hand, his work can be read as addressing a series of conceptual and historical issues, and as concerned with tracing a genealogy of modern ideas of justice that combine religious and secular sources, in what Herrera Lima calls Habermas’s “new genealogy of faith and reason.” Pointing to difficulties in what she refers to as Habermas’s “middle way” between the excesses of modern secularists and the anti-modern and anti-liberal bias of some of the contemporary defenders of a religious revival – difficulties she associates with the normative expectations Habermas would place on both religious and secular citizens – Herrera Lima proposes a stronger role for historical studies than the one she finds in Habermas’s work. Considering the

intertwined traditions of religious and secular thought in European history, as well as reconstructions of that history by both Hans Blumenberg and Charles Taylor, she seeks “to understand the changed historical and social conditions for religious beliefs and practices in our secular age” and to advance an understanding of secularization as a contingent historical process full of local particularities. Emphasizing, as Taylor does, the optionality of contemporary forms of religious belief and practice – that is, the extent to which religion has become one “choice” among others – Herrera Lima argues that the transformations associated with a secular age “make it impossible to appeal to religion *alone* as a remedy for the lack of solidarity and other distortions of contemporary social life, since, as the sociological evidence shows, they are very much part of the *same* cultural formation.” She then turns, in closing, to a reconsideration of the relationship between philosophy and religion, and to the place of religion in the public sphere, suggesting that we cannot “single out religion as a privileged source of moral insights” and, indeed, that there is “no distinct body of religious beliefs and practices isolated from the life of society and its interests that we could invoke as an indisputable source of moral insights.”

María Pía Lara situates Habermas’s work on religion within the rich and variegated history of debates around the religious sources of modernity. The supposition that political modernity is “dependent” on a religious prehistory has become all but taken for granted, she argues, to the neglect of the fact that the modern period has also witnessed “fundamental contributions to politics that had little or nothing to do with religion.” According to Pía Lara, the most important moral and political concepts of the modern age cannot be comprehended merely as translations or secularizations of theological antecedents, as both Carl Schmitt and Karl Löwith famously argued. It was on the basis of this philosophical position, she contends, that each

assumed a view both pessimistic and conservative in regard to political modernity. Thus, she recurs instead to Hans Blumenberg's rebuttal to Schmitt and Löwith, namely, that, as opposed to a "substantial continuation" of the theologico-political into modernity, the latter rather articulates itself through the "reoccupation" of the conceptual *positions* once, but not inevitably, tenanted by theological concepts. In the subsequent sections of her essay, Pía Lara recalls the influence of Hannah Arendt on Habermas (an influence that the latter has expressly acknowledged). It was Arendt, she writes, who best articulated "the proper conceptual frame of politics by proposing the concept of worldliness as its reference." For Arendt as well as for Habermas, political modernity emerges in particular through a reconceptualization of power, no longer as sovereign authority (Schmitt's exemplar of a secularized theological concept), but as an essentially mundane as well as an essentially collective capacity. At the heart of Pía Lara's rich reconstruction of a major chapter in modern intellectual history, then, is the question of what exactly Habermas means when he says that it is the task of a postmetaphysical philosophy to "translate" the semantic contents of religious concepts. Translation, it is implied, means less the preservation of those semantic contents under the guise of a different discursive register than a generative refunctioning and repositioning of conceptual positions in new constellations, through which the source and target languages, as it were, are rendered incommensurable with one another. Her chapter thus forces us to think more expansively and with added nuance about what it is that Habermas means by "translation."

Nicholas Wolterstoff takes up the themes of postmetaphysical philosophy, religion, and political discourse, three phenomena whose interrelations he sees as a central preoccupation of Habermas's recent writings. Wolterstorff opens his chapter with a reconstruction and

brief summary of what Habermas says about religion and secularization, identifying in Habermas's work an understanding of religion as a "sacred complex" of worldview, scripture, and communal ritual. By contrast, postmetaphysical philosophy, as Habermas conceives it, neither incorporates a worldview nor seeks to develop one. Instead, it aims to make explicit the structure of our shared lifeworld. Habermas's project of postmetaphysical philosophy – "the orienting center" of his thought – is also defined both by its secular understanding of reason and by a commitment to a particular form of rationality. Wolterstorff dubs this "Kant-rationality," which he defines as the expectation that a body of thought be "based solely on premises and inferences that all cognitively competent, adult human beings would accept if those premises and reasons were presented to them, if they understood them, if they possessed the relevant background information, and if they freely reflected on them at sufficient length." Postmetaphysical philosophy is conceived as secular, but not "secularistic," and through constructive dialogue with religion, it seeks – in Habermas's words – to "salvage cognitive contents from religious traditions," or to appropriate elements from religious worldviews. Yet Wolterstorff questions the understanding of reason and rationality by which Habermas claims to distinguish postmetaphysical philosophy from religion, suggesting that "every body of philosophical though is limited in its persuasive powers." There is, Wolterstorff argues, "no extant postmetaphysical philosophy," because "there is no substantial body of philosophical thought that satisfies the requirement of Kant-rationality." Indeed, he suggests, there are powerful reasons to believe that there never will be, as "philosophical reflection under conditions of freedom expands the scope of disagreement." Furthermore, Wolterstorff concludes, the requirements of Kant-rationality oversimplify the complex and diverse role of reasons and

reason-giving in philosophy, in part because “we do not usually aim our remarks at humanity in general,” but rather at a specific audience or readership, and in part because we offer reasons with different aims in mind – at times to persuade, and at other times simply to make explicit the reasons for which we hold the position we do. We do not always expect the reasons we give to be persuasive.

Like Wolterstorff, **Thomas McCarthy** is at pains to emphasize both diversity and persistent disagreement. Attending to Habermas’s reconstruction of the critique of reason, which he sees as at the heart of Habermas’s “unfinished project of enlightenment,” McCarthy calls for Habermas to make “a still sharper descent from the heights of transcendental philosophy.” Habermas’s demanding notion of discourse, McCarthy argues, is open at multiple points to contestation from both modernized believers and postmetaphysical reasoners, and the “path of reconciliation he proposes” between faith and reason “is rife with dialectical and hermeneutical snares.” Reflective believers, for example, may dispute his sharp separation of truth and rightness and goodness, or otherwise reject the accounts of reason and faith that figure in his analysis of cognitive presuppositions and global dialogue. Indeed, McCarthy suggests – drawing on extensive earlier work of his own – Habermas’s conceptualization of the distinction between ethical and moral claims gives rise to an “inextricable entwinement” of moral and ethical discourse about the right and the good, and so must face a potentially endless set of disagreements regarding the interpretation and application of moral principles. While Habermas would seek to fix the terms of interpretation by appealing to a general analytical framework, such frameworks are themselves, McCarthy argues, historically and culturally situated, and thereby open to contestation and ongoing disagreements, which reflect different interpretive and evaluative standpoints. Within the human sciences, the notion of “one right answer”

may reasonably serve a “regulative” function – forming an indispensable pragmatic presupposition of practices of reasoned disagreement – but the myriad ongoing disagreements we find within these branches of knowledge, frequently keyed to different interpretive starting points, suggest that we cannot reasonably expect to regularly agree upon that “one right answer.” Among the perennial contestants for claims to knowledge in these arenas will be religiously imbued interpretations and explanations, and in the penultimate section of his chapter McCarthy considers a set of problematic distinctions in Habermas’s work – between cultural and political public spheres, between the “opaque core” and rationalizable periphery of religious faith, and between the accessibility and acceptability of norms

– that bear on Habermas’s proposed terms of engagement among secular thinkers and religious believers. Putting “dialectical and hermeneutical pressure” on these key analytical distinctions, McCarthy underscores the importance of conceiving of theorizing as a form of reflective participation in the very communicative practices it seeks to understand and inform. “One should not expect the fault lines between faith and reason to be bridged in theory, once and for all,” he writes, “but rather repeatedly and variously in a global proliferation of situated practices.”

According to **Amy Allen**, Habermas’s engagement with religion ought to be understood against the background of his sustained attempt at a “genealogy of postsecular reason.” She notes that Habermas himself has taken up the term *genealogy* to refer to his own project of reconstructing the “learning process” that societies undergo in their journeys through secularization, rationalization, and modernization. Adopting Colin Koopman’s classification of three distinct modes, or types, of genealogy – “subversive, vindicatory, and problematizing” – she goes on to argue that Habermas, in his genealogical reconstruction of postsecular reason, should be read as combining both vindicatory and

problematizing tendencies, while muffling the more subversive registers of the genealogical approach (sounded, by way of contrast, to such reverberating effect by the likes of Nietzsche and Foucault). She contends in particular that Habermas unduly diminishes the critical capacity of his own project by rejecting contextualist philosophical standpoints and insisting instead on the inviolable "context-transcendence of validity claims," which position, she notes, "has long been central to [his] philosophical project, and a principal means by which he has distinguished his way out of the philosophy of the subject from rival approaches." Habermas's avowed opposition to contextualism, moreover, rubs up uncomfortably against not only his stated political positions – particularly his "goal of framing a genuinely open-ended and symmetrical dialogue between religious and secular citizens" – but also his own philosophical genealogy, as it were. Inasmuch, that is, as Habermas acknowledges that the notion of context-transcendence is itself historically situated, and so, however broadly speaking, context-specific, he ought rather to adopt the position of what Allen calls the "principled contextualist," which "maintains that [...] we understand claims to normative validity (and also truth) as context-transcending, in the sense that they aim toward transcendence," but not in the sense that transcendence simply appertains, *eo ipso*, to such claims. Hence, Allen puts forth a reading of Habermas's latest project decidedly inflected by the contextualism that he "needlessly demonizes," in her words, but in the interest, nevertheless, of advancing both his genealogical reconstruction of philosophical modernity and the democratic and egalitarian aspirations to which it is conjoined.

J. M. Bernstein's contribution is an original, and potentially upending, critique of Habermas's lately advanced conception of a "postsecular society." Bernstein raises fundamental doubts as to whether the project of

“postsecularity” is a coherent and defensible one. If the position that Habermas has taken in recent writings is indeed tenable, he says, it is so only insofar as it is a “radically secularist” one after all. Acknowledging at the outset the “reconciliatory rhetoric and tone” of Habermas’s foray into religion, Bernstein nonetheless suspects that his attempt to equalize the “epistemic and attitudinal burdens on secular and religious citizens” is an empty, because misunderstood, gesture – first, because such an equalization can never lead to a suspension of the giving and taking of reasons (such as is implied, according to Bernstein, in the concept of faith) without abrogating the axioms of deliberative democracy, but also because the conditions of political participation to which Habermas would hold the citizens of a democratic state are inherently prejudiced in favor of the unconfessing subject. And “rightly so,” Bernstein quips, since faith is that which neither modern subjectivity nor the democratic polity can abide without, in effect, sacrificing themselves. The affirmation of faith, according to Bernstein, bespeaks a performative contradiction, the dissolution of which has been the signal accomplishment of secular reason. As faith is beyond comprehension, what sustains it despite its logical impossibility, argues Bernstein, through a reading of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, is its entailment of “the sacrifice of the other,” as embodied in Isaac in the story of Abraham, and, more broadly, of “the sacrifice of love of the world as orienting our being in the world.” The point, of course, is not that faith commits its confessor literally to perform sacrificial acts, but that it does stand or fall on an abrogation of the demands of deliberative justification, which makes it “incommensurable with worldly ethics.” By way of a counterpoint to Kierkegaard, Bernstein proffers a reading of Caravaggio’s second version of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603), a painting that exposes us, through the agonized gaze of Isaac, to the inescapability of the