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In the fall of 2001, upon receiving the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers and Publishers Association, Jürgen Habermas (to the surprise of many) called on the secular West to reevaluate its vision of modernity, and in particular to engage in real dialogue with religious believers, appropriate religious ethical insights, and include religious voices in the public sphere. This moment has been called Habermas's "postsecular turn," and it is the purpose of *The Postsecular Political Philosophy of Jürgen Habermas* to examine this turn, what led Habermas to make it, and whether it has been philosophically successful. Dafydd Huw Rees's analysis is superb, and readers will find here a masterful guide to Habermas's thought as well as a trenchant critic of his recent rapprochement with religion.

The six chapters that follow his introductory overview move steadily through Habermas's mature philosophy before 2001, then a series of motives for his postsecular turn, and finally careful analysis and evaluation of Habermas's account of postsecular deliberative democracy.

In his major works (especially *The Theory of Communicative Action*) published in the 1970s and 1980s, Habermas divides human development into three stages: primitive, traditional, and modern. Religion and the sacred, characteristic of the transitional "traditional" period, is little more than "a pocket of myth which survives into a later era [the traditional era], like a nature reserve inside a city" (31). Once we transition to the "modern" period, "religion [is] a byproduct of entangled attitudes, worlds and validity-claims

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which the modern era has surpassed" (42). "Traditional" societies are a transitional period between the ritual and mythic "undifferentiated" past (where communication is mediated by symbols) and the modern, discourse-based and "differentiated" present (where communication is mediated by propositions). For example, the deductive reasoning of traditional, religious society is partly freed from primitive analogy (it constructs deductive, propositional arguments), and partly dependent on primitive modes of rationality (it assumes first principles that cannot be rationally defended). Rational discourse in modern society must adhere to Habermas's "discourse principle," according to which "only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity *as participants in a practical discourse*" (39, quoting Habermas).

In the 1980s and 1990s Habermas deepened his critique of religion while at the same time making room for it and so foreshadowing his postsecular turn. In these texts, religion is part of the "metaphysical method" whereby "individuals can access the structures of reality by mental effort alone" (47). Habermas and other postmetaphysical philosophers of late modernity do "not use contemplation to access reality as a whole....They reconstruct species-wide competences by reading off the implicit knowledge human beings use in their ordinary interactions" (52). Postmetaphysical thinking is therefore "weakly transcendental," since it gives up any attempt at a God's-eye view of reality, but nevertheless seeks to identify the universal conditions of the possibility of communication itself. This means that we can identify the behavioral conditions necessary for moral discourse (such as the discourse principle), but must remain agnostic about the goodness or badness of individual life-projects or any substantive common good. But since all of us need to engage in ethical discourse that addresses these problems, and philosophy cannot help us, Habermas defends "ethical appropriation" as "a procedure for taking values and ideas from religious discourse over into secular ethical discourse" (67). We might therefore understand "confessional literature in the tradition of Rousseau...as a secularized form of prayer, in which 'the prayer was deflated into a public conversation'" (62). Though Rees argues that ethical appropriation is required by the postmetaphysical paradigm, he also argues that the process of appropriation is undertheorized in Habermas, and only rarely addressed by commentators. This is particularly important because the process appears to be the forerunner of the "translation" of religious language necessary for Habermas's postsecular political theory.

Habermas's postmetaphysical philosophy is based on a rational reconstruction of the intersubjective presuppositions of human communication. As Rees says, Habermas "can extract the discourse theory of morality from lifeworld procedures for repairing broken communication because human beings, as a matter of fact, are creatures who inhabit an intersubjective lifeworld and coordinate their actions using validity claims" (76). In short, Habermas's substantive claims are grounded in a particular human "form of life," and Habermas assumes "that his unstated theory of human nature is an accurate account of the invariant facts about human beings" (77). Developments in biotechnology towards the end of the twentieth century shook this conviction, since it became apparent that we were developing the power to change our lifeform, and therefore needed to deliberate about which lifeform should be normative. This kind of deliberation is a form of ethical ("species-ethical") deliberation, and so off limits to postmetaphysical thinking. "The anthropic problem," says Rees, "is not that postmetaphysical thinking tacitly relies on a theory of human nature; the problem is not that human nature is less stable than we have previously assumed. The problem is that postmetaphysical thinking, while relying on a contingent ethical self-understanding of the species, disbars itself from participating in species-ethical discourse" (82). Habermas acknowledged this problem and formulated some tentative arguments in response, but they are caught in a dilemma. To the extent that they provide species-ethical guidance, they are no longer postmetaphysical, and to the extent that they are postmetaphysical, they are bound by the conditions of the form of life presupposed by the deliberative rationality under examination. Accordingly, argues Rees, "Habermas had realized, by 2001, that his postmetaphysical paradigm was incapable of defending its own species-ethical basis, and indeed incapable of making any arguments which could defend the human form of life from the potentially disastrous consequences of genetic modification" (104).

In addition to this problem internal to Habermas's theoretical framework, Habermas also faced an important challenge from religious believers themselves. According to Habermas, "only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent of all citizens in a discursive process of legitimation that in turn has been legally constituted" (130, quoting Habermas). If we combine this "legitimation principle" with strict secularism and the striking fact that religion is not fading away, we face the possibility of a significant number of citizens alienated from democratic politics whose alienation therefore poses a potential threat to democratic stability. As Rees concludes, "Strict secularism prevents [religious citizens] from contributing to the public sphere with the religion reasons and arguments which appeal to them. They may remain silent, or they may be forced to 'translate' their contributions into secular terms. Either way, the disjuncture between their public and private modes of discourse interrupts the process of legitimation" (132). Therefore, according to Habermas, "Secular deliberative democracy lacks legitimacy in the eyes of many of its citizens; it must be modified, since 'those who are neither willing nor able to separate their moral convictions and vocabulary into profane and religious strands must be permitted to participate in political will formation even if they use religious language'" (132).

Habermas's model of postsecular deliberative democracy proposes a twofold response. The formal public sphere (narrowly focused on the public work of courts and national parliaments) remains strictly secular; but in the informal public sphere (all other public discourse beyond formal public bodies) religious reasons and arguments are allowed and "religious contributions are translated into secular language before being fed into the formal public sphere" (140). In this way, religious citizens contribute religious reasons and arguments directly to public discourse, but these reasons and arguments in turn undergo "secular translation" that makes them available to the formal public sphere (and so provides theoretical support, for example, to species-ethical arguments) and allows religious citizens to contribute to democratic legitimacy.

The problem with this strategy, according to Rees, is that it is "pyrrhic"; "a translation of a statement is pyrrhic when it loses or destroys most of the statement's essential content—the humour of a joke, the truth-value of a factual assertion, the beauty of a line of poetry—to such an extent that it would be better not to translate at all" (157). There are two reasons for this. First, secular translation must fulfill contradictory demands. On one hand (as in the case of ethical appropriation), translation must preserve enough of the original religious context that religious citizens can acknowledge the translated content as related to their own beliefs substantially enough to support legitimacy. On the other hand, translation must preserve the secular language of the formal public sphere in order to maintain the rationality purity of that sphere and in turn make possible the successful appropriation of formerly religious content. But these criteria are at odds with one another; to the extent the "surrounding substance of piety" (158) for religious beliefs is preserved, legitimacy will be possible but not the secularity of the formal public sphere, and to the extent the integrity of the formal public sphere is maintained, neither legitimacy for religious citizens nor the appropriation of their insights is possible. This first problem is at least partially explained by the second: when the form and content of a statement are entangled, translation is always problematic (for example, how does one translate into another language the sentence "The seventh word of this sentence has three letters"?). And according to Habermas, religious statements display this kind of entanglement. "He thinks that the content of statements about 'the creator and redeemer God…theodicy, [and] the event of salvation' rely on the form of religious language, namely that 'the ontic, normative, and expressive aspects of validity…remain fused together'" (165, quoting Habermas). Here it is crucial that Rees emphasizes repeatedly that we have almost no examples from Habermas, or sympathetic scholars, of successful sacred to secular translation. One suspects that this is a research program consisting of one large promissory note, and Rees's arguments give us persuasive reasons for thinking we will never collect.

Rees's conclusion, however, is striking and itself a kind of promissory note. Rather than look to religious resources for species-ethical arguments, we should make room within postmetaphysical thinking itself for ethical reflection. "If we remove ethics from the category of metaphysics, and find a space for addressing it within postmetaphysical philosophy, then the anthropic problem ceases to be intractable, and we as philosophers are able to address vital questions of the good for individuals, communities, and the species as a whole" (172).

Nietzsche saw perfectly well that we cannot help ourselves to Christian morality having cast off Christianity. If we are persuaded by Habermas's philosophical approach, then it is a significant problem that Christianity, not to mention other religions, is not going away and, even worse, seems better off than Habermas's postmetaphysical philosophy when it comes to fundamental problems of ethics and politics. Rees is understandably scandalized by the attempt to bring (translated) Christian morality within the postmetaphysical fold. But we have good reason to think that making ethics itself a part of Habermasian postmetaphysical thinking will cause similar problems. We owe Rees our thanks for making this impasse clear, and for showing us what might possibly be the extended endgame of Habermas's postmetaphysical project.