The Crisis of Representation
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Invitation

Introductory Remarks on the Issue “The Crisis of Representation”

Jakob Deibl / Lisa Achathaler

The introductory remarks of the issue J-RaT 7 function as an invitation to deal with the topic of the Crisis of Representation. The Crisis, in this context, has not only a political and economic dimension, but a cultural, aesthetic and religious one as well. Thus, a serious inquiry into this complex and multidimensional phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary approach. The issue targets the phenomena at hand through 15 contributions. One common aim that holds the issue together is the analysis of the nature of the crisis, which helps to find suitable theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, the term itself functions as a tool that enables the analysis of specific societal developments.

Crisis of Representation; Representation

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Since 2017 Lisa Achathaler works at the Research Centre Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society (RaT) in Vienna. Her prior studies include International Development at the University of Vienna and Applied Crop Sciences at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna. In the year 2017 she took up the PhD programme Advanced Theological Studies at the University of Vienna, in the framework of which she recently received an Uni:docs Fellowship by the University of Vienna. Forthcoming publication: “Rekonvaleszenz. Kunst. Blickwechsel”. In: Kunst Heilt Medizin. 10 Werke.
It is a risky endeavour to write an introduction for a series of papers which, as a common ground, all tackle the notion of a “Crisis of Representation”. One might reasonably expect a representation of the issue’s content, its circumstances, guidelines, main arguments and aims from a preface. However, when its content is about the crisis of representation itself, this causes problems as the very possibility of a representation is at stake. Can the “Crisis of Representation” be captured and represented in a general introduction, in a broad overview, in a brief sketch? Or in even more general terms: are there ways to represent the “Crisis of Representation” or does this difficulty reveal that “crisis” is inherent to every process of representation? Can it be called “the hidden face” of every logic of representation? Giving an introduction, we cannot further expand these problems; however, we want to invite the reader to engage themselves deeply in the papers presented in the volume at hand. The following paragraphs should therefore be read rather as an invitation than as an introduction.

What we present in this volume started with an invitation. Carl Raschke (University of Denver) and Kurt Appel (University of Vienna, Research Centre for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society) decided to invite scholars from Vienna University as well as from other international universities to give a talk on the notion of “Crisis of Representation”. The organizers suggested that speakers tackle the task through focusing on neoliberalism, ethno-nationalism, religious conservativism and symptoms of crisis in politics, religion and culture. In comparison to other (maybe more regular) conferences the Research Centre Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society (RaT) has hosted so far, this one stood out in particular, as it was an adventurous exploration in which we challenged the invited scholars to treat the topic of the workshop in whatever sense they interpreted it. This led to a completely open process in which outcomes were unforeseeable and which led to great curiosity about how the participants would confront the topic.

In total, ten scholars from different academic disciplines (political sciences, Islamic studies, philosophy and theology) followed our invitation to the first workshop on the topic and gave their talks on the 26th and 27th of June 2017. In short, all of them talked about different “crises” each with specific approaches to the definition of the term “representation”. However, despite this vague and fuzzy character that inherently accompanied talking about a ”Crisis of Representation” and what this entailed, it still proved to be a helpful tool to frame and analyze current developments we all somehow seemed to perceive. For this reason, we agreed on organizing a follow-up workshop with precisely the same title. Another seven scholars from various disciplines (political sciences, juridical studies and philosophy) participated in this workshop which took place on the 12th of March 2018. Again, the framework was rather loose, kept together solely by the focus on whatever “Crisis of Representation” could mean.
To us, one major outcome was the realization that we were dealing with a “work in progress”, as the discussion on the topic had only just opened up, even after having concluded the second workshop, and it served as an impulse, for further continuation. Consequently, we wanted to portray this heterogeneity rather than aiming at an eager formation of a common synthesis of the contributions. With regard to the publication, our purpose was to capture this atmosphere, which also meant to urge for a prompt publication within no more than a few months. We are glad that many of the scholars met the tight deadline and sent us their revised texts.

We would very much like to thank Faye Lewis, who did all the English proof reading for us, Manuela Kamper as well as Philipp Schlögl, who did most of the editing of the texts, Natalie Eder for transcriptions, and Marlene Deibl and Daniel Kuran, who were part of the organizational committee of the workshops and esteemed members of the RaT team. Searching for suitable reviewers for each article, too, revealed an interesting aspect on the topic: talking about a “Crisis of Representation” seems to stimulate discourses to cross well-shaped fields of academic research and allows for a refreshing exploration of new and unexpected encounters. However, it was exactly for this reason, that, at times, it was quite difficult to find reviewers whose expertise could cover all the raised fields that were tackled in only one paper. Even though we might not have been able to agree on a definition of “Crisis of Representation”, we were able to successfully raise and discuss new perspectives on developments that societies are currently undergoing.

b)

Bearing in mind the highly diverse fields that were confronted in the articles of this interdisciplinary issue, it would have been very difficult – if not impossible – to cover the state of the art beforehand. Therefore, we kindly recommend the respective literature which can be found listed in each article.

Within the three days of discussion during the workshops we noticed a huge variety of approaches that were brought up. If we try to bundle the texts which the authors referred to, we learn that there were at least some recurring references to specific texts; among them the Torah/Pentateuch/5 Books of Moses, especially Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy. Regarding classical philosophy, Kant and Hegel stand out as the most discussed authors, especially Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. Regarding contemporary philosophy, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Agamben are the respective authors that can be found in several of the contributions. The variety of points of reference show that every author tried to address the topic from his or her respective standpoint.
The following paragraphs contain characteristic quotations that reflect on the different angles of approach on the “Crisis of Representation” which the individual articles of the issue have employed. These quotations are not intended to function as summaries that substitute the course of the respective considerations. They should rather be seen as invitations, or as a glimpse that should enable the reader to retrace what is developed in detail in the articles.

Many of the contributions approach the “contemporary crisis of representation” (Carl Raschke) by finding points of reference in history. In applying such a historic approach, the “Crisis of Representation” is presented as a matter of political theology that first arose when prophetical thinking challenged ancient oriental orders of sacerdotal legitimation and royal power (Peter Zeillinger, Isabella Guanzini) as well as when Antigone resisted the king’s order and obeyed divine rule (Guanzini). The concept accompanies also the development of the Trinitarian dogma and the notion of incarnation throughout history (Raschke, Daniel Minch) and their manifold transformations until late capitalistic order (Philip Goodchild, Minch). Going back to Hegel (Kurt Appel, Andreas Gelhard, Thomas M. Schmidt) and those who received his thinking i.e. Kojève, Bataille and the Collège de Sociologie in the 1930s (Schmidt) or Rancière and Honneth (Gelhard), the reader gets important philosophical insights into the contemporary “Crisis of Representation”. A further historic approach that reveals structures of a “Crisis of Representation” follows developments in warfare starting in the 19th century, which resulted in aerial bombing. This particular example reveals a crisis that has its roots in the colonial conception of the non-Western world and that is currently striking back to liberal democracies (Rüdiger Lohlker). Furthermore, such crises may be perceived as an aesthetic problem arising at the threshold of the 20th century (Marcello Neri) or already in Romanticism (Sandra Lehmann). These historic approaches are not an end in itself – as none of the scholars seemed to be primarily interested in historiography. A question that comes to mind is, therefore, if it could be that these historic references created some sort of distance which was necessary to perceive the contemporary crisis of representation, thereby avoiding its unmediated, direct presentation?

There are two further strategies to create a kind of displacement that is necessary to uncover the “Crisis of Representation”, that is an approach via processes of translation and dialogical constellations. For example, Goodchild states (what Astrid Mattes also described in detail) that there “is a crisis of democratic representation when people sense that the decisions, forces and necessities that shape their lives derive from elsewhere”. However, in order to describe this crisis, he translates it into another type of crisis referring to financial issues. He argues “that the dynamics of a credit crisis, such as the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–8, may also shed some light on the dynamics of the political crisis of representation.” Dialogical constellations can be found when Gelhard evokes a dialogue between...
Axel Honneth and Jacques Rancière; when Schmidt evokes a dialogue between Paula Diehl and George Bataille; when “Kant’s philosophy of representation” is confronted with Hegel (Gelhard) or when Hegel’s critique on representation (Appel) is confronted with Deleuze’s critique of the critique (Lohlker) or when the Deleuzian and Guattarian interpretation of Kafka is confronted with Kafka’s writing itself (Gerald Posselt). In Guanzini’s contribution one can find a constant dialogue of prophetic and utopian thinking. These dialogical constellations either open up an interspace or create a tension between two poles which seem to be appropriate to approach the ambiguous phenomenon that is inherent to the “Crisis of Representation”. This is further developed in Appel’s article that refers to a dialogical constellation of Christianity, Islam and the secular world. He asks whether they could create an amicable relationship among them by helping each other to establish displacement and decentration towards one’s own tradition and noetic core.

The “Crisis of Representation” refrains from its immediate presentation and reveals an ambiguous or even paradoxical character. As Posselt puts it more precisely: “There is a need to take a closer look at the complex workings of representation” – and of its crisis. Difficulties rise even further, if we relate representation to religion which, for many of the authors, seems to be inevitable. As Mattes states, the “crisis of representation […] relates to religion in a variety of ways, but as neither religion, nor representation, are enclosed concepts, it is a complex task to pin them down”. On the one hand the reader of this issue will reasonably expect that the “Crisis of Representation” is outlined clearly and explicitly (“to pin it down”, as Mattes said); on the other hand, as Olivier Roy explains, the demand and the attempt to make everything explicit (without ambiguity), is already a symptom of the crisis of cultural mediation and representation.

In a few lines, some of these ambiguities are now being sketched: Lehman distinguishes between two meanings of “Crisis of Representation”. On the one hand it is a broad category of interpretation: “the modern order of life is fundamentally characterized by a crisis of representation that extends from the individual relationship with the world to the political system of government”. On the other hand, it “serves as a critical instrument where it is used to question or even delegitimize modern subjectivity”. However, “Crisis of Representation” as an instrument of critique may very well be used in an ambiguous or even divergent way: From left-wing activist groups that criticize hegemonic and excluding structures of representation “to the demand of right-wing populist parties to let the people speak for themselves via direct-democratic procedures such as plebiscites, the principle of representation as a fundamental element of democratic opinion-forming and participation is increasingly being questioned.” (Posselt) In a similar manner, Hans Schelkshorn presents socio-political developments as a consequence of a representational crisis, which then evoke a new “Crisis of Representation”: “On the one hand, the New Right emerges as a reaction against
the representational crisis in modern societies during the last decades. On the other hand, promoting a new politics of representation, the New Right produces a deep crisis of political representation.” Neri points out a deep paradox within the very concept of representation which can be found in various articles of the volume. He asks whether there is an “end of representational order, while representation is still the structure for organizing and governing what is left of modern-liberal democracy”. That means that “representation still rules in (its very) absence. But is that” – as Neri asks – “not what representation is all about? Absence that just seems to be like a presence?”

Once the hegemonic and excluding dimension of representational orders is revealed and representation led into crisis, new ambiguities, paradoxes and pit-falls arise when thinking of non-representation. Posselt talks of the “constitutive role of representation” that becomes visible “in every act of speaking” as well as when we encounter others: “We always already represent others – whether we like it or not”. According to Lohlker the core of the problem may be seen in the “creation of a position of judgment, subduing the other in a totalized representation, and leading to a hierarchical construction of the world”. Paradoxically, this totalizing character of representation is also combined with a “negation of representation”. This reveals to be the secret history of Western modernity and its colonial approaches to the world: “Crise of Representation” as non-representation or denied representation of whomever is construed as the non-Western other. As Appel points out, the program of (pretended) total depletion of representation would mean “invisible omnipresence of power”.

As it seems that “we cannot [and maybe must not?] escape the process of representation” (Posselt), we have to ask ourselves whether the dysfunctional order of representation is “the only one with which we are familiar” (Neri). Can there be “a new logic beyond this ‘old’ logic of representation” (Lohlker)? Are there any alternatives beyond representation or of a transformed understanding of it – alternatives that can be found in literature (Posselt), poetry (Lehmann), art as performance (Neri), the prophetic tradition of religions (Zeillinger, Guanzini), the utopian tradition (Guanzini), or in non-Western conceptions (Lohlker)? May alternatives be found in philosophy as well, where “a shift from representation (Vorstellung) to presentation (Darstellung)” (Gelhard) occurs? May they be found within the aesthetic programs of religions, when this program is accompanied by a gesture of “ironic-reversal” (Appel)? Does this also direct us towards the “relationship between culture and religion” (Roy) which needs to be re-opened after the (fundamentalistic) loss of the complex forms of balance, mediation, and representation? Is it possible to “overcome the aporias of representation and therefore also the crisis of political representation” by asking for what cannot be represented – and how that may be brought into synchrony with the biblical and Islamic forbiddance of representation (Zeillinger)? Is there a new kind of responsibility which is imposed upon us by the inevitability of representing others (Posselt)?
d) Targeting these questions, we now turn to short descriptions of the texts. The following part aims at giving an overview of the articles and at enabling the reader to recognize and understand the composition and structure of the issue more easily.

Section I

The issue starts with two programmatic articles by the organizers of the workshops Kurt Appel and Carl Raschke that cover many aspects that will be treated in the following articles. Kurt Appel (“Critiques of Master-Representations: The Political Dimension of the Canon between the Bible and the Qur’an”) points out that cultures inevitably represent themselves in symbols, narrations and certain types of knowledge which, at the same time, protect and mask the subject’s vulnerable and mortal core. With Hegel, Appel shows the ambivalence of religions: On the one hand, the Absolute is seen as the guarantee of all representations; on the other hand, religions are structured by the knowledge that the Absolute can never be represented, which puts an end to every totalizing form of representation. In contemporary society, theology has its task in developing a critique of master-representations. In the wake of this challenge, Appel interprets the biblical canon as an alternative to the narrations and aesthetic programs of the ruling master-narratives. He especially refers to the symbols of the “tree of life”, the Tetragram, the Cross and the recapitulation of the canon in the Gospel of John. According to Appel, the canon offers an understanding of the world as a textuality that can be read as a critique of non-affective systems of representation.

In his text “The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory, and the Tawdry: Neoliberal Hegemony and the “Undoing” of the Demos” Carl Raschke puts forth a reading of Agamben’s “The Kingdom and the Glory”. He follows Agamben’s archeology of economy starting from Trinitarian theology in early Christianity, but in contrast to other approaches, he highlights Agamben’s theory of glory as an important idea for analyzing present day neoliberalism. Nonetheless, the notion of glory – which for Agamben holds the meaning of the political zone of acclamations, ceremonies, liturgies etc. – is further developed by the investigation of Agamben’s rather vague statement that contemporary democracy is based on glory disseminated by the media. The politics of glory not only transposed to secular politics, but furthermore, its aesthetic dimension today has to be understood as virtualization of politics within a mechanism of “symbolic economies” which Raschke describes. Moreover, Raschke takes a decisive turn by suggesting that Agamben’s mediatic glory today turns out to be the tawdry, which points not only to a crisis of the symbolic economy but to a “Crisis of Representation” which affects the political itself. At this point Raschke connects his analysis of neoliberalism with Bernard
Stiegler’s notion of a “cognitive capitalism”. Through Stiegler’s interpretation of the exteriorization of memory (*hypomnmesis*) Raschke points out that Marx’s theory of commodification today has reached the point of a commodification of truth. This is related not only to a culture of extreme virtualization but also to a form of reversed neoliberalism which attempts to remake the state, a phenomenon that Wendy Brown has described as *undoing of the demos*.

**Section II**

Subsequent to the initial two contributions, which give a broader introduction to the topic and introduce the reader into the field, the two articles within the following section link questions of the “Crisis of Representation” and faith or religion with an economic approach.

In his contribution “What Kind of God is Money Anyway? An Investigation into the Theological Structures of Capitalism and Gnosticism”, Daniel Minch presents a theological critique of the present domination of economic rationality in social and political discourses. He refers to Philip Goodchild’s analysis of capitalism as a belief-system, but moreover he aims at specifying the theological patterns and structures which are inherent in the deification of money in present day capitalism. For this purpose, Minch draws on the history of Christian experiences as a collective past and elaborates a hermeneutically nuanced re-contextualization of ancient heretical traditions. In this context, Minch relates Goodchild’s thesis with Devin Singh’s attempt to use incarnation as a hermeneutical tool to understand the theology of money. On these grounds Minch can show that an incarnational relation between money and currency points to a distinctly gnostic understanding of the *theos* of money.

In his article “Limits to Globalization and the Loss of Faith”, Philip Goodchild illuminates how the dynamics of globalization are deeply rooted in faith in the future. However, times of globalization come with new politics and are characterized by secularization processes. This is why limits to globalization fiercely challenge the above-mentioned faith in the future, which results in contradictory requirements on faith, which Goodchild ostensibly links to developments in the credit crises of 2007–08.

**Section III**

In the contribution “Globalization and the Crisis of Culture and Religion” by Olivier Roy, he investigates the crisis of culture and religion, as well as of the state, illustrated by Islamic fundamentalism. Roy expounds today’s problem of the requirement to make every aspect in life explicit, which, he rightly argues, functions as an antagonism to culture which further leads to a crisis of culture.
In his article “Representation with/out Representation: Saudia Arabia as a Hidden Face of Globalization”, Rüdiger Lohlker confronts the issue’s topic from a non-Western point of view. Olivier Roy’s argument of a loss of cultural mediation and the inner complexity of religious systems plays an important role in Lohlker’s considerations as well. His article links three heterogeneous parts in an unexpected and creative manner: starting with an analysis of Deleuze he criticizes (Western) concepts of representation operated by a structure of universally extended judgement. This operation leads, on the one side, to a universal hierarchical order (everything is an object of judgement), and on the other side it leads to mechanisms of exclusion of those to whom representation is denied. As the second part of the article shows, this structure is mirrored in a certain type of warfare, especially in aerial bombing, first exerted in colonial wars. Lohlker describes how structures of representation/non-representation can help to contextualize these forms of warfare. Those exact structures however tend to turn against Western countries, creating what we call a “Crisis of Representation”. In the third part of his article, Lohlker discusses the hitherto described forms of totalizing representation and denied representation regarding the contemporary relation between Saudi Arabia and Western Countries. Furthermore, topics such as the relation between politics and religion, the loss of religious- and cultural diversity, as conveyed for centuries, and the mutual support of Western democracies and non-democratic regimes play an important role.

Hans Schelkshorn, in his article “The Ideology of the New Right and Religious Conservativism. Towards an Ethical Critique of the New Politics of Authoritarianism”, analyses current developments in European liberal democracies which can be described as an erosion of the democratic constitutional state and the universalistic dimension of Christian ethics. As in Lohlker’s article the relation between politics and religion, two systems of representation, is thereby at stake. Schelkshorn shows that the generally applied categories like “populism”, “friend-enemy scheme”, and “neo-fascism” cannot capture the ideological matrix of the New Right which is opposed to the universalistic claims as expressed in the ideas of Enlightenment (e.g. cosmopolitism, or Human Rights) as well as Christian ethics. They are replaced by a neo-pagan, illiberal agenda promoting ethnic homogeneity and autochthonous citizenship in an organic society over cultural and constitutional mediation of diversity among a people. As a case study, Schelkshorn discusses Viktor Orbán’s synthesis between New Right ideology and Christianity by uncovering its contradictory elements.

Astrid Mattes’ article “Liberal Democratic Representation and the Politicization of Religion” is the last one in the third section of the volume. Like the three preceding papers, it discusses structures of representation and their crises with regards to the relation between politics and religion and confronts, as a case study, the current situation of Austria. Mattes adopts the differentiation of formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantial representation and discusses their respective pitfalls interpreting the crisis of political representation foremost as a crisis of
liberalism. Difficulties arise especially when it comes to the topic of religion which tends to play an increasing role in identity politics. Liberal democracies are facing the difficulty of how and to what extent religious group identities can be represented. Mattes campaigns for a de-politicization of religion, which does not at all mean its disappearance; on the contrary, liberal democracies have to find “plausible places for religion in society” as well as balance religious diversity.

The articles of the third section increasingly reveal the question of the symbolic dimension of religious identity and group affiliation in processes of (political) representation; a question that functions as a bridge to the first article of the fourth section, which deals with the philosophical dimension of the triangle of politics, religion and representation – and its symptoms of crisis.

Section IV

Thomas Schmidt’s article “Symbolische Praxis und normative Struktur. Die Krise der politischen Repräsentation in der Perspektive einer Soziologie des Sakralen” starts with an analysis on the intertwining of normative structures, the symbolic practice and the dimension of the imaginary which is at work in every process of (political) representation. Political crisis arises if the equilibrium of this constellation is disturbed. Schmidt confronts the reader with the question of the role of religion within this process of mutual influence referring especially to Paula Diehl, Georges Batelle’s project of a “Sociology of the Sacred”, and to Cornelius Castoriadis. Religion is, according to Schmidt, an important factor in political and societal forms of representation and has to be seen in its intrinsic ambiguity expressing or producing destructive as well as mediating and creative forces.

In his article “Bewährung der Gleichheit. Dialektik und radikale Demokratietheorie” Andreas Gelhard continues on the philosophical question on democracy, politics and representation. He confronts two dialogical constellations: the first one deals with Hegel’s criticism of Kant’s philosophy of representation and can be understood “as a shift from representation (Vorstellung) to presentation (Darstellung)”. The second one deals with a discussion between Axel Honneth and Jacques Rancière showing that Rancière’s concept of radical democracy is much closer to Hegel (and Adorno) as Honneth’s theory of recognition. In line with Hegel and Rancière, Gelhard opposes, as an ultimate aim, processes of learning and acquiring competences that try to resolve dissent in mutual recognition as an ultimate aim and espouses the conflictual process of presentation as “probation” or “verification” (Bewährung) of equality. This verification, however, must not be mistaken as mere identity-assertion but carries “out a liberating break with given identities”. Within the actus of dissented disidentification of natural identities, equality can occur within the realm of inequality and politics is stimulated.

Over the course of the articles of the fourth section, again and again we come across a non-representable moment that cannot simply be captured in the ho-
mogenous structure of representation (Schmidt) or resolved in procedures of mutual recognition (Gelhard). Peter Zeillinger, in his article “Repräsentation einer Leerstelle, oder: Auszug ins Reale. Zur politischen Bedeutung des biblischen Exodus, der historisch nicht stattgefunden hat”, points to this very moment which may also be coined as singularity, event, void. However, this non-representable doesn’t only lead structures of representation in crisis but will be further developed to a new understanding of representation as well as to an affirmative foundation of the “political”. For Zeillinger there are two main points of reference which at first glance seem to be very divergent but prove to offer many references to each other over an extensive period of time that separate them: the Exodus-Narrative and the political thought from poststructuralist and deconstructive philosophers like Derrida, Levinas, Badiou and Agamben. In an accurate examination of the historical context, the article “reads the invention of the Exodus-Narrative” as a “revolutionary different approach to political power” and its theological foundation.

As Zeillinger showed, within a “strict monotheistic understanding of theology” a new way of understanding “text” or “textual authority” is “invented” as well. Without explicit reference to the biblical or to religious narratives, however, in close connection to the question on text and representation as well as on what cannot be represented, Gerald Posselt, in his article “The Task of Becoming Minor: On the Politics of Representation”, gives a close reading to Franz Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” – by the way, a narration of enslavement, colonialism and an Exodus that did not happen? Thereby he shows the working of representation, its difficulties, its modes of exclusion, its inevitability, and the responsibility conveyed with the latter. Questions that accompany the interpretation of Kafka’s text as well as the notes Posselt gives on a discussion between Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari are how “those who are excluded from the realm of political representation may speak out and make themselves heard” as well as how one can speak for someone else. Moreover, similarly to Hans Schelkshorn, he asks whether there could be a criterion to distinguish emancipatory politics from its reactionary counterparts when it comes to the case of representing those who are excluded. Posselt argues that emancipatory politics are not only about claims and becoming major but have to adopt a minor use of language. It is about a certain usage of language which reveals a displacement that occurs in language itself. By this, language inevitably assumes a political dimension with collective value. Becoming minor and making a minor use of language doesn’t mean self-minorization. It rather subverts and ironizes (major) language and its denotative function, however, without destroying it. This opens up the possibility of new kinds of representation.
Section V

The last section of the issue is characterized by three contributions that use rather unusual and creative perspectives or lenses to draw attention to different aspects of the “Crisis of Representation”. As two of the articles are entangled with art and as all of them break open future outlooks, these three texts form the last section of the issue and insinuate what we described in the beginning: an opening to an ongoing process.

In her article entitled “Rethinking Parrhesia. Theological-Political Considerations on the Present Crisis of Religious Representation” Isabella Guanzini combines two seemingly separate strands of reactions to crises of representation, Old Testament prophecy and early modern utopia, providing a key to a reading of Pope Francis as a globally public figure. The role and power of the word as well as a way of opening up the future in a socially and politically fruitful manner present themselves in a long historical duration and theological impact. Guanzini shows how Pope Francis draws on these motives in order to find a way of compellingly using prophetic signs in contemporary culture.

In an innovative approach, Marcello Neri focuses on the presence in absence; the representation of something that rules in its absence – or to capture it in two words: he introduces the concept of “as if” in his article entitled “Post-Representational Order and Naked Citizenship”. This raises the question of how something can be in crisis that is not even there. How is it linked with faith, the public sphere, politics, and arts? Neri skillfully interrelates these spheres and directs them towards a performative understanding of religion that illustrates a viable system for a post-representational order during a time of “Crisis of Representation”.

In her contribution “Becoming Real in an Age of Shameless Lies”, Sandra Lehmann deals with the pressing issues of today’s discursive crises, following in the wake of an aesthetic shift in the usage of signification and the common acceptance of a historical a priori marked by postmodern philosophy. In an age defined less by fake news than by a common attitude of shamelessness, Lehmann proposes an alternative narrative of truth and public discourse. Her account of a phenomenology of the real poses a different approach towards the dynamics of a reality that is marked by its temporality and the fragility of signification.

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To conclude our invitation, we would like to finish by stating how the discussion on the topic of the “Crisis of Representation” has only just begun. It reveals the necessity of being expounded by various angles and that it needs to be handled with care as the discourse is full of tensions that also characterize the field. As the issue will reveal in detail, the phenomenon of “Crisis of Representation” requests
a tremendous variety of approaches. In this diversity lies a great opportunity, as it helps us to understand that it is not possible to represent any singularity as well as the non-representable, any ambiguities and paradoxes, which we find ourselves confronted with. All of these motives reveal the necessity of a critique on a representation as something totalizing. Subsequently, this is the reason why this issue aims to invite the reader to continue with the discussions that are raised within the contributions.

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Section I.

Critiques of Master-Representations: The Political Dimension of the Canon between the Bible and the Qur’an

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Political theology is at the service of the critique of power representations. On the basis of the examination of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit this paper supports the idea that religion can be considered a rupture in the projection of the subject’s claim to power. This becomes especially apparent in the biblical canon and its core, the name of God YHWH and its New Testament equivalent, the Cross. In the final section the paper presents the idea that, by serving as a corrective of strong Christian modes of self-representation, the Qur’an has to be considered as a revelation for Christians.

Hegel; Bible; Qur’an; Canon; Representation; Phenomenology of Spirit

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Preliminary Remarks

The main thesis of this article is that theology is constituted in the critique of master-representations that is a society’s prevailing symbolic order. Its task consists in exposing master-representations and questioning what lies behind them, specifically those that reflect the current political, social, cultural, and noetic frameworks of dominance. Indeed, the institutions, symbols, narratives, and forms of knowledge through which a culture (necessarily!) always represents the subject also ‘masks’ its ‘naked’, mortal, and infinitely vulnerable core. Those various representations are forms of projection, whose primary task is to conceal the traumatic core of human existence, which is characterized by man’s exposure, vulnerability, and non-categorizability (non-identity). Man is incapable of capturing his own subjectivity in an ultimate, decisive image – neither individually nor collectively. Thus there is no self-conception that could definitively objectify a subject. Each positive – in the sense of ‘fixed’ or ‘objectifiable’ – representation (i.e. each definitive image of individual or collective subjectivity, as well as each image of the Other) reduces the human to an object and thus to a means of exercising dominance. In this regard, religion is ambivalent, as we will suggest in connection with Hegel’s philosophy of religion in the Phenomenology of Spirit (PoS): On the one hand, the Absolute is the highest representative of and guarantor for all dominant representations. On the other hand, religion is the acknowledgement that the Absolute can no longer be known by representative means, and thus it also marks the end of all representations.

The question of representation has a decisive significance within the biblical canon. We may of course here think of the prohibition of images in the Old

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1 It is in this sense that Johann Baptist Metz discusses prohibition of images in the context of his New Political Theology. Giorgio Agamben suggests in his text “The Time that Remains” [Il tempo che resta], where he discusses the beginning of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, that the “as though [it were] not” (hos me) is a central term in Paul, in that he puts successive representations out of play (rent inoperose). Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2007); Giorgio Agamben, The Time that Remains. A Commentary to the Letters of the Romans Transl. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).


3 Gilles Deleuze devotes a masterful analysis to this circumstance and this ambiguity in his examination of Leibniz and the Baroque – whose primary philosophical representative is Leibniz. Leibnizian metaphysics is simultaneously the construction of a vast, all-embracing system of representation and the ironicization of that system. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
Testament, which forbids man from misusing God as the foundation of human power. God’s name YHWH – whose inutterability in the canonical texts denotes an interruption – prevents the biblical text from being fully integrated into humanity’s existing symbolic orders. In the New Testament the cross is the foremost symbol of this divine name, which represents an extreme horizon of human existence, or limit-case, that is no longer representable, and which expresses a maximum of vulnerability and exposure. Two New Testament writings – which in a particular way subject the entire canon to a re-interpretation, namely the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation – take into account this critique of powerful representations, expressed in the name of God and in the cross. John focuses this critique in the encounter between Pilate and Jesus, while Revelation throws the whole aesthetic program of history’s merciless, victorious powers into history’s lake of fire and, with this separation of historical powers from their forms of representation, reveals a new perspective on the history of the victims of human violence.

One of the founders of the New Political Theology, J.B. Metz, connects the resistance to politically dominant powers that determine history and the critique of the dominant chronological determination of time, i.e. the critique of a “time without finale [Zeit ohne Finale]”. In this form of temporality, the victim of history recedes further and further into the realm of forgetting and in the end everything is leveled. Going beyond Metz, one could emphasize that this entropically vanishing chronological time, which proceeds mechanically from moment to moment, amounts to a representation of completely meaningless, nihilistic, subject-less causality. It is no longer an expression of a specific historical power, but is itself power, though it lacks the status of a subject (in the NT a subject-less power would be called ‘demonic’). By contrast, the Christian canon sees the dawning of the Eschaton in the Parusie Christi, in which chronological time is sublated [aufgehoben]. The Bible’s time is eschatological time. This demonstrates a great sensibility for the fact that the powers of history not only represent themselves in an extensive program of images, but also in a very specific understanding of time. They dominate future insofar they dominate history. Against this, theology has had to address the question ‘to whom does time rightfully belong and who is the subject of time?’ to the governors since biblical times. To the extent that it is not understood as a mere mechanism, time is always also ‘the time of someone’, and thus stands in connection with subjects and their histories, and is thus enmeshed in narrative. Theology thus stands at the intersection of the critique of systems of representation, of experiences of time that
extinguish subjectivity, and of narratives that dispossess humanity of its time and justify repressive systems of representation.

Christian Theology has to invite our society to understand the biblical canon as an alternative to the ruling powers’ narratives, conceptions of time, and aesthetic representations. It does not regard the canon as the product of a distant past, from which we are supposed to draw conclusions for the present. In that sort of approach, the canon would be merely an object of self-reassurance. It would represent a system of meanings through which a seemingly stable, domination-oriented identity could be established. God would thus be a content of the canon, which one could take possession of by reading it. The canon would thus be a reflective surface, mirroring the subject, i.e. a projection of the human. By contrast, the encounter with the canon unleashes an alterity and alienates one’s own subjectivity, which demands an open process of translation. Thus the process of becoming a subject [Subjektwerdung] in reading the canon does not take place through the collective and individual appropriation of a symbolic world; rather it takes place when the canon and its content – the name YHWH – brings about a displacement of the human subject. The canon therefore is not primarily the content of a reflection, but rather a ‘landscape’ of affects, narratives, and experiences of the vulnerability of human life, which shatters those images designed to form a protective layer against vulnerability. Thus the canon, under the sign of the alterity of the divine name, permits the reader to inscribe herself into the traumatic core of existence, and to re-enact it, albeit never directly (i.e. in immediate reference). In this way the canon necessarily entails political theology, provided one understands the ‘political’ as comprising more than the shared identity of a community. Rather, the political begins where there is a fundamental break between the individual and collective identity that structures the subject, i.e. where the Other is manifest in the midst of the self, and the self begins to expose itself to the opening that the Other has made. The subject of the political is constituted in the name of the stranger.

Christian theology, then, remains dependent upon the biblical canon. When the Christian is baptized in Jesus’ name, he dons the canon like clothing. His life no longer exists merely within chronological time; he lives rather at the intersection of canonical history and world history. The Christian subject therefore always exists at a transition between times, at the transition between (impossible) succession to the affective space of radical exposure on the cross and current societal challenges. If the canon wants its reader to encounter the glory of God’s name YHWH, which in the New Testament is manifest on the cross (i.e. in radical empathy with the sufferer), then the contents of the canon never coincide with the contents of a book. For, if the canon is inspired by the Holy Spirit or is the subject of the Spirit, then it is radically open to re-reading and re-interpretation. In history, the canon’s openness is manifest in the fact that it does not exist as one text, but rather in a range of a plurality of texts. Perhaps the ultimate expression of this is the current tension between the Bible and the Qur’an, which marks an alterity
within the canon itself. The world of the (Christian) canon – which culminates in God’s name and Jesus as its ultimate reference – does not form a self-enclosed world, but includes the possibility of translation. If politics means the affirmation of alterity, and if the divine name YHWH is not directly representable, then the tension between the Bible and the Qur’an could give expression to the political within theology.

These introductory remarks are meant to sketch out the trajectory of this work: it begins with a reference to Hegel, whose thought not only includes a unique synthesis of philosophy, history, Christianity, and politics, but has also shown – in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the precise place where the project of modernity (progress in the consciousness of the subject’s freedom) successively encounters its Other. The second step consists in a reflection upon the canon, primarily on its political, epistemological, and temporal implications. Special attention will be paid to the gospel of John, which represents a metatext of the canon. In the third step, I will take into account the fact that the Christian canon points beyond itself and yields a contextualization in its relation to the Qur’an (though also in relation to Talmudic Judaism and the secular world, though these must be left out of account), which is (and must be) decisive for reading the canon. Guiding this trajectory is the conviction that the name of God, YHWH, as the center of the canon, refers to an alterity that becomes perceptible in the vulnerability of life, and it is the task of political theology today to witness and sanctify this vulnerability.

**Hegel’s Understanding of Religion as the End of Human Projection**

1. In the innumerable presentations of the history of philosophy – but also of the philosophy of religion – we often find references to Feuerbach’s contention that God is man’s own self-projection. These presentations claim that Feuerbach traces Hegelian philosophy, which hypostasizes an absolute Being, back to its anthropological foundations. In fact, this view attributed to Feuerbach expresses the exact opposite of the Hegelian understanding of religion. For Hegel the individual sciences, including anthropology, are primarily human (self-) projections, while human projection becomes shattered in religion. Of course this does not entail that our sciences represent arbitrary and worthless fabrications, but it does mean that they are the expression of social, symbolic orders and the realm of their validity is not completely independent of those orders.

2. The work where Hegel achieves his most profound reflection on the genesis of modern knowledge is the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, Hegel examines the question of how the (modern) subject, who has emerged from its immediate environment, discovers and represents itself in own world which becomes a kind of mirror (a realm of reflection) for its mode encountering its world. Objects of
experience in which the subject seeks to localize itself are: the immediate sense certainty of the pointing out [des Zeigens], the things of perception, the world of laws of the understanding, of enjoyment [Genuss], work [Arbeit] and the melancholic longing for the infinite of self-consciousness, theoretical reason’s world of sciences, the erotic, the virtuous, and the icons (Hegel speaks of brand [Werk]) of the poiesis, the family, and the polis of intersubjective spirit (i.e. the homogeneous state founded upon a common identity), and finally the subject’s claims to validity which manifest themselves in property, education, and in the insight that ‘intellectualizes’ the world. What characterizes modern knowledge, then, is the way the subject successively accomplishes an increasing abstraction, which goes hand in hand with the virtualization of the world. This abstraction is grounded in the fact that the self cannot retrieve itself in the world, cannot see its exact reflection there, and believes to find itself only in its distance from its environment, i.e. it increasingly seeks to produce itself through this sort of process of distancing. The self reaches the apex of this process upon realizing absolute freedom and the terror that accompanies it.

3. According to Hegel, absolute freedom designates the modern subject’s capacity to extricate itself from all ties, from the ties of nature and of history. The ego retrieves itself in its negative comportment to its world, i.e. in its process of abstraction, and so the terror is nothing other than the active, radical abstraction from all concrete content, which, as a final consequence, expresses itself in the total annihilation [Vernichtung] of all contents. The ego discovers itself through its radical lack of ‘place’ [Ortlosigkeit], i.e. it is a nothing in relation to the world it encounters. The only ‘place’ left to it is the nothing of negative freedom (i.e. the absence of content and alterity). Thus Hegel holds that modernity, which began with the self’s dawning awareness of its opposition to the (social and natural) world, ends in an all-embracing nihilism, which goes hand in hand with a freedom that suffers under a terroristic pressure to turn everything into ‘nothing.’ Today one could connect this to the ever-expanding virtualization of all spheres of life. What characterizes the virtual world is that there are no limits on how it is available to and subjugated by the subject, as there is no actual object that does not stem from the self. As a result, the contents of the virtual world are arbitrarily replaceable and detached from real history.

The decisive factor here is that, according to Hegel, the modern ego has also negated the historical genesis of its own origin. Hence the (conservative or even fascistic) attempt to give the ego a fixed historical identity (e.g. in the Christian heritage of the West or the historical heritage of a nation) leads directly to virtuality, since an unbroken recourse to tradition is no longer possible. Modernity therefore implies a radical loss of tradition. However, we must emphasize that in Hegel’s view, the traditional forms of knowledge have not simply disappeared, but have rather been sublated [aufgehoben]. History then retains a decisive significance, although a direct recourse to heritage to find one’s own identity is no longer possible.
4. In the PoS Hegel fixes two further levels to absolute freedom in the chapter on spirit, namely morality [*Moralität*] in Kant’s sense and conscience [*Gewissen*]. One could then say that in Hegel (prior to Nietzsche!) morality is inhibited terror, while conscience is its internalization. In any case, what is noteworthy here is that, according to Hegel, the genesis of modern morality is inextricably linked to the experience of terror. The greatness of modern morality lies in its aptness for general thought, which arises from a process of abstraction. It is no longer tied to concrete circumstances (the polis, family, culture, etc.), but is universally valid. Its terror is that it represents (together with the conscience as internalized morality) the final form of the subject’s claim to validity. The subject seeks to locate itself in its moral claim to validity, and places the entire world under its judgment. According to Hegel, the modern world is Kant’s world, since it refers back to a permanent process of judgment (especially in the sciences and morality, though today it reaches down to the most banal activities, such as ‘likes’ on Facebook), which, for the subject, remains its final place of self-discovery.

5. At the end of the chapter on conscience, which also marks the end of the chapter on spirit and thus the first major part of PoS, a radical rupture occurs: the judging conscience attains the experience that its own place, maintained the absolute place in the world, is a merely contingent place. The conscience acknowledges the contingency of its own standpoint and sees how much it too lives according to the conditions and contexts that have determined its judgment. Through this knowledge it is able to forgive the contingency of the Other. In the act of forgiveness, however, the subject experiences that this forgiving would once again only be a reflection of its own claim to validity if the subject as a sovereign were to forgive the Other. Therefore, according to Hegel’s understanding, the ego can only forgive what already has been forgiven. Thus it experiences in its act something that precedes it [*eine Vorgängigkeit*], to which it can only respond. The judged Other disappears with the experience of the subject’s own contingency as a surface of projection. The subject can then no longer find itself through its projections and representations, but instead paradoxically only by losing them. The ego constitutes itself by losing itself (cf. Matt 16:26), i.e. in the separation from and displacement of itself.

6. For Hegel, religion marks the loss of projection surfaces, which the world/the Other had served as up to that point. The ego experiences itself in his Other, without being able to find any ultimate representation of this Other. The Absolute then is that sphere which is no longer representable, and can no longer be subjugated to the self and its representations. Religion and its world of divinity thus symbolize the stages of the ego’s displacement. Hence deities are not projections of humanity, but are rather expressions of a fundamental loss, namely the loss of

7 Kierkegaard’s distinction between aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres points in the same direction as Hegel’s distinctions. The aesthetic sphere and the ethical stance towards the world contain a mirroring of the subject that only religion breaks through.
self-conception. This is also the reason why, for Hegel, religious symbols are inseparably bound to death.\footnote{Thus we can also find Heidegger’s figure of “being towards death” in Hegel’s chapter on religion, at least with respect to content. Heidegger introduces this figure in order to criticize the hypothesis of the ego’s absolute self-reflectivity.} Death shatters the levels of human reflection and resists any direct representation: the ‘I’ cannot be present at its own death.

I cannot exhaustively list each figure from the chapter on religion in Hegel’s PoS: symbolizations of the ego’s loss of self-conception include, e.g. the animal of Totemism, in which man encounters the animal’s strangeness, which outstrips conceptual thought. Further, Hegel calls the pyramid a sign of death, and he claims that in the Olympic games, the physical body in motion refers to a second, non-representable body. Even the statues of Greek gods do not directly represent the self, but point to a strangeness, which expresses the suffering of the artist (considered as the people’s representative). We find in language the deepest symbolism of the loss expressed in religion. Human language does not depict the world, but rather represents a break between the subject and its world. As a speaker, man is the death of every immediacy; words do not refer (directly) to things but rather to one another, i.e. to the endless openness of meanings, which is manifest in each sentence. In place of the world of representable objects, we have the infinite referential context of a linguistic system of signs. In other words: in language, the representable world is sublimated \([\text{aufgehoben}]\).

For this reason language is the death of the object. We encounter the last two linguistic stages in (ancient) tragedy and (ancient) comedy, which know that death underlies language. Tragedy is the echo of a world destined to fall into death and decay because its immediacy has become lost in language. The most radical level is the comedic consciousness: it dissolves humanity’s symbolic world and its traumatic core with laughter. Thus Hegel deciphers all symbolizations of religion – from light, to the animal, all the way up to the language of tragedy – as masks of death. What remains is not the nihilistic nothing in which the self could find itself reflected again, but the radical contingency of being, which transcends every representation. This prepares the way to a sensoriness that no longer functions as an image (and thus projection) of an object, but of the Absolute, i.e. loosened from every concept and every imagination, this sensoriness refers only to pure contingency itself.

7. God’s incarnation in revealed religion (Christianity) – which Hegel positions after comedic consciousness – corresponds to the comedic gesture. A contingency is manifest in Jesus, which outstrips every representation and every human conception, i.e. a sensoriness, which is no longer representable and can no longer be captured reflectively. This phenomenon finds its most profound expression in the cross and the connected phrase, “God has died”.\footnote{cf. Hegel, PoS, 455.} In this place, the Absolute as the guarantor of a powerful system of representation has died; paradoxically this also
includes death (understood as absolute nothingness) as the ultimate representation of nihilism, in which modernity is reflected. Thus all representations have “died”, all representations in which the subject sought to conceal its infinite vulnerability and contingency.

8. Hegel criticizes revealed religion for remaining in the form of representation.\(^\text{10}\) With the term ‘representation’ he is not deprecating the sensory aspect of religion, to which he would then oppose a supersensory philosophy of pure cognition. What Hegel does criticize is the religious community’s attempt to defang the contingency that came to consciousness on the cross, by grasping that event as something that belongs entirely to the past. At the beginning of the PoS, sense certainty failed to grasp its truth – the contingency of the sensory – insofar as it sought to write down this truth.\(^\text{11}\) Even Christianity cannot cling to the truth of the Absolute by attempting to represent it in writing. Properly understood, the biblical canon is not the preservation of a past event for posterity; it is rather the expression and beginning of a displacement process in which the reader is constituted as a subject. The subject is a response to the unrepresentable Other; it experiences a displacement in the Other and in this way the subject is the transition from “itself” [Es selbst] to “itself as Other” [Es als Anderes]. One could also say that the self is the guest of an otherness, and like the guest it can never stay by itself.\(^\text{12}\) Even mundane, human speech, as we have suggested, is not strictly denotative here since it is the echo of this displacement. The canon, and with it the Absolute, signify precisely that sphere in which the subject is displaced from its self-reference into the open, where it is exposed to a radical vulnerability and contingency. Hegel’s absolute knowledge, with which he concludes the PoS, has released itself from self-referential representations. It no longer attempts to compensate for this loss through religious symbols, but rather to see the reference to the Absolute itself in this loss. In the wake of Hegel then, one can only believe unconditionally in a God who is not immediately present.\(^\text{13}\) The canon then manifests Hegel’s intention, in that the reference to God’s name YHWH occurs in the shattering of human conceptions. Thus the canon becomes the political document of an individual and collective process of becoming a subject, which is constituted by suspending all final representations.

\(^\text{10}\) Hegel, PoS, 478. In the translation of Miller it is used the word ‘picture-thought’ for ‘representation’.
\(^\text{11}\) Cf. Hegel, PoS, 60.
\(^\text{13}\) Cf. Bonhoeffer’s elegant phrase: “There is not a God who is there [Einen Gott, den es gibt, gibt es nicht]” in: Dietrich Bohnhoeffer, Widerstand und Ergebung, DBW VIII, 514 f. [Author’s translation -Tr].
Thoughts on the Political (and Temporal) Dimension of the Canon

The Seventh Day and the Celebratory Beginning of Time (Gen 1:1–2, 4)

In the following section I will examine a few crucial pericopes from the canon in order to briefly analyze the theme announced here: specifically, the initial passages of Genesis (Gen 1–3), which state the central theme of the Bible, and then Ex 34:6, which offers a reflection on the divine name (where it only appears in the doubly asserted form YHWH YHWH). Finally, I will consider some ideas from the Gospel of John (first John 1:1; then John 19:4 f. as a decisive passage on Jesus’ path to the cross; and John 20:1–18, which forms a kind of conclusion before the epilogue-like passages John 20:19–30 and Jn 21). Indeed, as we have suggested, this gospel constitutes a commentary and metatext on the entire canon.

The narrative of creation in seven days (Gen 1:1–2, 4a) revolves around the theme of time: “day one” stands at the beginning of time, with its three dimensions of the being-towards-death of the evening, the interruption of death at night, and the morning’s renewed creation; in the middle of time there stands the “fourth day,” which is the time of celebration and the curtailing [Depotenzierung] of life-threatening forces; the “seventh day” stands at the end (or also at the beginning and in the center – see below) as eschatological and celebratory excess. Together they circumscribe the essence of time and therefore of creation as well. The seventh day, in opposition to the other days of creation, is not tied to any work of creation, but rather accompanies the other days as a ‘guest.’ The term guest suggests itself here because the guest can neither belong to what is one’s ‘own’ (the subject) nor can it be pushed out as belonging to the Other. Rather, it removes itself from the self-other dichotomy and, in its non-belonging, it stands at the center of the ‘own’ and generates a fundamental, non-occupiable openness of the ‘own.’ The seventh day symbolizes the unrepresentable openness of time, which it first constitutes.

Insofar as the seventh day (Saturday, Sabbath, the sixth day plus one) is transferred to the following day (Sunday) in Christianity, one could say that the re-

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14 The formula “it was evening and then it was morning” is not arbitrary: Here the rhythm of time, which also guides the liturgy, begins with the evening as a symbol of mortal time, and proceeds through the interruption of night (symbol of death) in hope for the new creation. This tripartite symbolism is also the background for the resurrection on the third day. Cf. Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wölkchen* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983).

15 The sun and moon, symbols of what had then been the superpowers Sun and Moon, are integrated into the order of creation and are thus curtailed.

16 The theme of time structures the whole pericope (Gen 1:1-2,4a), insofar as beginning, middle, and end are dedicated to that theme. Days 2–3 and 5–6 deal with the theme of land and space and are embedded in the structure of time.

sultant eighth day (the sixth day plus one plus one) confirms the excess of the seventh day (insofar as this doubling in the biblical sense signifies a celebratory emphasis!). Furthermore, the eighth day gives expression to how the last day coincides with the first day – also Sunday – which is the basis of time. Thus a celebratory excess is inscribed in world time, which prevents the world/time from coinciding with itself. Creation therefore cannot be chronologically delimited or represented. From a biblical standpoint, creation ‘aims’ at the celebratory excess of time. Given that this is an explicit theme at the beginning of the canon, we can interpret the entire Bible as a question concerning the genesis of divine celebration. This means that we must always see all of the canon’s political statements in light of the possibility of celebratory excess, which sublimates/sublates (hebt auf) the entirety of world events (symbolized in the six days).

The Tree of Knowledge as Both Centre and Open Space (Gen 2:4–3:24)

The central question concerns the content of the celebration, in which God expresses himself, insofar as God is the singular representation of the seventh day. We find our first clue in the first section of the Bible (Gen 1:1–2,4a) itself: it is often said (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) God sees that what he has created is good. Thus there is a celebration of creation’s goodness. But in what does this consist?

The second creation narrative that follows the first pericope provides an answer. Here we must pay close attention to space. Gen 2 represents it as a garden, full of life and shade-giving trees, in the middle of which stands the tree of life (which represents the oriental deity as the life-giving sun, shining over the whole garden). More precisely it is:

“Out of the ground the LORD [YHWH] God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden(,) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen 2:9).

It is striking how the tree of knowledge is mentioned next to the tree of life. Its location remains indefinite, or is of a double nature: on the one hand, we can read the ‘and’ as creating a parallel with the tree of life. In that case, we would have two trees in the middle of the garden, namely the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. On the other hand, it is possible to read the sentence as leaving the tree of knowledge’s location open, or incapable of being inserted into the overall coordinate system of the garden. Specifically that holds if we read the ‘and’ as both an addition to the trees generally and to the tree of life specifically. In this case we would have a wonderful garden with the tree of life in the center and beyond that, in an indeterminate location, the tree of knowledge. A third option would be to leave the passage in its ambiguity: the tree of knowledge would then be both in the center (parallel to or coinciding with the tree of life) and on the periphery, and as
such the static space would become a dynamic one. The center would then be marked by an openness and a displacement, which make it a center in the first place. On this reading, the tree of knowledge would be the spatial equivalent to the (temporal) seventh day: it would be in the center of the garden without belonging directly to it, and in this parallel (and movement!) it would represent the sphere of the divine, which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent to being.

Nakedness, Vulnerability, and Mortality

According to Gen 2:16 f., man was permitted to eat of the tree of life, but not of the tree of knowledge, since he will die on the day he eats of it. Many have interpreted this passage to mean that man only came out of a primordial unity with God by transgressing the divine prohibition, and thus in a certain sense had grown up and became man in the genuine sense through disobedience. This argument receives further emphasis in the sentence from Gen 2:25, which has become so potent in Christian history: “The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.” The key to understanding the tree of knowledge is in fact nakedness. This is the first concretization of what knowledge means, since immediately after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge “the eyes of both of them [man and woman] were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:7).

Contrary to the usual interpretations, the man and the woman are not children, and by no means are they asexual children. Rather, we are dealing with adults who can understand a prohibition, and this adulthood is even necessary to explicitly call the two people ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ If one considers the Book of Psalms, or even the culture of the Orient up to the present, then it should strike one immediately that, for the Oriental man, being exposed is even worse than being killed. Occidental strategies for self-immunization do not work there and therefore the worst curse in oriental cultures is to be placed under the (judging, dominant, scornful) gaze of the Other and to feel naked there.

On the other hand, if Adam and Eve are not ashamed to be naked before one another in paradise, then that is because they are not placed under the (‘pornographic’) gaze of the Other. Their nakedness is not the result of a forced disrobement, which concealed an unbearable nothingness; their nakedness is protected by a withdrawal [Entzogenheit] (which we must not think of positivistically), which is precisely what the non-occupiable tree of knowledge symbolizes. The Fall consists in the fact that the sphere of openness, as expressed by the tree of knowledge, is occupied by the will of dominance. Thus, in place of the withdrawing openness, the will to totality steps in, which corresponds to the all-knowing and all-seeing gaze, which extinguishes the Other in its otherness, so that ‘nothing’ remains. If the nakedness of paradise was an expression of mutual reference and vulnerable openness, then nakedness after the Fall is the limitless exposure to the
isolated gaze’s insatiable appetite (for invulnerable dominance). Through this gaze, the unbearable nothing (which must be clothed) takes the place of the original withdrawal.

This demonstrates the two dimensions of recognizing nakedness: on the one hand it concerns the acknowledgement of what is good in paradise, in the sense of a mutual, unconditional connectedness in the mutual openness of the body (and thus of vulnerability!), which is pure opening. On the other hand, through the Fall, the knowledge of evil arises as total and totalitarian knowledge, and thus as unlimited power over the Other.

The ‘Bet’ between God and the Serpent over the Goodness of Creation

God asserts that death, i.e. the separation from the tree of life, is the consequence of taking the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17). In contrast, we have in the dialogue between the serpent and Eve:

“He [the serpent] asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden’?” The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”” (Gen 3:1b–5)

What is immediately striking about this dialogue is that the tree of knowledge – which initially had no clear location – is now placed at the center of Eve’s desire (she now speaks explicitly of the tree that is in the middle of the garden). This desire is embodied in the serpent, which traditionally portrays the liar par excellence due to its claim that man will not die after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Upon closer examination, however, the situation is more complex: for the serpent’s second statement, that after eating the fruit man’s eyes would be opened, is true. This casts the first statement in another light: God does separate man from the tree of life, but obviously this death is not intended as a punishment for a transgression – we immediately receive proof that God still cares for man, as man receives clothing to protect him from the gaze of the Other (Gen 3:21) – since death rather serves as a tragic salvation of man from himself. It prevents man from becoming absolutely omnipotent, from becoming invulnerable, and thus prevents him from falling completely into nothingness. Death prevents man from having himself and the Other completely at his disposal. However there is still, as we will see, an attempt on the part of man to overcome death. Man thus enters into a rivalry with God, in which the decisive question is whether the world is entirely at man’s disposal, or whether it still retains an element of withdrawal and inaccessibility.
The next pericope about Cain and Abel concerns death and the attempt to overcome it. Eve solemnly proclaims the birth of Cain, the firstborn (Gen 4:1), because Cain’s birth has forged a genealogical chain (father-son), which in a patriarchal society is the primary way of achieving immortality: the name lives on in the descendant, who continues to represent the image of the self.

From what has been said, it is clear what the goodness of creation – which God proclaimed – consists in: its vulnerability and mortality, i.e. in not having to be all-powerful and untouchable. The celebration then is the manifestation of God, which does not suppress death, but celebrates the mortal creation with which God has made his covenant. Death, however, is not to be understood as a transition to nothingness; rather it refers to a final inaccessibility [Unverfügbarkeit] of one’s own self and of the Other.

The Prophet Abel and Speaking the Divine Name

While Cain symbolizes genealogy and thus the quest for immortality, God stands on the side of the mute Abel, the righteous (or justified) one (Heb 11:4), in whose name we hear the ‘breeze’, i.e. transitoriness, mortality, and weakness. Abel stands at the margin, just like the seventh day and the tree of knowledge. The parallelism with the first two figures becomes stronger with the arrival of Seth, the third son who takes Abel’s place and whose name (lit.: substitute) points to the function of living on in the name of the victims of domination and claims to power, symbolized in Abel.

We have two parallel worlds then: on the one hand we have the genealogy of Cain and thus Being as the continuation and mirroring of the self. Cain is the progenitor of (among other things) cities and weapon industries, whose function is self-security. On the other hand we have the line of Seth, which also gives rise to Jesus (cf. Lk 3:23–28). In this line, existence is representation [Stellvertretung] of the weak and the marginalized. Where the seventh day and the tree of knowledge inscribe a moment of openness into time and space, Seth inscribes himself directly into the open place of the murdered, the victim: not in order to occupy their place, but rather to carry on their memory. It gives Adam’s genealogy meaning in that it does not express a direct genealogy. The time of the Seth line is the time of the response to and responsibility for the silent call of the victim.

Gen 4:26 states in a small note that “To Seth a son was born and he named him Enosh” and closes with this verse: “At that time people began to invoke the LORD [YHWH] by name.” The name YHWH is not directly utterable and so it is not vocalized in the Bible, which makes this note all the more fascinating.

name Enosh indicates mortal, vulnerable man. Therefore the divine name YHWH resounds in the form of the vulnerable.

**The Divine Name YHWH (Ex 34:6 f.): God as the Predicate of YHWH**

Even more central than Ex 3, in which YHWH reveals himself as God of the exodus, who leads his people out of slavery, is the pericope Ex 32–34, with Ex 34:6 f. at its centre:

“So the LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed: The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity, continuing his love for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but bringing punishment for their parents’ wickedness on children and children’s children to the third and fourth generation!”

G. Borgonovo attempts to demonstrate that Ex 32–34 is at the centre of the Torah and thus of the entire Tanakh or Bible. What is important here at any rate is that Ex 34:6 is the only time in the entire Bible that the divine name is doubled, thus expressing a very special ceremonial, celebratory quality.

The context of the above-quoted passage is Israel’s breach of the covenant when they worshipped the golden calf; in doing so they ceased to be a people of exodus and accordingly YHWH blot them out of his book (Ex 32:33). After all this, the ensuing dialogue between YHWH and Moses does not conclude with a total break from foregoing history, but with YHWH’s renewed covenant, with a partial, verbal allusion (“you have found mercy in my eyes”, “the passing by of YHWH”) to the promise YHWH made to Abraham in Genesis 18 of a descendant (and thus a transformation of history into a history of salvation). The ‘passing by’ of YHWH’s glory [kabod] and (forgiving) goodness enables a revelation of the divine name, though it remains impossible to look upon YHWH directly (Ex 33:23). YHWH presents himself as a verbal event, which is interpreted through various predicates, and these predicates become meaningful only in the performance of the divine name, since they do not represent static attributes. The tetragram indicates a transcendence of every representable content and every external perception. Even the determination ‘God’ is a predicate and functions as the first reference to the divine name, which is followed by the further determinations: ‘merciful,’ ‘keeper of covenants,’ but also ‘ready to bear guilt.’ In this most central place of the Bible, ‘God’ is not the subject of the event, but a reference to the more fundamental name YHWH. In his YHWH-being, God sublates (hebt auf) the guilt-ridden past and acts out God’s presence in the

renewal of the document of the covenant (Ex 34:1.28); the result of Israel’s faithfulness is the path to the Promised Land.

We also encounter the priority of the divine name in the New Testament, e.g. in Mt 28:19, where the mandate is to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The highest Biblical profession of faith does not lie in the statement “YHWH is God” or “God is YHWH”, but rather in the statement “YHWH (is) YHWH”, which expresses the verbal dynamics of the divine name, which exceeds all predication. It is also on this basis that we must interpret the central profession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4 f.:

“Hear O Israel! The Lord [YHWH] our God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.”

We must not understand YHWH’s uniqueness as either a numerical one or as God’s unity; rather it pertains to the singularity of the name, which transcends every finite predication and points to the uniqueness of the relation of love that underlies the event of the covenant. What is of crucial significance for political theology here, is that this name is linked to a text (a canon), which suspends the ruling powers and their reference system.

The Torah as an Alternative Textualization of the World

We can understand the Torah as a textualization [Textwerdung] of the world. This means the transformation of time and its subjectless procession into an affectively connoted system of meaning, with the name YHWH standing at the center of it, which is manifest as faithfulness to the covenant. The biblical text does not narrate Israel’s past as a reference to a ‘time that once was’; rather it re-enacts that history with an eye to its future. It is therefore not a remembrance of a past that has disappeared, but rather the celebratory remembrance of the seventh day, i.e. the remembrance of YHWH’s future, who, as the God of the Fathers, is the one in whose name the exodus of the old symbolic forms (and their repressive structures) can be re-enacted. Even the temple, which at the time of the Torah’s composition either lay in ruins or was a mere shadow of its former glory, shifts to the level of a text (Ex 25–30 and Ex 35–40). In this process, the entire canon can be understood as re-enacting an alternative history that displays its own dynamics: in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Old Testament, the development proceeds from the Torah and its

20 Contrary to his announcement, YHWH no longer describes the stone tablets of the covenant after the breaking of the covenant (Ex 34:1). Thus it is now up to Moses and Israel to re-enact YHWH’s name in faithfulness to the covenant.
promise of a homeland (first part)\textsuperscript{21} to the second part, the \textit{prophets} (\textit{Nebiim}): in these writings events take place at several levels. First, the narrative thread that began with entering the promised land (Jos), ends with the catastrophes of the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian exile (2 Kgs). These traumatic events receive a fourfold commentary by Isaiah (central theme: the destruction of the temple and its re-establishment in the end times), Jeremiah (covenant, breaking of the covenant, and renewal of the covenant), Ezekiel (the holiness of the name YHWH) and the twelve books of the prophets, to be read together as a unity (central theme: God’s name YHWH and YHWH’s day). Backward-looking and forward-looking passages overlap here, and the geographic references shift from the promised land to a universal – or eschatological – level (Ez 40–48). Ultimately the prophets leave the chronological-referential framework behind them – knowing, that a trauma can never be directly addressed – and thus make it possible to open new perspectives on the past (and its victims), without undoing the past. The decisive point here is that there is no more history independent of the text, to which the text refers. Rather, the (prophetic) text creates Israel’s history anew, in that it establishes a system of symbols that serves as an alternative to the ancient Eastern reign, which no longer revolves around the temporal forces of nature or the historical acts of super powers, but rather narrates the hopes of the demolished Israel, which are bound to the name YHWH. Consequently, the name of God is placed in the center by the last prophetic commentary – the book of the twelve prophets –, whose two main motifs are directly taken up in Mt (see above).\textsuperscript{22} A celebratory re-enactment of the name YHWH takes place in the final part of the canon: in the \textit{Ketubim}. In \textit{Job} they follow the path of man’s suffering, the \textit{Psalms} address the canon’s history to YHWH, the \textit{Megillot} (the five feast scrolls, which are read for Israel’s greatest feasts) translates the name YHWH into a celebratory event, and, finally, there is the paradigmatic reconstitution of God’s chosen people in the recapitulation of the universal history (in the books of Dan, Ezr, Neh, Chr), which guides the reader’s attention to the temple, where YHWH’s glory has its seat (2 Chr 36:23).

YHWH’s day, as the seventh/eighth day, on which YHWH hallows his name, is described in the New Testament as Jesus’ path to the cross. YHWH’s glory – which had its residence in the cover of the Ark of the Covenant in the temple (as the place of the forgiveness of sins), and which is the center of salvation history – appears in the figure of Jesus, specifically on the cross, which suspends all other

\textsuperscript{21} In this part Moses and Israel will not enter the land, but it remains in view as a promised future.

\textsuperscript{22} The day of YHWH is interpreted in Jesus’ genealogy. This not only recapitulates the main stages of the salvation history of Israel – in its ‘3x14 names’ schema, with the stations Abraham-David/ David-Exile/ Exile-Jesus – but also sets out its own specific design since the last genealogical series only mentions 13 names; the fourteenth designates YHWH’s openness and his \textit{parousia}, which structure the whole of history.
symbols of power, including the natural cosmos. It is from this point of view that we must understand (e.g.) the apocalyptic insertions in the synoptic gospels: the cosmic order collapses, preparing the way for Jesus’ words (cf. Mk 13:31), which in being read reconstitutes the world.

The *Johannine writings* offer a particularly striking example of the transformation of history (in the sign of the cosmos and its dominant powers) into text (in the sign of the cross), and as we will see, they have a special place in the canon. The *Book of Revelation*, as the final writing of the Christian canon, casts the representations of the historical powers into the lake of fire, so that history – dressed up in the iconography of its conquering powers – records and displays the victims of those powers, symbolizing the victims in the cross and the slaughtered lamb. Jesus, as the wounded sacrificial lamb, holds the key to history in his hand, as his body becomes an affective space (the space of the biblical canon) where empathy for the wounded can gain expression. In this sense, the cosmos is transformed into a textual body, i.e. into the biblical canon, which functions as the body of history’s victims, and which liturgically re-stages that history. We must place special emphasis on the fact that while the last scripture of the Christian canon, the *Book of Revelation*, exhibits an intertextual collage of quotes from the rest of the (Old Testament) canon, it never quotes directly from the Tanakh. Under the impression of the cross, the text shifts: it is transformed into a liturgical response to the reversal of history that takes place in the text (from rulers to their victims), in which the being-with and presence of the name YHWH makes itself manifest. In this form of address, not only is profane history cast into the lake of fire, but the entire biblical canon undergoes a displacement, since the denotative word must transform itself into a performative liturgy in order to gain access to the open body of a universal affective space, which stands under the sign of exposure and total dedication.

**Ecce Homo! The Apocalypse of Power and YHWH’s Glory**

“Once more Pilate went out and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him.’ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, ‘Behold, the man!’” (John 19:4 f.)

23 Accordingly, this liturgy closes with an amen, followed by a universal blessing as the last word of the Bible (Rev 22:21).
24 It is also fitting in this picture that the Book of Revelation seems to be the only ancient writing that deliberately incorporates grammatical errors, above all with respect to the name of God. This makes it clear that in the encounter with the cross as the place of YHWH’s glory, language breaks down.
A process of re-reading the Tanakh, but also of the (synoptic) gospels, begins with the Gospel of John. The prologue to John cites the beginning of the Tanakh, while the end of John (John 20:17) discusses the ascension to the Father, which the end of the Tanakh alludes to (2 Chr 36:23). Three further observations are crucial here:

a. The *logos* of the beginning not only refers to the word of creation in Genesis or to the Greek *Logos*, in which the world becomes legible, but also to the Torah or Tanakh. Thus at the beginning was the word of the canon, which is interpreted in Jesus (Jn 1:18). Jesus is manifest as “God-is” (John 1:18); his coming discloses the name of YHWH and thus the canon. Whoever reads John is invited to encounter Jesus in reading the canon (John 1:37–39). The canon leads the reader to John and from there to the cross. The genuine creation of the world takes place in the reading of John, which culminates in the way to the cross. By following Jesus to the cross YHWH’s glory becomes visible.

b. The Holy Spirit’s mission promises those who believe in Jesus to accomplish greater works than Jesus had (John 14:12). These greater works cannot mean a greater number of resurrections, or turning more water into wine. Rather, the greater work is the Spirit-inspired re-reading of the canon, which John (or the beloved disciple, who is the paradigmatic reader of the canon) brings to paradigmatic expression. This gives the Holy Spirit – the ‘other’ support – a precise location: just as Jesus is the *Logos* of the canon insofar as his path accomplishes YHWH’s “passing by”, the Holy Spirit is the key to reading the canon, the ultimate experience of which is the vision of YHWH’s glory on the cross.

c. We must also take John’s position into account. It not only divides Lucan double-work, but finds itself in the fourth place of the gospels. This is surprising since John, which according to tradition was written by an apostle (in contrast to Mark and Luke, written by apostle’s disciples), should be in the first or second position in the New Testament. Situating John in the fourth place, *between* the two related books of Luke and Acts, seems to not only express that John is a re-reading

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25 Without a knowledge of at least one of the other synoptic gospels, John would be incomprehensible, and John’s position as the fourth gospel also indicates that it is a continuation of the other three.

26 In *Tempo e Dio* Appel attempts to show that the following passages already introduce the epilogue of John, insofar as Mary Magdalene is not only the first witness of the Risen One, but with her the way to the cross also initiates the paradigmatic re-reading of the canon. Thus she is the first concrete embodiment of the beloved disciple. The following passages, as an epilogue, reflect once again the true view on Jesus and history. Cf. Kurt Appel, *Tempo e Dio* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2018).

27 Cf. for example Ps 119, where Logos means the Torah (or the Tanakh).

28 The invitation to see where Jesus lives primarily refers to seeing the canon as Jesus’ actual dwelling. One of Jesus’ two students remains anonymous so the reader can find herself in that figure.
of the synoptic gospels, but also the fact that this gospel does not sit on the same level as the other canonical writings. It is located on a meta-level (like how the seventh/eighth day evokes a meta-level, in contrast to the six days of labor, as it opens and transcends the chronological order), where the canon – and therefore the entire history of salvation – is subjected to a new interpretation in the Spirit.

“Seeing” is the crucial keyword in the Johannine writings. The Gospel of John and Revelation (and 1 John as well) concern adequately seeing the real, a gaze which becomes manifest in the vision of YHWH’s glory (John 1:14), considered as the purpose of history. Thus the task to see the (vulnerable) reality is connected to perceiving both Jesus, the lamb of God (John 1:29–35; Rev 5:6), and seeing the history that will have been (Revelation). The Lamb is a sign that henceforth, Jesus, in his devotion and radical openness to the Other, will be representative of the victim as the subject of history. John 19:5 offers another crucial passage where the author invokes seeing, as he explicitly directs the gaze once again to YHWH’s glory.

Usually this verse, which is situated in the context of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, is translated so that the Roman governor asks others to look upon the tortured Jesus. While this translation is not completely impossible, it finds little theological or grammatical support in the text. Rather, in an act of self-revelation, it is Jesus who asks an adequate way of seeing for humanity in that he speaks the words “Ecce Homo”. He turns our eyes to the cynicism of the apparatuses of power, which have condemned him to death even while recognizing his innocence. The real representation of the Absolute is not Pilate, the representative of the Empire, but the tortured man: it is now the victims who represent the history that the powerful have written.

“Ecce Homo”, perhaps more than any other scene, offers a haunting display of what Hegel captured in theory, when after the comedic consciousness comes the incarnation of God as the unification of sense certainty and absolute spirit. “Ecce Homo” is sense certainty as absolute knowledge, since all the trappings of power have fallen away, and power is revealed in its naked brutality. That YHWH’s glory is revealed in the tortured man is the highest paradox and innermost moment of history. Only a vision that surpasses immediate sensoriness – which would be voyeurism – can recognize the world in its vulnerable contingency; this would require a seeing that perceives the infinite vulnerability of being (which emerges in its most radical form in that species of torture that is capable of delaying and, in a certain sense, mastering death) as the most profound sensory and cognitive experience. Whoever sees the world in this way no longer subdues the world under his own will for dominion. He deciphers history as a killing machine that the historical powers have installed, though these powers prove unable to rob their victims of the glory of YHWH.
The whole context and ‘performance’ of this passage is of decisive importance for the question of political theology: Pilate (the representative of Roman dominance) and Jesus are mutually exclusive and yet inseparably linked antipodes. Jesus is the parody of the expected Messiah. His messianic power does not display itself in a new empire, but rather in the ironic reversal [Ironisierung] of (Roman) rule, whose power he suspends upon the cross. Pilate, by contrast, attempts to make an ironic-reversal of messianism from a position of power with an act of writing, not understanding, that Jesus’ Kingdom, which he regards in mock irony, will have accomplished an ironic reversal of his own rule.

The question of sight is crucial in the encounter with the Resurrected One: when Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ first witness (Apostola Apostolorum), went to Jesus’ grave, she first encounters a gardener (Jn 20:15). That’s because her gaze is directed at the hoped for return of paradise, in which God (as gardener) has planted a garden. At first she does not see that “Jesus is”. This passage is not about a false identification brought about by Mary Magdalene’s problems with her vision, or Jesus camouflaging himself; rather it concerns the steps Mary must take from confessing her belief in God the creator (the gardener) to her belief in Jesus’ YHWH-being (the words “I am” or the words “Jesus is” refer to YHWH’s self-revelation in Ex 3 and Ex 34). As a consequence, Mary is not allowed to hold on to Jesus, for Jesus’ YHWH-being is connected with his journey to the Father, which in turn is inseparably bound to the ascension of his disciples to this Father. The Gospel of John artfully connects the subject of Mary with the subject of Jesus in 20:17 (“I am going [up] to…”), in that he leaves open whether it is Mary or Jesus who is the subject of the announcement to the disciples. This not only indicates an unsurpassable intimacy between Jesus and Mary, who are one in the ascension, but enacts the task of ascension with which the Tanakh ends. On the one hand, looking back, this task completes the recapitulation of the canon, and on the other hand, looking forward, this task is the ascent to the cross, in which the canon becomes legible in its ultimate truth. In doing so, Jesus binds his existence as a reference to the name YHWH (which becomes concrete history in his journey to the Father), to a corresponding reception, which the reader of the canon must keep alive.

History, in the sense of the canon, is therefore not primarily related to what is past; rather it is primarily related to the way to the cross, or to the opening of a common, affective space, which must remain open to the wounded and the

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29 On this point I must openly thank Marlene Deibl for sharing hints and insights with me.
30 Cf. (Jn 19:19), which refers to Pilate’s inscription upon the cross: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.
31 Here it cannot be the case that, after his resurrection, Jesus lingers on earth for a while and then goes to the Father, for his place is with the Father. It is crucial that Jesus connects his path to the Father to the path of his disciples.
murdered. As a symbol of devotion, exposure, and vulnerability, the cross opens up a new friendship that reaches into the innermost cells of the body, while simultaneously suspending the representation of one’s proper name (the subject of Mary becomes the subject of Jesus and vice versa). The (individual and collective) subject of the reader of the canon exists between his own history (her proper name) and the divine name YHWH; thus it does not exist within itself, but is radically open to the Other.

We also encounter this structure in the Pauline doctrine of justification: the decisive idea here is that, through his resurrection, Jesus becomes the new Adam, i.e. he is the new representative of man and all of creation: henceforth we can no longer regard any human being (actually, any creature, cf. Col 1:15–20) purely empirically, since they are all mediated by the figure of Jesus. The ethical equivalent of this new view – and the only commandment that can still claim absolute validity – is therefore the statement: consider the person you encounter as though you were encountering Jesus (and thus the glory of YHWH).

The canon shows itself to be inspired by the Spirit insofar as it suspends self-referential subjectivity and opens itself to the name of YHWH, which is manifest in this suspension. Therefore, according to its own being, the canon must be open to new contexts, i.e. to what is Other with respect to itself. Jesus’ cross, as the ultimate symbol of the Christian canon, must not become another dominant symbol of identity. Rather, Jesus reveals himself on the cross as the name of all names, in so far as he has not been misused as justification to wield power over others, but is instead transsubstantiated into the empathic community of the vulnerable, which at the same time remains open to experiences of the alien and of decentering. Thus the canon not only bears the truth within itself, but also in the encounter with what is Other to it.

The Canonical Dimension of the Qur’an as Decentering the Canon

The canon’s spiritual power consists primarily in the way it generates forms of reception (contexts) that make its own decentering possible. Its inner plurality is already evident in the fact that the canon exists in multiple forms: regarding the Old Testament, we can of course mention the Hebrew Tanakh (in its Masoretic form) and the Septuagint. Furthermore, we should also mention four epochal

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32 From a Christian point of view, in Jesus all names stand in this ‘space between’ proper names and YHWH. This not only applies to humans but to all living beings who have been given a name.

33 This concept of representation proceeds from the ontological presupposition that being is also Being-For (the Other) [Dasein-Für (den Anderen)].

34 Of course one could also point out here that the Gospel is in the form of four Gospels.
forms of world-encounter [Weltbegegnung], in whose symbolic orders the canon has been adjusted and carried forward: in two direct forms – namely in the Christian Church(es) and in Talmudic Judaism – and in two indirect forms: in the Qur’an35 and in the modern, secular constitutional state.36 While Christianity is gradually learning to respect the Jews as the first love of God (after centuries of the persecution of Judaism, and because of the catastrophe of Auschwitz), and while the Catholic Church (since the Second Vatican Council) and most Protestant churches can cautiously describe their relation to the secular constitutional state (and the secular philosophy it entails) in positive terms, Christianity has yet to demonstrate theological hospitality to Islam, and the Qur’an upon which it is based – either in spite of or because of the fact they too relate directly to Jesus.

The question, then, is: should Christianity recognize the Qur’an as a revealed, canonical scripture? There are two further connected questions here: 1. Why, in chronological terms, should there be yet another religion with a claim to revelation and a decisive impact upon history after Christianity, which received the incarnate Word of God in Jesus? 2. What significance would the Qur’an have for Christianity if it were recognized as a revealed scripture? Regarding the latter question, it is clear that if we understand the Qur’an as an authentic contextualization of the canon, it will have repercussions on the interpretation of the Bible. In responding to the latter question, one could perhaps proceed from the following observation: the Qur’an is the recited Word of God, i.e. the recitation

35 Muslim scholars have often charged Jews and Christians with falsifying the canon (Tahrif). For this charge they refer to passages in the Qur’an like 4:46 and 5:41. These passages, however, can be interpreted quite differently. All in all one must assume that in the Qur’an there was no doubt of the validity of the holy texts of Judaism and Christianity. Christians and Jews who combine the Qur’an with their own tradition, even get the double reward (Sura 28, verse 52–54). Cf. Abdullah Takim, Koranexegese im 20. Jahrhundert. Islamische Tradition und neue Ansätze in Süleyman Ates’s “Zeitgenössischem Korankommentar” (Istanbul: Yeni Ufuklar, 2007). On the relationship of the Qur’an and the pre-Qur’anic tradition, cf. also Angelika Neuwirth, Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

36 In the context of this article the author cannot go any further into the relationship between the canon and the modern constitutional state. The author would like to mention, however, that by no means should we use the term ‘secular’ as a counter-term to ‘religious’, but use it strictly in relation to the idea of free autonomy. Modern secularism has emerged in the confrontation with institutionalized Christian churches (and thus also in the recourse to ancient traditions), but this does not change the fact that one can draw the concept of personhood and the idea of universality from the biblical tradition. However this should not be taken as asserting any kind of monopoly on those concepts; the potential for institutionalizing human co-existence in such a way that takes the vulnerability of life into account – which we find in the great Asian religions, but also in the cultures of indigenous peoples and African cultures – is something that Christianity too must constantly re-discover.
by those who submit themselves to it (Islam) reveals Allah. This places the question of God at the center of the Qur’an, specifically the question of the unique, transcendent, and merciful God, the one we come to know from the first sura onwards. This confession of faith brings us right to the centre of the biblical canon, namely to Ex 34 and its confession of faith in “YHWH YHWH” as merciful God. For Christians, this turn to the unique God implies a request – which is also entailed by Judaism – regarding traditional interpretations of the Trinitarian confession of faith in God. In Christianity there is an all too facile tendency to interpret the unique name YHWH in a tritheistic manner, an all too facile tendency to transform the asymmetry between Jesus and the Father in the New Testament (cf. John 14:7) into a leveled and completely symmetrical relationship, so that the Father and Son become almost interchangeable. Christian theology cannot renounce its foundational dogmas (i.e. the Trinitarian confession of faith in God and the confession of faith in Jesus as “God-is”) without being unfaithful to its own canon (e.g. Matt 28:19; John 20:28). The question, however, is whether or not an appreciative reception of Muslim revelation leads to a deeper understanding of the canon and thus to a deeper understanding of YHWH YHWH. Jesus is not merciful in the sense that his mercifulness is just one of his properties among others; rather he is the concrete expression of YHWH’s mercifulness, which also occupies a central place in the recitation of the Qur’an. Jesus is not a second God, but is the ‘God-is’, i.e. the verbal performance of the name YHWH, which, as suggested in the context of Ex 34:6-7, goes far beyond being a mere representation of a supreme being. For Christians, Jesus is the unique reference to YHWH who is manifest in a concrete history, though Jesus’ journey to the cross and his resurrection – in which the name YHWH is manifest – have a profound kenotic dimension. Therefore, like the tree of knowledge, Jesus is only in the center when he is simultaneously at the margin – which in turn sheds light on the relation of the Bible and the Qur’an, which are at the center and the margins of one another.

In the Qur’an, Jesus is the “Spirit of Allah” (Sura 4, verse 171) and he occupies a special position among men (virgin birth, ability to speak even as a baby, capability of creation etc.). It is specifically Jesus’ emergence from Mary’s womb that emphasizes his proximity to God’s mercy, as the womb of Mary refers symbolically and semantically to divine mercy. In the reading that I propose in this article, the Holy Spirit – who expresses the fact that the canon is not an object of exegetical interest, but is rather a subject – must also express more than just the loving union of Father and Son. Specifically, it is the inspiration, first reader, and author of the canon, as well as its affective space; in this determination it can be brought into proximity with the Qur’an, the recited Word of God. The often-used juxtaposition of Jesus as God’s Word made flesh and the Qur’an as God’s Word ‘made text’ does not fully do justice to the fact that Jesus represents the incarnate

37 There we find the crucial statement: YHWH (is) YHWH, and divinity is only the first interpretation of this event.
word of God’s mercy, as an interpretation of the name YHWH. Furthermore, the Qur’an is not simply God’s Word in book form; it is rather the recitation of the divine word, i.e. its affective and sensory re-enactment (in this sense the affective horizon of the canon – indicated in the way to the cross – transforms itself into the voice of the believer).

The Qur’an is canonical insofar as it never expresses an objectifiable system of references – this is especially evident in those enigmatic signs that initiate 29 suras (including sura 2), and which resist every final reference; its purpose is to create a space of affective resonance through its recitation by a congregation, a space in which Allah can be sensorily effectual. Just as the (biblical) canon, through a Spirit-inspired reading (i.e. through the praxis of the succession), leads the believer to the divine name “YHWH YHWH”, and radically transforms the symbolic order of the world (from physis to the sign), the liturgical re-enactment of the Qur’an, through its recitation, also signifies the transformation of the world into a resonating chamber of Allah’s mercy.

Taking up these ideas, we return to the question concerning why a revelation after Christianity takes place. It is striking that, first, the Qur’an questions some of the theological one-sidedness of the Christian tradition, which in some cases has had some devastating effects: for instance, the emphasis on the image of Jesus as pantocrator (as the pinnacle of the Christian program of icons and imagery), which, although it can be truly understood in its subversive meaning, has nonetheless very easily turned into representations of exaggerated worldly and clerical powers. Second, one may perhaps also be able to affirm more fundamentally that every Christian representation must remain open to its Other, and therefore the canon, the cross and like Jesus himself.

Conclusion

Christian Political Theology is charged with the task of creating ironic reversals of power’s self-representations, in order to create space for the encounter with the Other and to be able to encounter the vulnerable (and unrepresentable) core of life. Theology can become ‘political’ by doling out divine justifications and unshakable images of sovereignty. But in that case, the political reverts back to a mere appropriation of power. Indeed, in the Catholic tradition one can observe a unique aesthetic program, in which the Church presented itself. Everything is well-ordered and has aesthetic depth: from the church buildings to the cardinal classes up to the cathedra Petri. These representations can and must be subject to a permanent theological critique. But this critique should not enter into the completely abstract program of ridding ourselves of all representations, for such a radicalized negative theology would go hand in hand with the invisible omnipresence of power. The atheistic god and its ‘imagelessness’ [Bildlosigkeit] – which hides behind the virtual world today, which refers to ‘nothing’ – announces
an absolute power that no longer represents a nameable subject. Thus political theology must concern itself more with the ironic reversal and decentering of representations. Perhaps in this sense theology could contribute to establishing friendly relations among Christianity, Islam, and the secular world in the future, precisely because in the future they will be bound to one another by mutually taking up the task of decentering.

References


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This article explores Giorgio Agamben’s celebrated “double paradigm of sovereignty”, which introduces the Christian idea of *oikonomia* (“economy”) as a foundational political concept in Western thinking. It argues that Agamben’s far-ranging discussion improves our understanding of how Foucault’s notion of biopower actually develops historically from the matrix of early Christian theology and how it becomes its own kind of “political theology” to undergird the contemporary dynamics, structure, and rhetoric of neoliberalism. Following Agamben, the argument also builds on his thesis that “economic sovereignty” today is cemented through the power of modern forms of media in much the same way that the critical theorists of the interwar period identified the “culture industry” as the genuine hegemon of capitalism. Finally, it devotes extensive attention to the work of the French social philosopher and media theorist Bernard Stiegler and his notion of “cognitive capitalism.”

Giorgio Agamben; Michel Foucault; Carl Schmitt; Oikonomia; Trinity; Biopolitics; Pastorate; Karl Marx; Wendy Brown; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Jürgen Habermas; Bernard Stiegler; Cognitive Capitalism; Neoliberalism; Social Media

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**Introduction**

The aim of this essay is to demonstrate how Giorgio Agamben’s third volume of his critical trilogy on the concept of sovereignty entitled *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* can be read as framework for a new theory of global neoliberalism as “cognitive capitalism.”

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Glory, while attempting to use his thesis to perform some sort of “genealogy” of the present day international order to which scholars have attached the label of “neoliberalism.” The most important of these works is Dotan Leshem’s *The Origin of Neoliberalism: Modelling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault*, a massive and extremely detailed historical investigation of Patristic theology and political theory in late Roman antiquity, which serves both to fill out and revise many of Agamben’s speculations. Of course, the book only deals with the “origin” of neoliberalism in the first five or six centuries of the Christian era and offers no real new insights on Foucault’s own contributions. A second work, which focuses more on the relationship between theological constructs and the development of early financial instruments, is Devin Singh’s *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West*. Singh’s volume combines much of the Patristic literature treated by Leshem, but delves more assiduously into the kinds of innovative hypotheticals advanced by Philip Goodchild in his highly influential *Theology of Money*.

But these strictly theological genealogies of “neoliberalism” do not give us anywhere near the full picture. In addition, the presumed linkage between Patristic thought and modern political economy is more a highly suggestive historical analogy for which the prestige of Agamben has set a scholarly brushfire than it is a useful map for conceptualizing the present day phenomenon. Rather than pre-occupying ourselves with Agamben’s notion of “economy,” as the aforementioned researchers have done, we will instead inquire in this essay into the former’s theory of “glory” as the secret of the present regime of virtualized political economy.

We will show through a close reading of such eminent theorists as Wendy Brown, Bernard Stiegler, and of course the Marxist tradition overall how the distinguishing feature of the relatively untheorized bogeyman of progressive politics regularly branded as “neoliberalism” is not simply capitalism gone wild. Nor is it somehow, as a number of scholars have fancifully and polemically conjectured, the inexorable millennia-long outgrowth of Western Christianity. So-called neoliberal “rationality” has far more to do with the development of a twenty-first century symbolic economy – a global emporium of exchange built on significations and simulacra rather than surplus materiality or expropriated labor. It is this “mediatized” form of economic value that uniquely serves as the latter day architectonic for neoliberalism, which is a polity, a culture, an economy, and a structure of representation all rolled into one. Neoliberalism today has by its own internal syllogistics been the prime mover for the current “crisis of representa-

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tion”, and we must do more than merely concentrate on the problem of markets and the fungibility of goods and services through historical exchange mechanisms to decipher the crisis itself.

If I may badly paraphrase Jesus, “markets you will always have with you.” The dark bodings of the present neoliberal moment are to the injustice of markets what Genghis Khan was to the petty corruptions of local Byzantine officials. A much more profound and consequential set of issues are currently at stake.

1. The Trinitarian Watershed

In the *The Kingdom and the Glory* Agamben lays out in the opening sentence a project that will take Foucault’s theory of “governmentality” to a new level. “This study,” he writes, “will inquire into the paths by which and the reasons why power in the West has assumed the form of an oikonomia.” It “locates” itself within the ongoing genealogical investigations that Foucault initiated in the 1970s, Agamben says, “but, at the same time, it also aims to understand the internal reasons why they failed to be completed.” Foucault was unable, Agamben suggests, to acknowledge “the shadow that the theoretical interrogation of the present casts onto the past reaches well beyond the chronological limits that Foucault causes, as if a more primordial genetic rank would necessarily pertain to theology.” In fact, it can be traced all the way back, according to Agamben, to the very “onto-theological” template for all Western thought itself, the *three-in-one* Godhead.

Agamben announces in his opening statement that he aims to go beyond Foucault’s fixation on the clerico-confessional management of both the language and psychology of salvation compressed into the latter’s notion of the “pastorate,” which becomes the groundwork for the theory of “biopolitics”. He argues that he wants to “show instead how the apparatus of the Trinitarian oikonomia may constitute a privileged laboratory for the observation of the working and articulation – both internal and external – of the governmental machine. For within this apparatus the elements – or the polarities – that articulate the machine appear, as it were, in their paradigmatic form.” Agamben proposes a few sentences later that the question of *oikonomia*, which means of course “household” in Greek and from which we derive both of the terms *economy* and *ecology*, is ultimately about the essence of “power” in the Western context. The metaphysics of “economy” is, in crucial but somewhat opaque respects, paired with the seemingly “antinomical” (Agamben’s term) construct of “sovereignty” in the absolute sense that Carl Schmitt analyzed in the 1920s. “The double structure of the governmental machine, which in *State of Exception* (2003) appeared in the correlation between auctoritas and potestas, here takes the form of the articulation between Kingdom and Government and, ultimately, interrogates the very relation – which initially was not considered – between oikonomia and Glory, between power as government and effective management, and power as ceremonial and liturgical regality,
two aspects that have been curiously neglected by both political philosophers and political scientists.\(^5\)

For Agamben, both Schmitt and Foucault serve as the double axis today, much like Kant and Hegel in the nineteenth century, for an investigation of the political. In addition, the analysis of the political is impossible without consideration of its embedded \textit{theological} substrata, a famous argument which Carl Schmitt advanced almost a century ago, but which has only been applied for all intents and purposes (as Agamben points out) heretofore to the notion of exceptionality (\textit{Ausnahmezustand}) without due regard for the increasingly relevant concept of \textit{proportionality}. This question, which perhaps amounts to a Derridean \textit{aporia} or “undecidable”, harks all the way back to Plato and the beginnings of Western philosophy in itself. It also trenches on the question in early Christianity of the significance of “law”, or \textit{nomos}, within the larger scheme of what the Greeks named \textit{dikaiosyne}, or “justice”. Is the law strictly situational (i.e., does it apply only, as Paul asked, to those who like the Jews are “under the law”), or is it truly “universal” in the way that Kant’s “practical reason” later formulated it (i.e., valid for all persons from all cultures and polities at all times in the same set of circumstances)?

Simply stated, is “justice” ultimately \textit{retributive} or \textit{distributive}? And who can, or \textit{should}, administer it? If justice is founded merely on sovereign, or divine, decree, then the appropriate “political” configuration is doubtlessly \textit{autocracy}. If justice is all about \textit{ratio}, or proportional allotment (Simonides’ “rendering to each person his due”\(^6\)), then it must subject to what contemporary theoreticians would term “administrative” or “managerial” reason – in other words, the logic of bureaucracy and the subtle play within the biopolitical venue of “power” alongside “knowledge”, as Foucault understood it.\(^7\) The latter would also be the prevailing semiotic coding mechanism for present day \textit{democracies}. How does one, therefore, assess \textit{real}, as opposed to imagined, power in accordance with the paradigm of “governmentality” that Foucault initially sketched out? And what would be the theological \textit{episteme}, as Foucault might call it, within which this process unfolds?

Agamben notably argues that the paradigms of both sovereignty and \textit{oikonomia} derive straightaway from “Christian theology” – on the one hand, a “political theology, which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God,” and on the other hand, an “economic theology, replacing this transcendence with the idea of an \textit{oikonomia}, conceived as an immanent ordering – domestic and not political in a strict sense – of both divine and human life.”\(^8\) The theological provenance of both transcendent sovereignty and an “immanent or-

\(^5\) Agamben, \textit{The Kingdom and the Glory}, loc. 113–119.
\(^6\) Plato, \textit{Republic}, 331(e).
\(^7\) See Michel Foucault, \textit{Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews And Other Writings} (New York: Vintage, 1980).
\(^8\) Agamben, \textit{The Kingdom and the Glory}, loc. 150–156.
The Trinitarian formulation at Nicea. Trinitarianism historically can be seen as a compromise to reconcile the Caesaro-papal instincts of Christianity’s new imperial benefactor Constantine, who sought to unify the empire under one common faith, with the “pastoral” apparatus that the underground and previously persecuted church had already achieved with its remarkable, organizational prowess over nearly three centuries. The Trinitarian formula was also a sophisticated outworking in both a political and philosophical context of the inherent “incarnational” synthesis of pagan and Jewish thought brilliantly articulated from 50 to approximately 65 A.D. by the apostle Paul. Apart from such a synthesis, Christianity would not only have failed to develop over time, especially after the debacle of the Jewish War in 70 A.D. It would also have proved inadequate as a true “state religion” designed to hold the fractious and centrifugal forces of a decaying Roman empire together, a project which a successive caesars prior to Constantine had unsuccessfully attempted under the guise of an innovative form of unitary “solar monothesism”. The prestige of the militarized Roman state had already been in decline since the disasters on the frontiers a century earlier. Hence, Constantine needed a new, religio-symbolic order that embraced the pecularities of the already sprawling and largely literate clerical classes, which were heavily populated by Christians. The Christianity of antiquity from the outset was what Foucault terms “governmental”, and it came to be secularized, especially in the France of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as Prussia during the nineteenth century, which invented through the ministrations of the Lutheran Landeskirche what has come to be known as “state socialism”. Genealogically, the Prussian prototype of a secularized clerical state governance centered on the university and its “faculties” along with the military and a cartelized financial system dating all the way back to the Middle Ages was the seedbed for the growth of what currently we recognized as larger “neoliberal” order, not to mention Bernard Stiegler’s “cognitive capitalism” or Peter Drucker’s “knowledge society.”

2. From Oikonomia to Biopolitics

So far as Agamben is concerned, the “biopolitical” administration of the world is authorized by the idea that the divine is, in effect, a triple functionary, as first enunciated per scholarly consensus by the church father Irenaeus of Lyon in the latter half of the second century with his claim that the Godhead is one in reality, but manifests through three different functions, or operations. Whereas Irenaeus

10 Jackson J. Lashier, however, in his close reading of Irenaeus’ works suggest that
understands the “economic” administration of the Triune God to entail the work of the Son as well as the Father and the Spirit, Agamben is concerned mainly with the first and third persons of the Trinity. But what makes *oikonomia* unique, according to Agamben, is that it mirrors not the sphere of sovereignty that informs the *politeia* (that is, “the political”) but the *household*. Broadly conceived, *oikonomia* in the Aristotelian setting has only to do with the conduct of personal or family affairs – dealings between master and slave, father and children, husband and wife – which are completely set apart from, and impenetrable by, the *polis*. Whereas in the modern “republican”, or bourgeois, setting the household would be regarded as a kind of monadic prototype for civil society – and in Hegel’s “philosophy of right” for the rationality of the state *tout court* – it would paradoxically in the Athenian environment be envisioned as the very penumbra of the political. How would, therefore, the “economic” model of human relationships be gradually given separate, but importance with “despotic” sovereignty? The result would be a Christian “political theology” that would ultimately leave its unmistakable “signature”, as Agamben puts it, on the modern secular order, while perhaps becoming what Schmitt in his later work would describe as the “nomos of the earth”?

It is a commonplace among historians that the Christian *ekklesia* evolved during and throughout the pre-Constantian era as a kind of shadow state, purposed for the general “care of souls”, filling an enormous social as well as spiritual vacuum which the militarized and overly politicized *imperium* was completely derelict in executing. The role of the Christian pastorate, therefore, became its own kind of Aristotelian “household” writ large and inscribed, despite the recurrent antagonism of the imperial authorities, within the “cosmopolitan” expanse of an increasingly unwieldy – and ungovernable – empire. After the “conversion” of Constantine, the dialectics throughout the Mediterranean world of *polis* versus *oikonimia* resulted in an unparalleled moment of Aufhebung, which still persists into the present.

At the same time, if “politics” and “economics” are now separate, yet theoretically *inseparable*, in the guise of what we have come to call “political economy”, and if these two modalities of “administration” have been fused ever since the age of Constantine by a dominant *political theology* of both God and government as necessarily sovereign, yet simultaneously “caring” and concerned for the general welfare, what does that portend for the present and evolving “globalist” configuration of polities and peoples, one in which once independent ethnicities, the pith of national sovereignty ever since the seventeenth century, have been replaced with the new transnational empire of fluid markets and nomadic

Irenaeus was not the first to articulate an “economic” model, but drew on various threads of commentary from an earlier generation of Christian apologists. See Jackson J. Lashier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, May 2011.

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capital? This new empire is no longer defined by disciplinary structures of hegemony and authority as much as by the swarming and “sliding” signifiers (in Lacan’s sense) that constitute digital communications and the infinitely rarified specimens of financial transactivity? Such indicators, following the academic conventions of the last decade or so, delineate much of what has come to be known as “neoliberalism.” And the new planetary regime that carries its name has come to be invested with a certain disrepute, even among those who are visibly as well as invisibly its agents of influence and benefactors.

At a very superficial level, this new global demesne of etherealized capital, which as we have seen derives its power from the pseudo-ethical imperative of a “socially conscious” consumerism that will “save the planet”, resembles the ancient ideal of Romanitas. Such an ideal can be summed up simply as collection of higher “humanist” values on which citizens of the empire relied in order to justify morally and culturally their brutal subjugation of the far-flung multitudes. It was similar to the British colonizer’s fiction of their “civilizing mission” throughout the nineteenth century. But this kind of “humanism,” which the Romans invariably contrasted with the pervasive “barbarism” which they were convinced had to be conquered and pushed back from its borders, was ultimately inadequate to keep the empire together. It inexorably fell prey to a kind of regional warlordism stoked by the increasing reliance of the regime on non-citizens, or what today we would describe as “stateless” mercenaries, to maintain peace and order amidst a widely dysfunctional political, as well as steadily collapsing economic, system.

What the Christian oikonomia provided was a different form of governance akin to what today we would call “soft power” through the mediation of a compelling new symbolic ensemble of instrumentalities. In Agamben’s view the power wielded by the “pastorate” in this new clerical economy derives from what he calls a politics of “glory.” Such a politics is immanently inscribed within the social order to the extent that it encompasses the entirety of those who are not mere subjects, but also those who are claimed by, or theorized as coming under the authority, of the lordly realm. The Medieval legal figment of a “Holy Roman empire” could not have been elaborated over the centuries without this curious sort of pastoral postulate. In Roman times this privilege of invoking such a principle was accorded only to the narrow circle of those holding “citizenship”. But the early church rendered it “transcendental” in the sense that it promoted a novel style of “subjectivity” through baptism into, and participation within, the body of Christ. In other words, because of the pastoral postulate Christians were constituted as more than simply political subjects. They were incorporated soteriologically, rather than strictly civically, into a “kingdom not of this world.”
3. The Instrumentality of Glory and the Origins of a Symbolic Economy

Augustine, writing during the decades of imperial prostration in the early fifth century, first laid out the general theory of such dual subjection in his *City of God*. But while he, like Paul, looked for the reconciliation of these “two kingdoms” only at the moment of an eschatological finale, his ecclesiastical imagination laid the groundwork for the revival of the Constantinian synthesis during the high Middle Ages and eventually for the rise of a *novum ordo seclorum* in the late modern period. The question of “glory” as “the uncertain zone in which acclamations, ceremonies, liturgies, and insignia operate”, for Agamben, came to be transposed from the sacerdotal to the symbology of secular politics overall.11

Agamben writes: “glory is the place where theology attempts to think the difficult conciliation between immanent trinity and economic trinity, theologa and oikonomia, being and praxis, God in himself and God for us. For this reason, the doxology, despite its apparent ceremonial fixity, is the most dialectical part of theology, in which what can only be thought of as separate must attain unity.”12 The instrumentality of “glory,” which was used routinely by both kings and clergy up until early twentieth century and became the flash point for the kind of sectarian conflict that eventually morphed into anti-clerical political revolutions, served as the precursor, according to Agamben, for the *aestheticization* of mass politics that found its most demonic expression in the various totalitarianisms of the twentieth century. “We find here, as we find at the hidden root of all aestheticisms,” Agamben notes, “the need to cover and dignify what is in itself pure force and domination”.13 But this “aesthetic” subterfuge can also be understood in terms of the virtualization of politics through both earlier and later forms of media and the manipulation of what once were material interests through the idealizing mechanisms of a “symbolic economies,” about which I have written in my book *Force of God*.14

The idea of a purely symbolic economy was advanced during the 1970s by a lesser known French post-structuralist theorist named Jean-Joseph Goux, roughly about the same time as Foucault began his decade of lectures at the College de France. It is Goux’s overarching approach, adapted from Marx’s analysis of the fetishism of commodities in Book I of *Capital* as the generative principle in the formation of surplus value, that helps us frame a broader theory of neoliberalism as *global governance by purely semiotic operators*. These operators, or “signifiers”, are not so much a cover for “pure force and domination” as they are they are the

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11 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, loc. 3917.
12 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, loc. 4316.
13 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, loc. 4385.
force of domination itself. Goux relies on Marx’s observations about how commodification serves as an anticipation of the ultimate epiphany of alienated labor under the aspect of money. Political economy, not only for Marx but for a number of his predecessors, comes down to the issue of how value is created. In Marx’s final analysis, such value constitutes different transmutations, or “crystallizations”, of labor as commodities, culminating in their “dazzling money form.” 15

Commodification progresses through the increasingly obscure alchemy of the market exchange mechanism. In order for commodities to be exchanged, their “values” must be compared by some kind of rational set of criteria. But the commodities themselves cannot serve as a basis of comparison. Their values are merely “relative” to each other.

Thus there must emerge a general principle for comparing the relative values of commodities, a “value of values”, so to speak, or what political economy designates as a “general equivalent”. The brandishing of the general equivalent requires that we excise the value of the labor that went into making it, yielding a more recondite form of value containing nothing more than “abstract labor.” Marx writes that “the body of the commodity that serves as the equivalent, figures as the materialisation of human labour in the abstract, and is at the same time the product of some specifically useful concrete labour.” 16 The money form of the commodity becomes the very prima materia for the accumulation of “surplus” labor value (Mehrwert) from which all historical variants of “capitalism” spring. The general equivalent, or the “money form,” thereby becomes the sorcerer’s apprentice that sets in motion an endless procession of formal correlations (“simulacra,” as Jean Baudrillard calls them), converting material inputs into immaterial regalia. This “virtualization” of concrete value through commodity production, especially in the money form, is also the occasion for class conflict and exploitation, so far as Marx is concerned.

Marx, of course, in his fidelity to Hegelian dialectics believed that this process over time would bring about the ripening of multiple, inherent “contradictions” in the system, leading to its eventual breakdown and the onset of revolution. But what Marx did not foresee was the way in which the virtualization process itself, including what Maurizio Lazzarato terms “immaterial labor”, could be further virtualized and consequently commodified, bringing into being the brave new world of today where “knowledge” is not a simple condition for the manufacture of usable “things,” but a thing to be produced and valued for itself, which is what we really have in mind when we prattle on about “knowledge workers” and the “knowledge society.” 17

15 Karl Marx, Capital, Book 1, 6.
16 Marx, Capital, Book 1, 11.
17 Lazzarato writes: “The ‘great transformation’ that began at the start of the 1970s has changed the very terms in which the question is posed. Manual labor is increasingly coming to involve procedures that could be defined as ‘intellectual,’ and the new com-
Goux explains how this kind of transformation takes place: “instead of the relation, in which symbolicity is constituted; instead of exchange, through which subjects, in partially reversible fabric, can metabolize the signifiers that constitute them – the symbolic freezes into a rigid mediation that dominates them. Furthermore, if the symbolic relations introduces a third entity, a mediating element, by which the ceaseless floods of the imaginary are absorbed ... a symbolic counteraction, operating like a forced currency, blocks the balancing process and dispossess subjects of their own activity, through the symbolic functions of the state, money, the concept.” Thus the contemporary “crisis of representation” can be understood as fundamental to the very translation of *politeia* into *oikonomia*, or at least the beginning of a recognition that they are interchangeable somehow at an ontological level. The introduction of the primordial intuition of value as “exchange value”, which defines the “economic” paradigm as a whole, demands this shift in our perception.

4. The Neoliberal Moment

Nevertheless, it is not only money that presents itself as the new face of tyranny in serving to “dispossess” subjects of what is properly their own through the apparatus of symbolization, virtualization, and de-materialization. If the virtualization of finance had a lot to do, as most analysts agree, with the Great Recession that started in the fall of 2008, the digitization and proliferation of personalized media has been a driving force in the degeneration of politics into low-grade civil war. Standard critiques of neoliberalism, especially since the instant media sensation that came to be known as the Occupy movement in September 2011, have focused on the heightened maldistribution of wealth and traced the current malaise to a revival of a predatory capitalism not seen since the 1890s. But a more recent wave of communications technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge. It is not simply that intellectual labor has become subjected to the norms of capitalist production. What has happened is that a new ‘mass intellectualty’ has come into being, created out of a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the forms of ‘self-valorization’ that the struggle against work has produced. The old dichotomy between ‘mental and manual labor,’ or between ‘material labor and immaterial labor,’ risks failing to grasp the new nature of productive activity, which takes this separation on board and transforms it. The split between conception and execution, between labor and creativity, between author and audience, is simultaneously transcended within the ‘labor process’ and reimposed as political command within the ‘process of valorization.’” Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”, in: *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 133.

of literature has focused on the hegemony of the symbolic economy itself. Many of these writers have drawn attention to the co-dependency of such an economy with what we might term consumptive consumerism. Wendy Brown, perhaps foremost among such theorists, characterizes the way in which these symbolic economies expropriate not only a person’s labor, but their very value and self-worth. They force us to become “entrepreneurs of the self”, an expression coined by Foucault which Brown leverages extensively in her argument that neoliberalism transforms everything into capital, especially the kind of “personal capital” that thoroughly reconstitutes individual self-worth as professional identity in keeping with socially enforced criteria of symbolic comparison. Brown writes:

“The figure of the human as an ensemble of entrepreneurial and investment capital is evident on every college and job application, every package of study strategies, every exercise, every new diet and exercise program. The best university scholars are characterized as entrepreneurial and investment savvy, not simply by obtaining grants or fellowships, but by generating new projects and publications from old research, calculating publication and presentation venues, and circulating themselves and their work according to what will advance their value.”

At the same time, what these strategies of both cultural and economic analysis, which prove to be intimately intertwined when it comes to the critique of neoliberalism, tend to miss is the determinative role of media. As the pioneers of critical theory within the so-called Frankfurt School during the first half of the twentieth century realized, the “holy alliance” of culture and capital, which achieves its Gramscian-style synthesis in the evolving figurations of social control through not only mass media platforms but also individualized digital communication, is the real dark matter that needs to be illuminated by the light of reason. The politics of mediatization need to be reviewed in light of the mediatization of politics, and that is where Agamben’s claim that modern communications provides an aura of “glory” for democratic politics, where pomp and pageantry no longer suffice, turns out to be suggestive, even while it remains rather obscure. According to Agamben, Schmitt’s rule that politics rests on a monarchical declaration of sovereignty – or at least a constant condition of inimicality (the “friend/enemy distinction”) analogous to the state of exception – only works within an autocratic setting.

Rousseau’s notion that sovereignty in a formal sense can also be engraved within the demos is not necessarily incompatible with Schmitt’s deduction of political power. Likewise, Rousseau’s contention that democratic sovereignty has a historical warrant, insofar as it invokes contra Hobbes a certain commensurability of the political with life the state of nature (“man is born free, but everywhere he is

in chains”), presses us toward accepting the “economic” model of governance. Such a move is consistent with the kind of providential calculus concerning the rise and fall of human societies implied in Adam Smith’s metaphor of the “invisible hand”, and it constitutes an epochal shift in the rudimentary representation of “political economy” as a whole.

Agamben perhaps takes Rousseau further than he would have otherwise been willing to go. One of the essential tensions in the eighteenth century theory of the social contract turns out to be tug-of-war between the ideal of collective cohesion founded in the “general will” and the need for some kind of transcendental legitimation of democratic sovereignty. With the latter goal in mind, Rousseau came up with the heuristics of a “civil religion.” Rousseau’s formulation of such a civil religion can be found toward the close of The Social Contract: “there is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject.” These “social sentiments” can only be buttressed by the weight of the symbolic. The potency of the symbolic, or what Agamben terms “glory”, has its avatars in the era of democratic egalitarianism with what Guy Debord famously named the “society of the spectacle.” Agamben writes that:

“If we link Debord’s analysis with Schmitt’s thesis according to which public opinion is the modern form of acclamation, the entire problem of the contemporary spectacle of media domination over all areas of social life assumes a new guise. What is in question is nothing less than a new and unheard of concentration, multiplication, and dissemination of the function of glory as the center of the political system. What was confined to the spheres of liturgy and ceremonial has become concentrated in the media and, at the same time, through them it spreads and penetrates at each moment into every area of society, both public and private. Contemporary democracy is a democracy that is entirely founded upon glory, that is, on the efficacy of acclamation, multiplied and disseminated by the media beyond all imagination. (That the Greek term for glory – doxa – is the same term that today designates public opinion is, from this standpoint, something more than a coincidence.) As had always been the case in profane and ecclesiastical liturgies, this supposedly “originary democratic phenomenon” is once again caught, orientated, and manipulated in the forms and according to the strategies of spectacular power.”

It is not entirely clear what Agamben has in mind with this analogy with the phrase “efficacy of acclamation.” The analogy with regal pomp and circumstance implies that the media somehow manages only to lionize, and thereby legitimate, the

21 Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory, loc. 5288–98.
formation of sovereignty within the modern *demos*. However, it becomes immediately apparent, once we read just a little further in this concluding reflection of Agamben’s *The Kingdom and the Glory*, which admittedly is not as developed or well-formed as it should be, that he is alluding to Jürgen Habermas’ theory of “communicative action.” Habermas’ recipe for democracy as founded on the inherent rationality of communicative, or deliberative, power is well-known. As Habermas declares in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), “all political power derives from the communicative power of citizens.”

Habermas grounds this assertion in what he dubs an “illocutionary” construct of rationality – something akin to, more “Platonist” in its origins, to what Derrida came to call the “New Enlightenment” – “when language is conceived as universal medium for embodying reason.” The maintenance of linguistic coherence as a “postmodern” version of the classic *political logos*, resident within the systems or communicative transaction and symbolic exchange comprising the new cosmopolitan *agora*, fosters in our present day “lifeworld” (to invoke Habermas’ own expression) the conditions for both democratic participation and the commitment of citizens to some form of the “common” or “public” good. For Agamben, this preservation of Habermas’ “knowledge-constitutive interests” through the cultivation of a pluralized, yet intelligible fabric of shared discourse is *not*, however, to be established pragmatically through the intervention of the academic disciplines, especially philosophy. Such a higher, *governmental* role for “critical theory” was always the aspiration of the Frankfurt School, and can perhaps be traced all the way back to Plato’s own call for rule by “philosopher kings.” It can, at least, be linked to some of the inclinations of Frederick the Great during the eighteenth century in his dream of a Europe commandeered by “enlightened despots”. Frederick sought to replace the hegemony of the clergy with that of professors, an episode in the evolution of the social imaginary that inspired to a certain degree the founding of the Prussian state system of universal education, which would indirectly nurture a “virtuous” citizenry.

The “glory” of the democratic and “holistic” state in the view of Agamben is “founded on the immediate presence of the acclaiming people, and the neutralized state that resolves itself in the communicative forms without subject, are opposed only in appearance. They are nothing but two sides of the same glorious apparatus in its two forms: the immediate and subjective glory of the acclaiming people and the mediatic and objective glory of social communication.” According to Agamben, “glory” in this regard demonstrates “its dual aspect, divine

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24 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, loc. 5332.
and human, ontological and economic, of the Father and the Son.” Following Habermas’ distinction, it can be construed as mediating both “the people-substance and the people-communication.”

5. Bernard Stiegler’s New Critique of Political Economy

But what if Agamben were dead wrong, and what if his notion of mediatic “glory” has metasized, as we are seeing increasingly nowadays, turned out instead to be the tawdry? What if this “tawdriness” were in fact the inevitable “cash-out” of the symbolic economy itself, of an appalling, but spectacular climax to the ongoing virtualization of both labor and capital in a latter day, gargantuan immolation of both meaning and signification whereby the “crisis of representation” becomes a global catastrophe of the political itself? What if the linguistics of “communicative reason” had now morphed as in some kind of insidious mutation of its own semiotic genomes into a hyperpartisan “hate machine?” How could that even happen? In order to answer that question, we must begin to pay heed to Bernard Stiegler’s urgent call for a “new critique of political economy” that understands the linguistic process in keeping with both Plato and Derrida’s reading pharmakon, as both “poison and remedy.” Stiegler’s brilliant analysis of the problem, published in 2010 at a time when the current sordid state of politics was lamentably but all too small, lowering cloud on the horizon, calls into question the very sentimental assumptions about the connections between democracy, discourse, rationality, and mediatic expression, which Agamben together with Habermas have dangled in front of us. “We thus have pure cognitive labor power utterly devoid of knowledge with cognitive technologies, Stiegler writes.”

In order to achieve a better grasp of what Stiegler intends with such a comment, we need to flesh out his larger perspective. For A Critique of Political Economy pulls together many of the threads of his extensive, earlier writings to revive a call for a critique of capitalism in the twenty-first century that takes up from what Marx left undone in the nineteenth century. Stiegler set forth these remarks in the immediate wake of the worldwide economic crisis that began in the fall of 2008, but became manifest in 2009. In the first chapter entitled “Heads Buried in the Sand: A Warning,” Stiegler makes the case that both the Keynesian “stimulus” to what was supposed to have engineered recovery from the Great Recession and the digital automation of industry that is proceeding apace “is the translation of a

25 Ibid.
27 Stiegler, For A New Critique of Political Economy, 47.
moribund ideology, desperately trying to prolong the life of a model which has become self-destructive.” At the same time, Stiegler is not merely advancing some cheap, hackneyed version of rhetoric against capitalism per se. It is the distinctive new kind of capitalism – i.e., “cognitive capitalism” – that is bringing the crisis to a head. Cognitive capitalism constitutes an economic as well as a social apocalypse of the virtualization process, the beginnings of which antedate electronic media by two and a half millennia. The overarching philosophical dilemma we have dubbed the “crisis of representation” is centered on the technical issue of hypomnēsis, or the exteriorization of memory. Plato identified in the Phaedrus as the danger posed by writing. Plato’s preoccupation was the loss of direct access to the real, a position Derrida in Of Grammatology characterized as “ontological”.

Writing, Plato insists in the latter section of the Phaedrus, is anti-philosophical because it offers us “learning rather than wisdom” (σοφίας δὲ τοῖς μαθηταῖς δόξαν) and philosophy is of course the pursuit of the latter. Such “learning” is mere “semblance” (doxa), and even though it provides expanding opportunities for the elaboration of new discursive connections, it fosters an amnesia of the thing itself, as Heidegger was fond of pointing out, through the production of incessant re-presentations (or if we wish instead to use Baudrillard’s terminology, we can say the “precession of simulacra”). Such re-presentations are, if we want to use a current cliché, a form of “fake presence.” And it is “presence”, or ousia, in the Platonic tradition that constitutes the authentic object sought through philosophical inquiry. Stiegler, a student of Derrida who in turn criticized the Socratic discomfort with writing as a “potion” (pharmakon) that simultaneously “poisons” the well of wisdom while “remedying” the affliction of forgetfulness ironically seems to side with Plato. But his Platonic sympathies have little to do with a preference for ontology. The crisis of representation derives from the manner in which “learning” (mathesis), or the spatio-temporal coding and archiving of what was once knowledge by acquaintance, comes to reify the hypomnetic process as the human essence itself.

Thus the invention of “writing,” which by Stiegler’s reckoning is but a convenient trope for hypomnēsis as a whole encompassing everything from symbolic logic to electronic bits and bytes, sets in motion an historical juggernaut careening toward a “transhuman” future. Hypomnēsis is what we really mean by “capital” as a rendering of Marx’s “alienated labor”, and it threatens to eclipse us all as “artificially” intelligent machines that not only eliminate jobs, but even human intimacy (think the latest, uncannily human “sexbots” that are creeping into the market). The difference between “wisdom” (sophia) and “learning”, or “science” (mathesis), is what Stiegler calls savoir faire versus savoir vivre. Science and technology furnish only “know-how” (savoir-faire), engendered from experiences

28 Stiegler, For A New Critique of Political Economy, 4.
29 Plato, Phaedrus, 275a.
brought about through manipulation of the human environment using symbolic tokens and apparatuses.

Relying on terminology harking back to Edmund Husserl, Stiegler refers to this mode of sign-production as “ternary retention.” Ternary retention is the key to *hypoamnesis*, because it gives impetus to a wider process Stiegler dubs “grammatization,” a convoluted but inexorable and irrepressible historical movement for which the development of writing is only the first instantiation. In other words, grammatization, which encompasses everything from manuscripts and their dissemination to the even more sophisticated use of numbers and formal protocols for ciphering equivalencies to abstract reasoning on the part of both *homo sapiens* and computing machinery, consists in the *commodification of truth* itself. The commodification of labor, as Marx understood it, is merely one moment in the unfolding of a much greater and consequential trendline. “Alienated labor” is simply a harbinger of the eventual extinction of what it means to be human, which relies on *savoir vivre*, “knowing how to live.” A genuine “critique of political economy,” for Stiegler, cannot be separated from the critique of human knowledge overall.

Stiegler insists that this extreme stage of alienation conceals a genuine crisis of capitalism. We might add that it appears as well to be the watermark of neoliberalism itself. “The capitalist economy strictly speaking no longer works,” Stiegler contends, “because it wants the psychic individualism to be self-detected, to become the ‘entrepreneur of the self’, without collective individuation, but rather through a collective disindividuation orchestrated by marketing,” which Stiegler writes includes both the so-called “conservative revolution” of 1980s and the present post-millennial phase of global, corporate neoliberalism. The notion that contemporary culture is a form of *self-entrepreneurship* whereby our alienated *self-knowledge* now becomes a kind of high-octane fuel that powers the capacious neoliberal *modus operandi*, of course, can be attributed to Brown in her *Undoing the Demos*. Brown is the first to recognize that neoliberalism is not merely a tendentious set of economic principles, but “a form of normative reason remaking the state, society, and subject, generating social policy, positing truth and a theory of law.” It is, in effect, “a revolutionary and comprehensive political rationality, one that draw on classical liberal language and concerns while inverting many of liberalism’s purpose and channels of accountability.”

Brown stresses that neoliberalism subtly stands on its head the classical liberal values emphasizing personal freedom by summoning such grandiloquence to perform the task of constraining the social agent to the *unfreedom* of self-entrepreneurship in the name of the vast, collective good – what she terms “responsibilism.” Responsibilism never prescribes an objective, person, or idea to which is nevertheless always “responsible.” One can never do enough, because there is always infinitely

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31 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 69.
more to do. Responsibility is unbounded; it is forever committed to an imperceptible “elsewhere.”

6. Cognitive Capitalism and the Crisis of Neoliberal Hegemony

The idolatry of cognitive capitalism, which seduces both of our instincts for self-validation and helping others, is founded on an ethic of “knowledge, thought, and training” that are “valued and desired for their contribution of capital enhancement.” \(^{32}\) It should be noted that contrary to latter day sentimentality of today’s “Bohemian bourgeoisie” that is fond of parroting Marxist slogans from the cubicle of a tech firm offering exorbitant salaries and benefits, or from the comfort of an oak-paneled university office where “revolutionary” ideology is not matched by the commitment to taking authentic political risks, the real neoliberal power complex is no longer vested in the likes of neither Ebenezer Scrooge, the Koch Brothers, nor even the legendary “military industrial complex”. Instead it accrues to the captains of the new “knowledge industries”, allied with intelligence agencies and vast, government bureaucracies, who leverage the infrastructure of electronic communications networks more and more to manage and regulate the contents of information flow and their formatting into usable snippets of insight. The new planetary space of cognitive capitalism (it is actually, he insinuates rather cryptically a type of “mafia capitalism”), according to Stiegler, becomes a vast desert of “pure calculable exchange” wearing the deceptive mask of “socially conscious” enterprise. It becomes a type of transnational, postmodern, post-Christian secular “supergo”, as Emmett Rensin has called it \(^{33}\), that exploits in its own unique style the consumerist “will to nothingness,” as Nietzsche would have described it.

Stiegler is not, however, an unrepentant pessimist. Like Marx, he offers his own eschatological vision, which we will explore in some of the passages that follow. But what is missing in Stiegler – and to a large degree in the growing chorus of critics as well as diagnosticians of the deeper “logic” of neoliberalism – is the way in which this novel type of “political rationality” is driven by and large by mediatization itself. In other words, how does Agamben’s mediatic “glory” alchemize into the basest illustration of the “tawdry”? In order to answer that question, we must examine another core concept of Stiegler’s, what he in a very plain-spoken manner identifies as “stupidity” \(^{34}\).

\(^{32}\) Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177.
\(^{33}\) Emmett Rensin, *The Blathering Superego at the End of History*.
\(^{34}\) The French word bêtise, which Stiegler strategically employs, can also be translated as “brutishness”, “senselessness”, or even “foolishness”, depending on the context. Stiegler wants to drive home that is a condition of the late modern era that does not call in an obvious sense for moral opprobrium, but is a kind of fatuousness that can precipitate
Stiegler views his calling as a renewal of the task defined by Horkheimer and Adorno in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and detailed at the height of the Second World War, that of courageously investigating how the Age of Reason had metastasized into the pseudo-politics of totalitarianism, where “public life has reached a state in which thought is being turned inescapably into a commodity and language into celebration of the commodity.”

The commodification of thought and language, for Stiegler, is far more complicated than what the Frankfurt School interpreted as the descent of reason into unreason, the “reversion” of *logos* to *mythos,* as manipulated cunningly through fascist propaganda. It is the baleful outcome of the triumph in all spheres of hypomnesic technology and its very “interiorization” in both conscious and unconscious life. “What is occurring, on a scale and in conditions that were hitherto inconceivable,” Stiegler writes, “is the effect of what Gramsci described as a cultural hegemony that de-forms reason – reason understood in Enlightenment terms as that historical and social conquest that now seems to decompose so rapidly into rationalization.”

In his *Prison Writings* from 1929–35 Gramsci himself had foreseen this evolution with his observation that Hegel’s “ethical state” as the embodiment of moral and cultural reason (favored by liberal democrats) had fallen victim to the same kind of “fetishism” that Marx ascribed to the logic of commodification. This fetishism marks usurpation of what Gramsci called the “philosophy of praxis” by the cultural and linguistic apparatus exercised through popular communication techniques appropriated by the rising class. Writing at that juncture in the history of Europe when fascism had supplanted class consciousness with what the Frankfurt School had recognized as a hostile takeover of the collective unconscious under the sway of the “culture industry”, Gramsci discerned that hegemonic relations in twentieth century society were neither political nor economic so much as they were semiotic. In that respect Gramsci was the one, long before Stiegler, to cognize how any “revolutionary” seizure of the means of production could not be separated from the means of culture production. Moreover, such a ghastly results, as implied in Hannah Arendt’s celebrated expression “the banality of evil.” Stiegler draws to a certain extent on Derrida’s critique of Agamben in his final lecture series around the question of “what lives?”, where the totalitarian politics of “bare life” profiled by Agamben in Homo Sacer is re-imagined as the transformation of the politics of experience (savoir vivre) into an automatism of the abstracted subject, where “living” (vivant) substance becomes an empty “set with no other unity.” See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, vol. ii (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 8.


seizure, if it were possible at all, would have to depend on a new kind of **communicative internationale**, who through a universal dictatorship of the cognitive proletariat would would upend the system of semiotic control in accordance with which Foucaultean biopower resolves itself into the most insidious subterfuges of logopower. “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’”, Gramsci contends, “is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces that comprise it […] in the entire international and world field.”

It is significant that Gramsci alluded in his notebooks to the emerging hegemonic role of journalism, which he characterized as a contingent of “pocket-geniuses”, which pretends to be “holding the whole of history in the palm of its hand.” But Gramsci was naturally unable to anticipate the digitization of both news and entertainment media where the “manufacture of consent” was boosted exponentially by an explosion, if not the amalgamation, of digital communication and commerce, especially what we now know as “social media”. In social media, Stiegler’s “tertiary retention” desiccates not only lived experience, but the spiritual fabric of human relationships, an electronic *bellum omnium contra omnes* that has become the strange and eminently hostile “twittering” virtual universe we know as politics in this day and age. The *demos* that has been “undone” by this global apotheosis of grammatization and mediatization (by a proliferation of not only “fake news” but “fake agencies” of the electronic sort that cull, peddle, and feature what we are supposed to know through marketizing algorithms and hyperbots that exercise their own seamless, yet invisible control over the new “symbolic milieu” (Stiegler).

Stiegler himself calls for an insurrection against this pervasive alien dominion of a machinic “deep state” that might be fomented somehow through a recovery of the intimacy of wisdom itself, the wisdom of the body, of classical *mnemosyne*, of philosophy as the *philia of sophia*, something akin to Alain Badiou’s notion of *love* itself as a revolutionary praxis, or “truth procedure.” Such an insurrection requires the severance, according to Stiegler, of “the interface between the technical system and social systems” and the “economic system.” The upshot would be what he calls *l’économie de contribution* (“the economy of contribution”), which unfortunately he does not specify in any detail. Knowledge must be valued for its own sake, or at least for social flourishing. Such a society would be anti-consumerist. In an interview with a representative of the Macif Foundation, Stiegler comments:

“This model [of the society of contribution] rests on investment and citizens taking responsibility. It differs from Fordism because it depends on de-prolaterisation (sic). For Marx, the workers are proletarized when their expertise is replaced by the machines that

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they serve. In the 20th century it was the consumers who were proletarized and we lost the old knowledge. Proletarization isn’t financial poverty, but the loss of knowledge. Consumers do not produce their own way of living, which is now prescribed by the big corporate names.”

Although Stiegler’s solution sounds vague and not a little utopian – and certainly does not have the “critical” transformational perspective we would expect perhaps from such incisive social and political theorizing – it steers us in a direction from which the broader critique of neoliberalism often shies away.

The crisis of neoliberal hegemony comes down to a crisis of liberal democracy stemming from the crisis of representation that can be tracked all the way back to the end of the Aufklärung. It is a hollowing out of the political, caused by the passage of dialectic into a highly undialectical planetary economism of algebraically codified and commodified desire. The same process is spurred on by the sophisms of marketing (in contradistinction to the production of exchange values on the market itself), where the sublimation of drives in the traditional Weberian analysis is transmuted into what Herbert Marcuse called “repressive desublimation”, according to which “the progress of technological rationality is liquidating the oppositional and transcending elements in the ‘higher culture.’”

The fundamental challenge of the new era is to recapture the sense of “real presence” in both our language in our social relations, and in our politics.

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Section II.

What Kind of God is Money Anyway? An Investigation into the Theological Structures of Capitalism and Gnosticism

Daniel Minch

This article investigates the role played by the neoliberal economic narrative in the crisis of representation, and specifically in contemporary representations of God. The continuation of Christian structures through secular modernity also carries with it the tendency to fall into familiar, ideological, and even ‘heretical’ images of humanity, creation, and the divine. This article addresses the question: if money is treated as a god, then what type of god is it precisely? First, the author presents capitalism as a system of belief, wherein money serves as the highest value, or as theos. The author argues that this ‘theology of money’ functions structurally as a kind of late-modern gnosticism. Second, the author examines the theological ‘incarnation’ of money through currency and how this reveals a dualistic ‘gnostic’ metaphysics. The third part of this article identifies three essential characteristics of ancient Christian gnosticism in order to make a structural comparison with contemporary capitalism. Finally, the author points to the eschatological implications of representing divinity through money and how this representation affects humanity’s relation to time and temporality.

Consumer Culture; Economy; Eschatology; Fundamental Theology; Gnosticism; Incarnation; Neoliberalism; Secularization; Theology of Money

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Introduction

One of the most important features of Christianity is that it is fundamentally historical phenomenon. It is a tradition of experiences; it is, therefore, a historical process of ‘handing over’ (Greek: paradosis, paradidomi; Latin: traditio, tradere; German: Überlieferung, überliefern) what has come before into the present. The Christian narrative is not an ahistorical revelation nuda vox Dei, but it is instead based on both historical events and the historical process of interpreting and understanding those events in each new time and context. This is also the case for our ways of representing the divine; our immanent interpretations of transcendence. Throughout my reflections on the myriad of contemporary crises – including the crisis of representation – it has been beneficial to return to the history of Christian experiences in order to find patterns of meaning and narrative forms to give expression to what is occurring now. In Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si’, he presents and reinterprets the positions of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas in order to come arrive at a theology of creation that is suitable for the challenges of the present. In so doing, Francis confronts us with an anthropocentric cosmos in which humanity is not the owner or master of the world, but is instead invested with a profound responsibility for creation. This recontextualized creation theology is not a capitulation to contemporary desires, but can in fact be critical of them, providing a model for us to retrieve and critically implement elements of tradition in the present. This recent example serves to remind us of both the historical nature of traditions and the importance of re-contextualization as a program for theological engagement with a tradition. Forms and structures from the past often recur – with both positive and negative effects – and at times it helps to look to the past in order to better interpret and critique the tradition as we experience it in the present.

Here, I want to look back to a historical phenomenon that is deeply intertwined with Christian history in order to better understand and critique the present domination of economic rationality in our social and political discourses. I approach this topic from the perspective of fundamental theology. I aim to critique economic rationality on theological, rather than on purely ethical, sociological, or historical grounds, although a theological critique must involve each of these at some level. This economic domination refers broadly to “the place that economic affairs, as well as the professional study of these affairs, occupy both in our per-

1 Francis, On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si’ (May 24, 2015). For ‘re-contextualization’ as a concept, see Lieven Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval (New York: Continuum, 2007), 30–49.

2 There is something about ‘being contemporary’ that requires one to have a foot in the past in order to have a balanced hermeneutical perspective on the present. See Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?”, in: Nudities, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 10–19.
sonal lives and in the functioning of the societies in which we live.”

Politics was once the dominant partner in what is known as ‘political economy’, using economic activity to support the goals of the political as a sphere of public representation with the ability to transcend itself. Broadly following the argument of contemporary political theology, descended from Carl Schmitt, that the state operates on ‘secularized’ theological principles, we can now go a step further. The philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy has argued that, in fact, the economy, or dominant economic rationality, replaced the sacred when the world was ‘desacralized’, even displacing politics in the process. The process of secularization was, therefore, also a ‘religious’ phenomenon. Religion did not disappear, but it was transfigured. Specifically, then, I want to examine how we represent God under this economic regime, in a critical dialogue with particular representations of the divine from the past. The ‘handing over’ process of tradition allows us to return to the past for models of interpretation, and indeed representation, which can be reactualized in a new, contemporary context.

In this article, I will investigate the role played by the neoliberal economic narrative in our representation of the divine. I will examine money as a representation of value in conversation with the Christian tradition from the perspective of fundamental theology. First, I will briefly look to Philip Goodchild’s argument that capitalism is essentially a system of belief, and within that system, money functions as the value of all values – it is the theos in which we believe. Second, we have to ask: if money is treated as a god, then what type of god is it precisely? I will examine the extent to which the ‘theological’ structure of contemporary capitalism mimics the Incarnation of Christ. While I believe that there are similarities, ultimately they are formal and structural in nature. I want to propose that, as a deity, money lends itself to a kind of late-modern gnosticism. In the final part of this article, I will identify three of ancient ‘Christian’ gnosticism’s essential characteristics to make a structural comparison with how money functions theologically for contemporary capitalism. I am not positing that capitalism is somehow directly or genealogically related to Menander, Valentinus, or Basilides, or that the ‘secret turning point of modernity’ lies in the desert monasteries.

4 Ibid., xv.
6 Dupuy, Economy and the Future, 6.
of Roman and Coptic Egypt. Rather, I believe that the continuation of Christian structures through secular modernity also carries with it the tendency to fall into familiar, ideological, and even ‘heretical’ images of humanity, creation, and the divine. Further, without the corrective force of Christian tradition, it seems more likely that such images would be perpetuated and even strengthened through cultural practices and social imaginaries.

Heresy itself is quite often the ‘easy’ option for faith – the difficulty and mystery of the hypostatic union can be avoided if Jesus is merely a heroic man adopted by the Father, or if the transcendent and eternal God only appears to suffer on the cross. These options do not challenge or even actively subvert expectations of the divine in the manner of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the hypostatic union. For an ancient world familiar with Platonism, the rule of the One is easier to come to grips with conceptually than the ‘Trinity’s ‘oneness of rule’. The unity of divine and human in Christ posed a serious conceptual problem for cultures that grappled with the change from a ‘benevolent dualism’ between the body and soul in the Greco-Roman world to a kind of ‘sarcophobia’, or general fear of the body, in late antiquity.7 Thus, Docetism, Arianism, and other ‘ancient’ heresies become attractive, not to preserve the integrity of the divine mystery, but to preserve our categories of thought that we use to interpret that mystery. One of the most important parts of the Christian tradition is the critical impulse within its very core, which should push believers to evaluate and to reevaluate our assessments of absolute truth in light of both past tradition and contemporary experience. In discussing this critical relationship, the theologian Edward Schillebeeckx observed that:

“The great heresy which threatens all forms of Christianity and which has laid fatal traps for it since the beginning is gnosticism, which narrows Christianity down to a theoretical doctrine, consistent with its point of departure in leaving the world as it is, or to a hermeneutic clarification of existence without any concern for the effective renewal of the world or of man’s existence.”8

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7 Peter Brown calls the distinction between ‘body’ and ‘soul’ in antiquity ‘benevolent dualism’, where the “soul met the body as the inferior ‘other’ to the self. The body was as different from the soul, and as intractable, as were women, slaves, and the opaque and restless population of the cities.” See Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity, Lectures on the History of Religions 13 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 26.

In a sense, great heresies never go away; they change shape and form in each new era, because they are fundamentally attractive for human narratives and for human reason.

1. **Money as Theos: The Value of Values**

The philosopher of religion, Philip Goodchild, has reflected critically on the place given to money in contemporary global capitalism. He has argued that there is a ‘theology of money’ that grounds the neoliberal capitalism system. Goodchild’s argument flows from the way in which we now conceive of ‘value’, and by extension how this conception shapes our judgment of things in the world as well as our experience of temporality. Within the economization of desires, all value has been converted into ‘exchange value’ – things are valuable based on their worth in relation to other things through exchange. Additionally, money acts as a universal “measure of price and the means of payment”, making it the means by which all exchange is conducted. In principle, all objects are interchangeable, because they can all be reduced to their exchange value represented by money. If all objects are theoretically exchangeable and can all be measured in the same way, then we have a flattening of values and the reduction of all things to the level of ‘commodity’. Even those goods that cannot be directly commodified, such as gifts and personal relationships, are very closely associated with products that can be exchanged and marketed. Commodities are assessed based on exchange value, and this can be thought of in terms of quantity, like the number of commodities or their price. This reduction to exchange value relativizes importance of the objects that are consumed in-and-of-themselves.

Goodchild’s argument continues by turning to the conditions of temporality and transcendence. The actual value of money is transcendent in the sense that it is never made manifest except in mediation through exchange; it is a ‘promise’ of value, or a store of credit. Credit, based on a kind of faith, is essentially a promise

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of future value that is made effective in the present.\(^{13}\) The present value of things is always measured in terms of what they will be worth later, thereby projecting all value into what Dupuy has called a “Baron Münchhausen” version of the future – we bring about this future from within ourselves.\(^{14}\) Through exchange, “the texture of society is constituted by credit”, which is in turn represented by money: money offers credit, and credit implies faith in the value of money.\(^{15}\) The position of money as the highest signifier is here reinforced by the constant deferral of the future in favor of the present. Structurally, the capitalist system has confused credit and debt. While credit is a statement of value (‘this thing here is invested with value’), debt represents an obligation to pay an amount for something valued. Because there is only one way that value can now be measured – through money – this confusion leads to representing objects of value as either real or potential debts, and the continual generation of an economic surplus by transferring debts to either the future or to others through contracts.\(^{16}\) Just as before, the actual objects of consumption are unimportant except insofar as they represent the ability to take on or transfer debt temporarily. A second consequence of conflating credit with debt is that all wealth, or possession of value, is threatened with its opposite: poverty, lack of money, and therefore the inability to realize one’s needs and desires. There is no ‘outside’ to the system, and so we must already participate in the capitalist system in order to be included.\(^{17}\) Freedom only exists from and through the market, and the market does not tolerate competing claims to sovereignty. Money makes human demands effective, but it also necessitates that “the creation, acquisition, maintenance and investment of money takes priority over all other demands.”\(^{18}\) Money is also effective in the political realm because it is the primary form of social mediation, forging a united ‘political economy’ in the process. The logic of market exchange was made to appeal to the modern ideal of human emancipation, progress, and individual sovereignty stemming from the Enlightenment. Essentially, the reduction of all value to exchange value, which is quantitative and transferrable in terms of money, helped capitalism to become the dominant metanarrative in the twenty-first century by grafting the modern master narrative of emancipation onto that of technological progress. This resulted in the neoliberal capitalist ideal of the autonomous consumer, whose life is entirely economized as a function of ‘human nature’.\(^{19}\) The acquiescence to markets


\(^{15}\) Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, 105.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 179–80.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 128.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 119.

\(^{19}\) Lieven Boeve, “Consumer Culture and Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe.”
therefore “prioritizes the making of profits over all other political values” since this is the path to individual and social emancipation.\textsuperscript{20} Since the system is based around the repayment or transfer of debt and the exercise of freedom through taking on debt in search of a future surplus, it becomes a self-perpetuating cycle – we only pull ourselves out of the swamp by our own hair. Ultimately, however, there is no ‘outside’, and since the system of borrowing and repayment is built entirely on imagined future values, there is also no real future, for if the future ever arrived then all estimations of value would collapse. The promise presented by the future also appears simultaneously as a threat of its immanent collapse.

The conversion of all value into monetary exchange value has gone hand in hand with the transposition of an infinite growth in human desire from the religious sphere to the economic sphere, one which has no regard for the object of that desire. It was appropriate to have an ‘infinite’ desire for God, who is the infinite object of contemplation. When turned to finite things and processes, however, it easily becomes an expectation of infinite growth in profits or benefits through the continued consumption of finite resources and capital.\textsuperscript{21} Economics should perhaps no longer be treated as the management of scarce resources, but instead as the management of desire itself, which in consumer culture is associated with the “pleasurable sensation of desiring.”\textsuperscript{22} If the goods that we collect are ultimately interchangeable, then it makes sense that the person as ‘consumer’ is never satisfied by what is consumed, but finds only fleeting satiety in act of consumption itself. A kind of manufactured scarcity is created by the proliferation of consumer goods, generating an erotic movement in the human subject, moving itself outward from a perceived lack. This reinforces our understanding of humanity and human freedom as being actualized and defined through opposition to the other.\textsuperscript{23} With such a view of freedom, the human subject must always become itself in opposition to the other, driven by an interior absence and its own instability.\textsuperscript{24} In

\begin{itemize}
\item Refe\textsuperscript{ralions on Individualisation, Critical Agency and Reflexivity”, in: ET Bulletin 17 (2006): 111.
\item Goodchild, Theology of Money, 119.
\item Dotan Leshem, The Origins of Neoliberalism: Modeling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 93. See also, Eve Poole, Capitalism’s Toxic Assumptions: Redefining Next Generation Economics (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 115–121.
\item Cavanaugh, Being Consumed, 91.
\item Vincent J. Miller, Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture (New York: Continuum, 2004), 137–44.
\item The philosopher William Desmond has termed this ‘erotic sovereignty.’ See William Desmond, Ethics and the Between (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 325–340.
\end{itemize}
transcending itself, “it goes towards the other, and yet goes towards the self via the other.”

2. Economic Doctrine and Empty Incarnation

Genealogical approaches to political theology, related to the ‘theology of money’, are based on the evolution of ‘economy’ as the management of the Greek oikos, to the Christian pastoral economy, and finally in relation to its transformation into the neoliberal market economy. This type of work is largely based on Michel Foucault’s genealogical approach and Giorgio Agamben’s critique and ‘corrective’ genealogy of political economy, both of which maintain that there are structural parallels between capitalism and Christianity. Devin Singh has made an interesting contribution in this area through his article entitled “Incarnating the Money-Sign: Notes on an Implicit Theopolitics.” Singh broadly disagrees with those who predict the end of the nation state and the end of money. He does not start from Christianity, but instead begins from the nature of money itself. He then proposes that the Christian concept of the Incarnation can act as a ‘useful hermeneutic’ for understanding the biopolitical and theopolitical power of money. Here, he differentiates between ‘money’ and ‘currency’. This is correct because in order to have concrete money in the form of currency there must also be an ‘abstract money of account,’ or a “system of values, divisions and pro-

25 William Desmond, Being and the Between (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 115. See also p. 442: Hobbes’ ‘leviathan’ is an erotic sovereign, but only in the equivocal sense: “a center of all but absolute power that has to terrorize that community of equivocal desire to prevent its degeneration into the degraded state of nature”.


Essentially, currency relies on the concept of money itself as already existing and functioning in our social imaginaries, both ontologically and, in a certain sense, historically prior to currency and barter systems. For example, in the mid-1990s, in order to stabilize the Brazilian economy and reign in hyper-inflation, economists created a virtual currency to ‘rewire’ how people saw goods and services in relation to actual currency. The virtual currency served to change the perceptions of proportions and measures of goods, which eventually became more concretely tied to a new currency which people associated with the more stable measure of value produced by the virtual currency.

This example emphasizes the extent to which politics, society, and economy are intertwined. A shared social context is necessary for a shared concept of relative value, embodied in consumer society as the value of money. A political system is necessary to issue currency however and this allows for people to actualize their demands. Issuing currency implies that a state has the power and authority to enforce its own institutions and that they help to support the virtual currency of values which is represented by the physical ‘token’ currency. The use of currency relies on the state providing legal systems and infrastructure, both physical and mental, to make it work, including the threat of violence. Thus, markets “derive their existence from this pre-authorized sign, grounded in state power.” This takes place ‘prior’ to the various incarnations of physical money. Money is legitimized and produced by the policing structures of governmentality. It is *theopoitical* because it draws “on theology for political legitimation.” We should think of this ‘theology’ as both the divine quality of money as well as the ‘theological’ structure of political systems of sovereignty. This helps to confirm Goodchild’s analysis of money as the ultimate value of values and the structural divinity possessed by money.

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28 Ibid., 133.
31 See Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 177–78, 200–201. It is not yet clear if the recent development of decentralized, non-governmental ‘virtual currencies’ like Bitcoin constitutes an interesting new exception to this ‘rule’, or if they are only peripheral phenomena dependent on support provided by official institutions and currencies for their existence. After all, they must eventually be ‘converted’ into goods (usually illicit substances) or official currency in order to be effective.
33 Singh, “Incarnating the Money-Sign”, 134.
34 Ibid., 135.
In a critical move, Singh believes that the doctrine of the Incarnation can provide a critique of such a structural, economic God-concept. He sees the Incarnation as an example of an ‘alternative economy’: Jesus represents, or ‘signifies’ God, acting as God’s ‘coin’ in the human sphere – an image that represents the power of the sovereign who is absent.36 Jesus points to “an external referent of value”, while revealing the divine at the same time. This introduces an instability into the structural analogy, one which Singh believes is productive because we are presented with a symbol that contains what it signifies in Jesus, while currency as a sign is ultimately empty. The value of money is always essentially fictitious, “in the sense that it derives much of its value from the story woven about it by instituting authorities. Its value is arbitrary.”37 The logic of the Incarnation can be used to call into question the idolatrous nature of money and monetary systems, in part because money is ultimately fictional – it is a product of our social imaginaries. There is no way to get to ‘the Real’ as a stable source of value. Therefore, Incarnational logic can be seen as a critique of “any particular fixation of value, any one story told.”38

Singh presents the Incarnation as an analogue of money, but the comparison runs into the wall of doctrine almost immediately. He first claims that Jesus is like God’s ‘coin’, the symbol of God’s active sovereignty in the world, but must immediately backtrack because Jesus is not the same type of symbol that money is. The Chalcedonian formulae that affirm the hypostatic union and the coeternity and equality of the Father and Son make Jesus the primordial ‘sacrament’ of the encounter with God, not just a ‘sign’ in the empty sense of money, as Singh acknowledges. Money represents the ontologically prior idea that has been enabled and constructed by both a confluence of cultural heritage and governmental power, and is ‘incarnated’ in currency. It has no essence of its own and can only point to other things through what it does. The sovereignty that issues the currency has a similar structure. The figure of the sovereign, who also issues currency, is the visible manifestation of ‘the people’ who can never be fully present, “and thus can only be represented.”39 Singh suggests that the ‘incarnational dynamics’ of money and sovereignty attempt to create ‘fictional’ fixed hierarchies of value, and furthermore that we treat this fiction as though it were either real or as if it gives us immediate access to ‘the Real’.40 Currency is not God, it only appears to be, and points to a fully transcendent divinity that is inaccessible. The power that it commands over people, however, is essentially spiritual and is based on faith in

37 Ibid., 138.
38 Ibid., 139.
39 Agamben, Sitas, 51; see also Foucault, “Pastoral Power and Political Reason (1979)”, 146.
the effectiveness and value of money.\textsuperscript{41} If there is a ‘Christology’ at work in the theopolitics of money, then it is a docetic one that is also strangely dualistic. I believe that this amounts to a broadly ‘gnostic’ conception of god in its structure, since the nature of ‘salvation’ and ‘the Real’ are ultimately characterized by a kind of salvific knowledge for capitalistic individuals.

3. Systems Separated by Centuries: Gnosticism and Capitalism

In arguing for the modern relevance of the gnostics, the managing editor of the English edition of the \textit{Nag Hammadi Library}, Richard Smith, recounts the Enlightenment revival of gnostic and dualistic thought as an anti-orthodox critique of institutional Christianity.\textsuperscript{42} Smith looks at the ways in which Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, Pierre Bayle, and others romanticized the ancient gnostics, remaking gnosticism in their own ‘secular’ and rationalist image: “The eighteenth-century philosophes regarded gnosticism as a counter-tradition and wielded it as a weapon in their outflanking tactics to overthrow the received tradition.”\textsuperscript{43} In so doing, they had to ignore the transcendental and salvific dimensions of what had been a collection of religious sects and movements. It may be that this recontextualization of gnosticism has filtered into other areas of contemporary life, transmitted through political and social culture from the Enlightenment through modernity and postmodernity. Perhaps, Smith conjectures, this influence is even reflected in existentialism’s emphasis on the alienation of humanity from the world in which it finds itself.\textsuperscript{44} I do not want to dwell too long on the historical connections here, but this example helps to illustrate the fundamental attraction of certain ‘classical heresies’ for human reason. As rational structures and patterns of thought, they tend to reemerge in new and updated forms. I will proceed by examining three essential characteristics of ancient gnosticism and relate them to the dominant monetary system as a theological system. These are: a dualistic metaphysics; the nature of humanity and the order of deities; and the role played by salvific knowledge. Finally, I will conclude with an assessment of the type of eschatology that such a ‘capitalist-gnostic’ system produces.

It is important to first note that both gnosticism and contemporary capitalism grew, at least in part, out of other earlier religious traditions. Birger A. Pearson has argued that gnosticism likely originated from Judaism, and later came to absorb and rework elements of Platonist philosophy, Hellenistic religious cults, and

\textsuperscript{41} Goodchild, “Capitalism and Global Economics”, 229.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 533.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 544-45.
Christianity in order to produce a myriad of different types of gnosticsisms. Gnosticism underwent a series of developments in the ancient world that allowed it to pass from a mythological structure to a metaphysical one. It has likewise been argued (most famously by Max Weber) that capitalism has its roots in the Protestant Reformation and the transformation of Christian social structures by Calvinism and especially by the more radical Puritans. Another related factor in the rise of capitalism is the process of secularization which should also be seen as a ‘religious’ phenomenon. It is religious both functionally as argued by Dupuy where economics ‘replaces’ religion in the realm of the sacred through secularization, and in its origins as argued by theologians. Both Schillebeeckx and Henri de Lubac point to the scholastic postulation of ‘natural law’ between human conscience and the divine law in the thirteenth century as the beginning of secularization. As metaphysical systems, both capitalism and gnosticism each possess an uncanny flexibility; they are able to assimilate and transfigure the characteristics of other systems of belief and action. Neoliberal capitalism can even integrate and sell its own criticism without being adversely affected by it.

Much like the gnostic worldview, which posits a radical dualism between God and the world based on a mythological ‘fall’ of divine powers from the eternal pleroma and the flawed creation of the material world, capitalism also holds to a


47 Dupuy, Economy and the Future, 91–125; William T. Cavanaugh, Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 74–95, 100–120. That both systems have roots in ‘other religions’ (if we consider capitalism to have a theological structure and act at least as a functional equivalent of religion) does not mean that they faithfully interpret or carry on the ideals of their predecessors.


kind of dualistic metaphysics based on its own mythology. This is not an ‘absolute’ dualism of competing and equal powers as with Manichaeism, but it is radical nonetheless as a devaluation of matter in the face of a divine realm that is more original and more ‘real’. Humanity is said to possess an original and absolute sovereign freedom; therefore, the human being is compelled to seek mastery over others and over the environment. Essentially, this is the economic assumption of utility maximization: each individual acts selfishly for personal gain. In our current state of being, humans are limited by governmental and societal structures that constrain our original freedom. Ours is a degraded world that assumes a radical break between the ideal realm of pure freedom, a pure humanity, and the Real as a state of pure competition and pure capitalism.\(^{50}\) Such a view of the ‘evils’ of the other who contaminates and impinges upon my freedom is essentially mythological, stemming from a confluence of factors, including the cult of the individual, the belief in the ‘invisible hand’ of the market, and the practice of consumption to satisfy the ‘lack’ that is at the center of the human person.

The capitalist belief in an ‘invisible hand’ is a form of faith that “the sum total of diverse transactions must ‘by definition’ be benevolent”.\(^{51}\) Thus, we must have faith that collective market activity will always ‘naturally’ lead to an aggregate good for all. This is intimately related to consumption, since: “One story the market tells, then, is that of scarcity miraculously turned into abundance by consumption itself, a contemporary loaves-and-fishes saga.”\(^{52}\) The view of human freedom as proceeding from an essential lack and exercising economic agency as the only legitimate form of self-actualization ends up making the goal of human activity into ‘utility maximization’.\(^{53}\) But this immediately runs into the question of what utility is and how it is measured; this is a question we can only answer in terms of the accumulation of money as the value of all values, and therefore the possession and actualization of freedom by accumulating and spending money in the market.\(^{54}\) This reveals a dualistic cosmology in two ways: first, money is seen as

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50 The most famous proponent of such a view of human freedom was Milton Friedman, who thought of freedom in such economic terms as a potential check against political constraints. See Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 40th anniversary ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 7–21.

51 Poole, *Capitalism’s Toxic Assumptions*, 38.

52 Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 93. That is, like Jesus feeding the crowds (Mk 6.35–44; 8.1–10; Mt 15.32–39), capitalist markets promise to create overwhelming, almost miraculous, abundance out of efficient management of scarce resources.

53 Poole, *Capitalism’s Toxic Assumptions*, 61: “‘Pure’ utility is an incoherent notion, because it begs the question: usefulness for what?”

54 Interestingly, for Simmel, money represents values symbolically through the objectification of subjective values, and is therefore invested with value. Goodchild, on the other hand, sees money as more active, and actually capable of investing external reality
inherently good, and can even be identified with the personified ‘invisible hand’ – when the divine will is allowed to be freely exercised though financial transactions, the result is the acquisition of the good. This transcendent power, accessible only through currency as its empty ‘sign’, is the true Good that communicates directly with the individual, at least within this closed metaphysical system. This also presupposes that earthly forces that attempt to hinder, regulate, or otherwise complicate financial transactions are inherently evil because they are attempting to subvert the divine will that is covertly saving humanity and preserving its original freedom. These enemies of the divine will can be counted as anything that resists exploitation as a source of economic gain: the natural world, social customs and structures, financial regulation, or familial and sentimental relationships that refuse to be commodified and turned into profit. Thus, the transcendent is good, but the immanent natural world is evil unless it is in explicit cooperation with transcendence. The dualism between god and the world runs parallel to the dualism of self to other, since the self in its absolute freedom is ultimately identified with the infinite and divine as the exercise of true freedom, and not with finite creation which generally resists subjective attempts at control. This dualism between self and other is built into the very fabric of capitalism itself because ‘competition’ is the default form of capitalist social relations and the way to achieve efficient and successful management of one’s environment. People actualize their relationship with the divine by accumulating wealth in relation to others; the other is a threat to my acquisition of money, and my victory through competition proves my own virtuousness in relation to hostile external forces.

The second parallel with gnosticism is the superiority of the enlightened human being over creation and the creator god. Obviously money has not ‘created’ the world in the very basic sense of bringing it into being. We can say that it has helped to ‘arrange’ what exists in a near-optimal capitalist structure, but it is not the

with value. Thus it is the ‘value of values’ not just as the neutral X used as a universal medium of exchange, but because of the power and faith it commands.

55 Friedman, in particular, shows this tendency in his discussion of monopolies, couching it in terms of resistance to limitations on human freedom, by which he seems to mean only the economic and political freedom of economic agents. For him, private monopoly is preferable to public monopoly or regulation because public goods can continue to exist thanks to the economic ‘demand’ for such goods, while still adhering to his idealized view of individual freedom. Thus, the ‘economic’ realm (here in terms of freedom) is elevated over politics or other social goods and interests. See Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, 22–36.

source of our being-here-in-the-world. This is the work of a demiurge, or a creator god (e. g. Yaldaboath), even if we merely acknowledge this to be the physical world, and do not follow Aquinas back into the first causes of being itself. Humanity, however, transcends nature because of the divine ‘spark’ imprisoned in human bodies that allows it to know the true order of the universe and recognize the true and transcendent god. The “physical world is a barrier”, but it is one that can be used in service of the one true god. Thus, levels of divinity are posited and adhered to, and here humanity is secretly, unbeknownst to the creator of the Genesis narrative, capable of more than was intended in physical creation. This can only be achieved, however, by adhering to the real structure of the universe and the highest value, which is transcendental and ideal. The fact that money exists as a collective, eidetic fiction only emphasizes the point, since this makes it something that is truly inaccessible to lower orders of creation and even to large ‘sinful’ sections of humanity. This brings back the gnostic division of humanity into three levels: the spiritual, the psychic, and the material, in a system in which the possession of money and success in the market is equated with virtue. Class division and the social division of labor is a matter of ontological constitution, an unchangeable and divinely instituted order.

The final characteristic that I want to examine here, which is intimately interrelated with the last point, is the necessity of divine knowledge, gnōsis, for human salvation. For gnosticism, this meant secret, revealed knowledge coming from the transcendent realm: “knowledge of the divine self and the means whereby the soul can return to its divine origins.” Such knowledge includes, of course, the true nature of humanity, its divine origin, the true nature of god and the pleroma, as well as structure of the cosmos – essentially a metaphysics. The theology of money functions similarly, by valuing a certain kind of knowledge above all else. Certainly this includes the kind of knowledge and expertise in economics learned in business school and in MBA programs, but ultimately that type of ‘technical knowledge’ serves a greater, more divine kind of ‘self knowledge’. This is the so-called discovery of the economic ‘laws’ that are inherent in humanity, society, and the world at large and that have been both illuminated and propagated as a universal social science, analysis and prescription for human behavior, and explanation of the world. It is through this special revelation that human

reason becomes equated with economic reason.\textsuperscript{61} Ethics can, therefore, be easily replaced by \textit{insight} into the order of the world – once we understand the science of it all, we need only implement that knowledge in such a way that correctly adheres to the structure of reality, thereby maximizing our utility and freedom. Knowledge is salvific because knowing how the market ‘works’ grants access to the sacred, or the ability to constantly satisfy desires, and ultimately the desire for money as the highest good. This includes the intimate self-knowledge about the ‘divine’ nature of humanity as \textit{homo oeconomicus} – the more perfectly and successfully one acts in the market, the more in tune one is with the divine. The economic classes of society are also reinforced here, since some people are seen as having a kind of divine gift and inherent virtue that gives them possession of this salvific knowledge. The lower classes, however, and particularly minorities within Western societies, have often been portrayed as inherently inferior, unable to be truly virtuous and economically prosperous – two characteristics that are now interchangeable. Economic success is proof of salvation, and we can therefore \textit{know} who can and will be saved. Money as the gnostic god of global capitalism makes this possible.

\section*{Conclusion: The Secularization of Eschatology}

There remains one basic question about salvation and money – if money presents a theology and a piety, then how does it save and what does it save us from? The ancient gnostics were to be saved from the world and from the reality of human finitude. This was part of a broader trend in the ancient world whereby “every religion in antiquity-Babylonian, Canaanite, Persian, Greek and Jewish-passed from a naturalistic to an otherworldly religious hope in the period from approximately the sixth to the second centuries B.C.”\textsuperscript{62} The development of metaphysical systems that integrated and transformed the natural world and traditional mythologies was carried to an extreme with gnosticism. The redemption of the world through the coming of Christ (or a divine analogue) is a primary tenet of Christian and related gnosticisms; it is presented in mythological, cosmic terms.\textsuperscript{63} The Incarnation transforms the human being, who is a microcosm of the cosmos, from its ‘natural’ fallen state, linking it up with the true eternal and divine principle. Christ appears as an intermediary between the pleroma and the fallen world of matter, sometimes in a distinctly docetic way that only appears human,\textsuperscript{64} and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 628.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Brown, \textit{The Body and Society}, 106.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Pearson, \textit{Ancient Gnosticism}, 34–35, 196–98.
\end{itemize}
sometimes as merely discounting the importance of Jesus’ body and of matter in general. \textsuperscript{65} This is an indication of the kind of ‘dualism’ discussed above. Second, Christ is ‘otherworldly’, and comes from outside of the created universe in order to subvert the given order created by a fallen god. Third, Christ brings salvation and access to the higher realm through secret \textit{gnôsis}. Money, and specifically in its incarnated form, acts similarly by presenting and reinforcing a broadly dualistic metaphysical worldview. It allows humans to transcend the fallen world of social constraints and obligations to others by directly accessing the ideal of the transcendent and original sovereign freedom. The incarnation of money through currency provides a means of making the demands of the original sovereign freedom effective over-against the world as we find it, functionalizing all otherness into commodities to be consumed for our benefit. \textsuperscript{66} It allows us to reap the benefits of the market’s supernatural benevolence. Finally, this access extends to the ‘sign’ character of money. Through its continued use in consumer practices, the secret knowledge of the market and its supposedly eternal laws are revealed and made manifest through human success in economic life. The ‘incarnation’ of money makes this possible as a spiritual system of belief in the salvific power of money. Money imparts a kind of salvific freedom, but it is a limited and imperfect freedom.

For the ancient gnostics, saving knowledge was supposed to free the divine soul to return to eternity in the transcendent pleroma, never to be affected by suffering, death, and decay. This dualistic theology is also present today, because “it is our being as creatures that is repellent. Being a creature is to be between: torn between evil and good.” \textsuperscript{67} Embracing gnostic salvation is a rejection of creaturely finitude, and even a rejection of the status of ‘creature’ in favor of divinity, albeit one which is reduced in rank for the time being. But our world does not truly acknowledge transcendence – even money is a kind of ‘transcendent immanence’ because it exists only insofar as humanity brings it about. As William Desmond has observed of ‘modern’ incarnations of gnosticism:

“\textquote{In ancient Gnosticism the absolute One is utterly beyond the counterfeit creation, for this world here and now is the domain of the mimicry of spirit, hence the need of a world-denying flight. In more modern forms, it seems all but the opposite, in that the absolute One as utterly transcendent must be redoubled in \textit{absolute immanence}, which is now the pleroma to be realized through the self-becoming of the absolute One. In one, flight to the hyperbolic transcendence as world denying; in the other [i. e. modern], flight from transcendence to utter immanence.}\textsuperscript{68}"

\textsuperscript{65} Brakke, \textit{The Gnostics}, 68–69.
\textsuperscript{66} Miller, \textit{Consuming Religion}, 130–37.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 217.
Essentially, eschatology, along with much else, has been secularized. Money makes our demands and desires effective, and the salvific promise of money is now the ability to live in total freedom – doing whatever, whenever. The rejection of finitude and inclusion into the divine entails embracing the power of money to ‘freely’ exercise our options prior to the encounter with death as an ultimate limit. The fear of death motivates us to embrace acceleration as a secular form of salvation: “One who lives infinitely fast no longer need to fear death as the annihilator of options.” The problem is that in order to ‘fill’ one’s life with experiences, one has to choose between a multitude of options. This means living ‘infinitely fast’ in order to exercise all of our options prior to death, so as not to fear it. However, the subject must then have enough money to make demands effective, leading us to prioritize the accumulation of money in order to then spend it. The things desired are often delayed, substituted with accumulating money to be used later. What is ultimately most important is accumulating money, and not the things it is used for – those objects are devalued first by the ‘flattening’ or economic conversion of all value to exchange value, and second by the prioritization of economic activity (both buying and selling) above all else, leading to the commodification of other kinds of experience. Thus, the desire to do and possess things is once again either transmuted into the desire for money itself or into desire for desire’s sake, most forcefully expressed in consumer behavior. The demand for money itself over-against the objects of consumption is compounded because such value represented by money cannot remain static: “[w]hen money stands still, it is no longer money according to its specific value and significance.” At the center of ever-accelerating social, structural, and economic processes, is the fact that time is being regulated and ruled by our obligations to a god that we have created, but whose power we are increasingly no longer able control. Schillebeeckx was, therefore, correct to say that:

“This [gnostic] heresy, which has frequently, of course, presented itself as ‘orthodoxy’, has haunted authentic Christianity from its origins and throughout the centuries up to the present day, has laid snares for it and made it incredible for many people. Christians have again and again been ensnared by it and become heretics and have in turn made heretics of their fellow-believers. What is more, this is still taking place.”


70 Simmel, The Philosophy of Money, 510.


72 Schillebeeckx, “Theological Criteria”, 61 [68–69].
Although the cosmology has changed from the ancient world, contemporary capitalism is still built on a metaphysical foundation. Money acts as the theos of a system that we ourselves have created, and the accumulation of its incarnated form promises a kind of transcendence of our own bodily finitude through acceleration – the exercise of sovereign freedom through consumption. The ancient gnostics broke up the ‘horizontal’ social bonds of their contemporary societies in favor of the ‘vertical’ dimension of human beings.73 By actualizing the hidden divine freedom of humanity, the gnostics believed that they could transcend all exterior and interior otherness.74 The capitalistic drive to master the world through harnessing wealth is incredibly similar: putting aside familial and social relationships in order to pursue a lucrative career; dismantling social welfare systems in favor of the interests of the rich and powerful; the permeation of economic principles in every aspect of life without a second thought.75 I have attempted to make sense of this ‘deification’ of money and the economic representation of the divine by reading elements of the historical tradition of Christianity in light of contemporary developments. The perennial challenge presented by thought patterns from our collective past should be confronted by utilizing the resources of Christian memory and religious imagination stemming from tradition. Pope Francis’ recontextualized creation theology presents an important model that should be explored more thoroughly by political and fundamental theology in order to develop an ‘adequate’ theological anthropology that does not fall into the trap of ‘economic gnosticism’, for the sake of our societies and for the future of the world that is in our care.76

References


74 Ibid., 114–15.
75 See Francis, *Laudato Si’*, sec. 178.
76 Ibid., sec. 119: “If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.”


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Limits to Globalisation and the Loss of Faith

Philip Goodchild

The contemporary rise of populism may be explained as a product of the process of globalisation against which it reacts. For globalisation rests upon a faith in the future, and limits to globalisation necessitate a change in faith. It is proposed that the nature of this faith in the future can be illuminated by the dynamics of a credit crisis, such as the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–8. According to new economic theory, economic growth is driven by the rate of credit creation, and economic downturns result from a failure in mutual confidence. There are both mathematical and external limits to economic growth. The first result of approaching such limits is an attempt to retain one’s share of resources with the rise of populism. A subsequent result may well be a return to religion in currently secular countries.

Faith; Globalisation; Credit; Finance; Crisis of Representation; Sacrifice


Introduction

The rise of populist, authoritarian, nationalist and protectionist rulers in developing and advanced economies alike is often understood as a crisis of democratic representation: populist majorities strengthen their advantages over migrants and minorities. This conflict may be mapped against at least three axes. On one axis, there is political conflict between those who promote national, ethnic and religious identities over against those who are identified as ‘other’ in respect of origin, ethnicity, or religious or sexual identity. On another axis, there is political conflict between those for whom globalisation has enhanced prosperity and opportunity and those who fear that others are prospering at their expense. On a third axis, there is political conflict between those who seek to ground public discourse in evidence, working within political and economic constraints, and those whose public discourse is either calculated to produce particular effects or else simply expresses wishful thinking and resentment. Cosmopolitan, global, and rational
citizens may perceive a crisis of democratic representation when the interests of diverse peoples, prosperous trade, and truth are set aside.¹

It is therefore counterintuitive to propose that a root cause of this contemporary crisis lies in the progress of globalisation itself. There is a crisis of democratic representation when people sense that the decisions, forces and necessities that shape their lives derive from elsewhere. For governments are constrained not only by the wishes of their populace but also by the demands of economic and physical security. This constraint is a natural outcome of a far more interconnected world which has brought with it not only increased opportunities but also threats such as international terrorism, climate change, financial crises, and mass migration. Furthermore, lasting constraints are imposed by democratic representatives: trade agreements, which are complex contracts, involve promises which govern one’s own nation’s conduct, and, in the most complex cases, develop institutions external to the ongoing democratic process to regulate what has already been agreed. In other words, there is a tension between an ideal of democratic autonomy, where liberty consists in the ability to engage in free market exchange, and the reality of democratic representation, where trade involves contract and external constraint. Finally, since people have little understanding of the consequences which might emerge from agreements in a complex world of capitalist creative destruction and ecological interdependence, there remains some distance between the rational foresight which grounds political choices and ultimate outcomes. In other words, globalisation, understood as the advance of free market exchange and democratic institutions, exposes itself to mobile forces, constraints, and disconnections with external reality which undermine its own progress.

In this respect, globalisation, like the populism which contests it, rests upon a faith. The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the nature of this faith in order to explain the political transformations of our time. The aim is to lay out a framework for understanding religious and secular faith alike. For the roles of credit and faith in driving economic life may also hold significance for future transformations of religion. Indeed, if the social function of religion as a basis for underwriting trust has been eclipsed by faith in the future, then a loss of that faith may lead to a return of religion. More specifically, the argument proposed here is that the dynamics of a credit crisis, such as the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–8, may also shed some light on the dynamics of the political crisis of representation.

Any investment, whether financial, political or religious, involves an assessment of both the value that is on offer and the degree of security afforded. Many previous societies have found that value and security in their own past – in the establishment of custom and tradition, in the great achievements of the nation, or in the revelations or ideas of founding fathers, whether Confucius, Manu, St Paul,

¹ For recent commentary on such political changes, see Heinrich Geiselberger (ed.), *The Great Regression* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).
Mohammed, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, or Karl Marx. What is distinctive about the age of globalisation is cooperation beyond the boundaries of nation, creed, ethnicity, linguistic group, or political ideology, expressed in the form of the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Far from appealing to a common heritage, the common good of globalisation is future prosperity. Global cooperation is based on promises, and promises offer a value and security that is to be found in the future. Just as each person who takes on a debt, whether for investment or consumption, expects to pay out of the resources provided by a wealthier future, so also each person who makes a political commitment to increasing openness and engagement expects to receive greater value and security. This wealthier future is itself provided by globalisation, the increase in exchange that generates wealth. In distinction from previous societies, our relations to each other in an age of globalisation are founded no longer on our relation to a common past, that which we are given, but on our relation to a common future, that which we can make. Traditional religions have been displaced by projection.

Now, any relation to the future is a matter of faith. Faith in a prosperous future makes cooperation possible; cooperation makes prosperity possible; and hope for future prosperity is a ground for faith. This has functioned as a benign circle. Yet any future threat will prove destructive if it undermines confidence. There are perhaps three kinds of response that aim to maintain confidence in the face of future threats: a first is the technocratic paradigm which hopes that a solution to the problem can be found through ingenuity, investment and commitment. A second response is denial: refusing to face up to the significance of future threats so as to continue as before. A third response is to advocate a return to an image of cooperation founded on the past. These three responses, in various mixtures, determine the main political options of our time.

The age of globalisation is also, in certain respects, an age of secularisation: a common religion is not necessary for mutual trust and cooperation. Religious faith may be acceptable as a personal option, but economic relations with others have to be regulated in practice by the worldly realities of states and markets. When economic globalisation offers an immanent frame for extending trust and cooperation, religious imperatives, based on obligation, become less significant. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which faith, which was formerly directed first of all towards God, is now directed towards each other through the mediation of states and markets. Prosperity is no longer regarded as a gift of God, but is the natural outcome of ingenuity, discipline and cooperation. This immanent frame consists in confidence in the faithfulness of others. The ground that supports such mutual trust is the value and security afforded in the future by cooperation itself. In this respect, investing in globalisation bears some resemblance to a speculative bubble: when others are investing, the price continues to rise, and investment seems attractive, but the moment there is hesitation, the price can start to fall, and the disinvestment is sudden and catastrophic. It is possible that globalisation is
being kept afloat by our technocrats, by our reality deniers, and by our nationalists. It is also possible that it might experience a sudden, catastrophic collapse.

1. The Emptiness of the Future

One day global market capitalism will come to an end. Whether destroyed by an external shock, such as a nuclear winter, or undermined by its own economic dynamics, such as a spiral of hyper-inflation or debt deflation, or overturned from within, by a religious revolution or by runaway artificial intelligence, or displaced by another socio-economic system as yet barely imaginable, capitalism will have its last day. Now, any foresight into such an end leads to a problem of backwards induction. For on the last day, investments may no longer yield a profit, debts may no longer be repaid, work may no longer yield wages, and money may no longer store value. On the penultimate day, then, why should anyone with foresight make investments, offer loans, or turn up for work? In other words, if the end is recognised, capitalism will destroy itself on the penultimate day – the end will come before it has arrived. Having recognised this, then one should also recognise it the day before the penultimate day, and so bring the end a day nearer, and again and again until we reach our present day. One day global market capitalism will come to an end. Should foresight into the end of capitalism be sufficient to destroy it here and now? Has capitalism already become bankrupt, and do people live in denial of the fundamental emptiness of all investment, all debt, and all money? For if our debts, at any moment, should prove unpayable, why attribute them such significance here and now? Of course, any insight into the empty foundations of financial value cuts both ways: if it is advantageous in the short-term to undertake unpayable debts and to invest in the debts of others, why not continue to do so until the date of the end of capitalism is clear?

The point of this thought experiment is to disclose that an essential economic resource, enabling investment, borrowing and even modern money itself, is faith in future prosperity achieved through economic cooperation. Cooperation is founded upon faith in a future, yet this future is to be achieved through cooperation itself. Capitalism must collapse without such confidence. In this respect, global market capitalism as a whole bears some structural resemblance to an investment bubble: it feeds its own growth through expectation. It does not matter whether the asset is in reality over-valued, for so long as others are investing in expectation that the price will rise, then, in the short-term, the price will rise and profits can be made. The prosperous future arrives to the extent that we believe in it and cooperate to achieve it. Now the condition for the emergence of an investment bubble is the use of leverage or trading on margin so that an investor.

provides only a proportion of the nominal asset price. The simplest form of credit is deferral of payment – for example, in the tulip mania of Amsterdam in the 1630s or the South Sea Bubble of London in 1720, assets changed hands in exchange for deposits of 10% of their nominal value. The balance was still owed, and speculators were debtors; people would pay later, or rather, not at all, for if the asset rose just another 10% in value, one could sell it on and double one’s original investment. In those instances, while fortunes were made and lost, the investment bubbles collapsed. Yet the form of capitalism that emerged from that era, initially relying for value on the debts undertaken by the Bank of Amsterdam or the Bank of England, has survived. It is based on promises to pay in the future, whether those promises are banknotes, financial derivatives, insurance contracts or employment contracts. Such debts have proven more secure when founded on the mutual exchange of debts between sovereign states, private investors, and the banking system. The Financial Revolution in England generated a long-term national debt, an active securities market and a widely circulating credit currency, enabling a global empire and the Industrial Revolution. The key economic agents are all dependent on each other paying their debts, and, as such, their behaviour becomes more disciplined and predictable. This exchange of debts expresses a faith in economic cooperation and ongoing prosperity. Of course, past performance, even over the course of three centuries, is not a reliable guide to future profits. If the conditions under which capitalism has thrived were to cease then this would send a shock wave in advance through its effect on expectations.

It may be that reaching the limits of globalisation and economic growth, with a consequent loss of faith in a prosperous future, may offer some explanation for the political transformations of our time. When there is less promise of a future to be obtained through cooperation it may seem more urgent to defend what one has: it is a matter of circling the wagons to keep out outsiders, or staking a claim to the property one enjoys. I wish to point out three salient aspects of a faith grounded in future prosperity. Firstly, faith in the future is founded upon a faith in faith, a confidence that others will keep faith. Of course, people try to support such faith with rationalisations based on past trends towards growth and current technological progress. But there are no future facts; our grounds for faith in the future rest upon confidence alone. Secondly, in order to maintain continuing confidence, people must avert their gaze from future dangers. Few people are interested in understanding how the world truly is; instead, they focus upon how they wish it to

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be. Thirdly, as a consequence of an unacknowledged anxiety, people keep a suspicious eye upon each other so that if dangers are realised they can react ahead of or with the crowd; one cannot afford to be the one left behind holding worthless assets and collateral. These structural features of the psychology of a speculator, inherent in capitalism since its inception in the early modern financial revolution, have only been amplified by the most recent financial revolution through which finance has come to predominate in the creation of asset values, and daily lives have become increasingly structured through debt.  

Classical conceptions of capitalism understand it in terms of saving, the accumulation of the means of production. Historically, this may be a misconception, for the first industrialists in England each mortgaged their land to fund their investments. Yet what is especially striking about the recent period of globalisation, since around 1980, is the extent to which personal, corporate, financial, and government debt has increased in most countries. Whether debt is used for investment, consumption, for balancing cashflow, or to pay essential bills, it involves a speculative wager on the future. For those who sit on the boards of secure and profitable companies, capitalism is simply a prudent way of freely handling property and agreement, and its excesses may be curbed by virtuous conduct. For those for whom economic opportunities are only available through debt, by contrast, conduct is determined in the last instance by debt obligations. Projection of the future, drawing on the psychology of a speculator, may be more pervasive than we might suppose: in addition to the growth in finance, speculation and debt which has accompanied the era of globalisation, projection is found in both faith in globalisation itself and in the monetary architecture which underpins capitalism.

2. Limits to Globalisation

There is some evidence to suggest that faith in a more prosperous future is declining. In 2013, a Pew Research Center survey asked people in developed countries whether they expected their children to enjoy a higher standard of living than themselves. A reassuringly positive answer was returned by just 33% in the

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US, 28% in Germany, 17% in Britain, 14% in Italy, and 9% in France.\textsuperscript{10} The experiences that motivate such pessimism might include stagnant wages, increasing levels of debt, unaffordable housing, insecure employment, the loss of a social safety net through austerity measures, observed declines in physical and mental health, warnings of inadequate pensions, and epidemics of social isolation. It is in such ways that people may experience at an individual level the lacklustre performance of national economies. The critical question is this: what happens to globalisation when people lose faith in a more prosperous future?

The question of whether economic growth undermines its own future prosperity through its own success, whether through pollution, depletion of resources, or an ageing population,\textsuperscript{11} may be less immediately relevant here than the internal dependence of the economy on credit. Globalisation is based on a faith in increasing exchange, including the mobility of goods, services, labour and capital, as the route toward prosperity for all. This faith in exchange is supported by three key elements: hope for future prosperity, based on evidence of increasing wealth; confidence in the stability of the global financial system, as the infrastructure mediating investment, borrowing and exchange; and effective wealth distribution, for exchange can only be trusted as a route to accumulation if there is a realistic chance of obtaining wealth. Any future limits to globalisation from each of these dimensions offers a present limit to faith in globalisation itself. If economic growth starts to falter then income and profits can only be drawn by some at the expense of others. Once the future no longer appears to be a reservoir of prosperity, a source of motivation for investing credit and a source of collateral for undertaking debt, then a far more defensive political dynamic will start to emerge.

One limit to globalisation is offered by increasing financial instability. Those who trade from their own resources can grow richer or poorer, but those institutions or people who are highly-leveraged, drawing on borrowed money, are exposed to risks. If global debt in the non-financial sector was around 269% of GDP in 2007, after a decade of austerity and deleveraging it reached 273% in 2016.\textsuperscript{12} Such levels of debt make the system unstable: while there is some insurance against defaulting debtors, once the rate of default crosses a critical threshold then it spreads through the wider economy by contagion, for those who depend upon the debt repayments of others may not be able to meet their own obligations in turn. There have been few regulatory changes affecting banking and

\textsuperscript{10} Cited in Satyajit Das, \textit{A Banquet of Consequences: Have We Consumed our Own Future?} (London: Financial Times, 2016), 3.

\textsuperscript{11} These are other issues are surveyed in Satyajit Das’ comprehensive survey, \textit{A Banquet of Consequences}.

the trading of derivatives since 2007, and central bankers are largely agreed that future credit crises are inevitable. Even China, which sought to avoid the mistakes of the West with sovereign control over credit creation and expansionist fiscal policy, has gone from a total debt to GDP ratio of 150% in 2007 to 280%. Financial collapse, the unravelling of chains of credit, causes liquidity problems in the real economy, bankruptcies, unemployment, lack of investment, and the threat of a debt-deflationary spiral. When the stability of the global financial system cannot be trusted, globalisation goes into reverse.

A further limit to globalisation is rising inequality. Once the world’s eight richest individuals own as much wealth as the poorer half of the global population, then global inequality has reached an extreme. Two of the mechanisms that drive the growth in inequality may be revealed by looking specifically at where money comes from and to where it flows. Inequality is driven by a spiral of speculative borrowing to invest in real estate and financial assets: such borrowing leads to price rises and capital gains for the owners of assets, and these lead in turn to increased borrowing and investment in unproductive assets; in the meantime, real production is deprived of investment, and those without assets are increasingly priced out of a global speculative bubble. Inequality is also driven by the existence of large corporations, since the money used to pay to consume goods and services is extracted from local economies, and less of that money returns if the large corporations have few suppliers in those regions. With the prospects for gaining wealth through hard work and innovation receding, faith in a prosperous future for the majority is rapidly eroding. Each of these dynamics undermines faith in globalisation and exchange, and loss of faith sets real limits to globalisation.

3. The Dynamics of Debt

If these limits operate first at the level of faith and subsequently at the level of production, there are also limits operative at a purely economic level through the dynamics of debt. This phenomenon calls for a shift in understanding: it now seems that global market capitalism is driven by debt creation or deferral of payment. According to previous economic theory, debt has no aggregate effects on the economy as a whole, for by definition, for every debtor there must be an

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equivalent creditor. Whatever the debtor has borrowed to spend, the creditor is unable to use. The fundamental misconception here is to imagine that all economic transactions are exchanges, for some are mere promises. Debts and credits are created out of nothing when settlement is deferred. Such debts become valuable assets that can be transferred as a means of payment. Finance as a whole is irreducible to instantaneous market exchange because it consists entirely in the temporal reality of deferred payment. In this respect, one can distinguish separable yet interdependent dimensions of a market economy: while people engage in exchange transactions, such that one person’s financial asset is always balanced by another’s liability, banks also have another function: they settle debts with each other. Since such mutual debts between a few banking institutions cancel each other out, banks do not need to receive or borrow the vast majority of the money which they lend.

As the Bank of England’s paper, ‘Money Creation in the Modern Economy’, makes clear: ‘Whenever a bank makes a loan, it simultaneously creates a matching deposit in the borrower’s bank account, thereby creating new money.’ For when money is created by banks through issuing loans, the mutual credits and debts cancel each other out. It is quite straightforward to create mutual debts out of nothing. The borrower has the liability of owing the loan as well as the asset of the money to spend in their bank account. Since these are equal, and cancel each other out, it is as though the borrower is their own creditor. Likewise, the bank has the new asset of a loan that will be repaid, while having the liability of creating a deposit to be spent immediately. Since these are equal and cancel each other out, it is as though the bank is its own depositor. So banks do not need the money they lend in advance. As the nineteenth century Swedish economist Knut Wicksell made clear, the banks are able to do this because they settle debts with each other, and such debts cancel each other out through clearing transactions. This creation of credit adds to aggregate demand in an economy, eventually funding both consumption and purchases. Yet it arises from nothing, for in clearing transactions between banks they simply cancel out the mutual sums owing. In short, purchasing power or real, effective demand is created through an apparently mutually-cancelling creation of paired credits and debts.

This has enormous consequences as money creation becomes increasingly deregulated. In the case of the UK, household debt was stable around 15 % in the
1960s, but started to rise rapidly in the 1980s due to financial deregulation until it reached 95% of GDP in 2007. This newly created money, at a rate of about 1.5% of GDP per year. An increase of little more than 1.5% per year may sound small, but notice what is meant by these figures. Consider the money that is spent on a credit card in a shop: this is then used to pay wages, suppliers, and investors, who in turn will spend or invest the money, leading to a multitude of transactions each of which counts towards GDP, all making use of that same created money. If all that newly created money was re-spent 66 times in the course of one year, passing from one bank account to another, then it would be the basis for almost the whole of the GDP – of course, it can’t be spent that often in reality, for there is also corporate and government borrowing to consider, as well as the excess borrowing from previous years that is still recirculating. An entire economy can live by borrowing alone, gaining access to goods and services for nothing more than promises or debts; others within the economy or beyond can provide the goods and services, treating the debts as money. This is an economy in radical disequilibrium, where investment bubbles and credit crises punctuate the underlying growth in debt.

There is also another dynamic to consider: debt may continue to grow whether an economy itself grows or shrinks. The mechanism works like this: when debt is issued against collateral, such as a mortgage based on the value of a house, then the quantity of debt is fixed, while the value of the asset will fluctuate with supply and demand. In a downturn, when asset prices fall because there is a rush to sell, debt remains fixed. Wealth decreases in a downturn, but debts do not; the level of debt remains stuck at its existing rate, while there is less collateral in the economy to support it. Likewise, when people deleverage and pay down their debts, they reduce the amount of money circulating in the economy. With less money around, demand goes down and businesses contract, leading to unemployment, less investment, and less income from which debts can be serviced. In Irving Fisher’s description of a debt-deflationary spiral, the more debtors pay off, the more they owe. In other words, whether the economy grows or shrinks, the level of private debt relative to GDP stays ratcheted up.

These dynamics have been given a mathematical description by the Australian economist Steve Keen, who has shown that the aggregate demand that drives an economy is given by the sum of GDP plus the growth in credit. In other words, while a growing economy can drive itself, with money circulating faster and faster, an economy can also be driven by an increase in private debt, for this is new money creation that adds to demand even when this exceeds the rate of growth. Credit

22 Turner, Between Debt and the Devil, 22.
24 Cited in Keen, Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis, 115.
25 Keen, Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis, 56.
creation is the volatile factor here. If private debt is small relative to GDP, then changes in borrowing habits have less significance within a growing economy; yet once private debt is large relative to GDP, a change in borrowing can easily outweigh any previous GDP growth. Keen suggests that the key threshold is when private debt reaches about 150% of GDP. Beyond this threshold any economic downturn paralyses an economy such that debt repayment becomes impossible, and the demand for increasing credit falls away. If Japan reached this state of a ‘zombie economy’ in 1990, then in 2008 it was joined by Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and the UK. While Ireland has succeeded in further expanding its growth in credit, current ratios of private debt to GDP suggest that it will be joined shortly in the next economic crisis by Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Korea, Norway and Sweden. The other advanced economies rely on exports to the highly-indebted economies. The drop in demand from their neighbours will present the kind of difficulties faced by China in 2008, threatening recession. China itself chose to follow the debtor countries by stimulating demand through internal credit creation; it has now joined the highly-indebted countries. National differences and choices aside, this mechanism of debt overwhelming productive growth operates in the global economy as a whole.

The underlying point is that global market capitalism is fuelled by debt, and there are internal, mathematical limits to debt-driven economic growth. These internal limits exist alongside any external or ecological limits. Once overall levels of debt rise, most funds are directed towards debt service, crowding out both consumption and investment. In a stagnant economy, profits can only be earned by the extraction of wealth from others. Such extraction is not new, but it had previously been disguised by the promise of inclusion in wealth creation through the globalisation of knowledge, skills, productive capacity, and governance. Once growth falters, one can only profit at another’s expense. Moreover, the global middle classes had benefited substantially from such extraction of wealth, whether directly through cheap goods and services or indirectly through rising asset prices. The wealth of such middle classes is becoming the primary object of contemporary extraction through debt, for asset values are now much more significant than cheap labour in the extraction of wealth. Yet once there are limits to the economic creation of wealth, whether environmental or economic, then the technical knowledge that increases productive capacity will prove redundant. The clearer the evidence becomes for stagnating prosperity, financial instability, and rising inequality, then the less authority will be granted to an ideal of globalisation with its modern rationalised culture and its technocratic paradigms of reason. In short, we stand at the threshold of a crisis of faith. What will happen to global-

26 Keen, Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis, 81.
27 Keen, Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis, 87.
28 Keen, Can We Avoid Another Financial Crisis, 97.
isation when there is no longer faith in rising prosperity, in financial stability, and in economic opportunity? The first indications are that people will endeavour to safeguard their share of a shrinking resource base.

4. The Role of Religion

Lastly, we may turn to consider the relevance of religion here. Human prosperity and well-being depend in large measure upon ongoing cooperation: mutual trust is the principal source of wealth. While trust in one’s immediate neighbours is straightforward if it is deserved, trust in those whom one rarely meets, or in those whom one does not meet at all, is a far more momentous, yet rather more fragile, affair. In this respect, it may be helpful to understand the process of secularisation not as the end of religion but as the transference of faith from received revelation to willed projection. Where revelation sustains trust around the past, projection sustains trust in the future; where revelation appeals to a transcendent origin, projection appeals to an immanent construction; and where revelation offers a given content, projection is empty of content but for faith in faith itself. Form, the mode of organisation, displaces content. The twentieth-century has witnessed the extension of a cumulatively more momentous and yet fragile apparatus of trust: economic globalisation. Distant people may be trusted to the extent that they are incorporated into a framework for guiding conduct based on contract and exchange, monetary transactions, audited accounting, regulation and enforcement of trading standards, stable government, employment in corporations, and an infrastructure for transport and communication – all contributing towards the free movement of goods and services, workers, and capital investment. At the same time, such mobility also has the effect of uprooting people from previous frameworks of trust: when products, people and investment capital are scattered far from the living communities in which they first emerged, modernisation and rationalisation tend to replace the prior customs that gave identity and orientation to human conduct. Trust in living traditions is undermined, being replaced by trust in products, procedures, systems, governments and money.

This is immensely unsettling. It is therefore hardly surprising that the twentieth-century has also witnessed another momentous transformation of frameworks for trust throughout the majority world: the spread of world religions, or more specifically, Pentecostal Christianity, Roman Catholicism, indigenous Christianities, Sunni Islam, and neo-Hinduism, as well as more minor religious movements. Whatever processes of secularisation may have been operative in Europe, North America and Japan, the twentieth century has largely witnessed

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the triumph of religion – a cultural transformation which, emerging from much longer histories, may perhaps prove to be rather more stable and enduring than economic globalisation. Moreover, in situations where the very existence of trust and community has been under threat, whether as a result of war or as a by-product of the disruptions wrought by economic globalisation, world religions have proved effective in re-establishing a basis for organised, meaningful conduct and mutual trust.

This suggests an unforeseen prospect: if faith in debt-driven capitalism collapses, along with the benefits of globalisation, peace and prosperity that it brings, there will be a change in where people place their faith. Initially, loss of faith may lead to the behaviour of a desperate debtor who endeavours to postpone future settlement as far as possible, funding debt with more debt. Attention is focused upon opportunities to make money in the here and now, while others come to be regarded primarily as competitors in a market that scarcely feeds us all. In short, debt-fuelled capitalism promotes the psychological dynamics of an investment bubble, involving practical denial of the future, inattention to reality, and a purely extrinsic relation to others. This is what Carl Wennerlind has called ‘credit fetishism’, to be contrasted with Marx’ money fetishism: ‘if money allows people to disregard the origins of value, credit on the other hand necessitates a careful construction of a social imaginary of the reality within which future values will be produced. Money frees people from thinking about the past conditions of production, while credit necessitates that future conditions are carefully considered and vividly imagined.’

This credit fetishism is intensified for those from whom value is extracted, just as it is intensified for those who draw a profit. The problem, however, is compounded in this way: for those whose entire lives have been immersed in a culture of individualism, wish-fulfilment, and a focus on the images projected by others have few intellectual resources through which to open their eyes to the dynamic relations that constitute reality. Modern cultures are largely hollowed out by heteronomy and isolation in place of collective responsibility, by the pursuit of wishes in place of finding meaning in collective purpose, and by a focus on images and identities instead of causal and human relations. As such, they may lack the basic skills of intelligence, courtesy, self-criticism, and diplomacy necessary for any adaptive response to a changing reality. Despair takes the form of a nostalgia for a lost collective identity, infantile rage against the denial of wishes, and an obsession with the threats posed by images of others. These sentiments may then be manifest in political shifts towards regional secession, national autonomy,

30 Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 230.
31 Wennerlind develops this conception of credit fetishism in a discussion of the belief in the unlimited profitability of the South Seas slave trade in 1720, which overlooked the agency and mortality of the slaves themselves.
control over borders and right-wing politicians. It is hardly likely that any of these gestures will offer a successful way of addressing the new economic reality.

Nevertheless, however much conflict is generated by the new politicians, the rise of this new politics is part of a global process. Just as the rise of new religious visibilities may be explained by the deculturing effects of globalisation, the rise of a new politics can be explained as a result of the transformations of faith. In other words, the reaction against globalisation is itself a global process, even if it accelerates the production of conflict and chaos. Under modern conditions of fragmentation, a route out of chaos has often been offered by religion, for religions offer a framework for self-discipline, mutual trust and cooperation. If the developed world loses faith in a cooperative and prosperous future, if the wealth of the many is extracted by the few, and if globalisation collapses into fragmentation and conflict, then we may well see a resurgence of religious commitment in currently secular countries. For where secularising globalisation offers people the opportunity to save themselves through their own efforts, world religions offer to save people from themselves. Where globalisation offered the salvation of future prosperity through the cooperation that overcomes individual differences, world religions may offer salvation from isolation and anarchy. Such religions may not often take a form of which modern, critical theologians could approve. They might found trust on a wishful denial of patent reality; they might deny ecological concerns and promote war. Yet they might also offer some defence against economic catastrophe and a universal loss of trust by offering a basis for human cooperation. For where economic globalisation is based on an exchange of mere promises, debts which are treated as collateral for other debts, religious life offers the substance of a life regulated by religious piety. Prior to the financial revolution this was the basis for economic life.  

Such considerations leave one key question outstanding for the purposes of a critical understanding of religion. To what extent have traditional religions always functioned according to the emotional logic of an investment bubble? Perhaps the issue turns on the leverage or downpayment involved. According to Paul’s gospel, it is God who makes the initial downpayment of the Holy Spirit.  


33 For a fuller description of how this emotional logic functions within capitalism itself, see Martijn Konings, *The Emotional Logic of Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

34 2 Corinthians 1.22, 5.5. For a discussion of how this concept functions later in the
contrast, humanity makes or returns a sacrifice, then the cost of the sacrifice itself may function as evidence which guarantees the validity of a projected belief. Under such conditions, sacrifice substitutes means for ends: it becomes the reason why given ends are believed and trusted, for the price paid counts as evidence for their value. It may seem rather strange to propose a link between capitalism and religion in this way, such that personal religious commitments and sacrifices correspond, in the realm of belief, to capitalist investment. Likewise, capitalist investment, involving credit or downpayment on margin, may repeat the logic of religious faith. I am not the first to make such a link, and would like to offer the last words here, albeit rather suggestive ones, to another. Simone Weil compared Rosa Luxemburg’s theory of capitalist war with Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter on the eve of the Trojan War: both sacrifice their nearest and dearest in a competitive struggle for the means of power, whether the blessings of the gods, or markets, money and the means of production. As a result, they can never abandon the quest for which such sacrifices have been made. Weil articulated the critical principle which may be used to evaluate capitalism and religion alike in terms of Homer’s Iliad:

The real subject of the Iliad is the sway exercised by war over the warriors, and through them, over humanity in general; none of them knows why each sacrifices himself and all his family to a bloody and aimless war, and that is why, all through the poem, it is the gods who are credited with the mysterious influence which nullifies peace negotiations, continually revives hostilities, and brings together again the contending forces urged by a flash of good sense to abandon the struggle.

Thus in this ancient and wonderful poem there already appears the essential evil besetting humanity, the substitution of means for ends. At times war occupies the forefront, at other times the search for wealth, at other times production; but the evil remains the same. The common run of moralists complain that man is moved by his private interest: would to heaven it were so! Private interest is a self-centred principle of action, but at the same time restricted, reasonable, and incapable of giving rise to unlimited evils. Whereas, on the other hand, the law of all activities governing social life, except in the case of primitive communities, is that each one sacrifices human life – in himself, and in others – to things which are only means to a better way of living. This sacrifice takes on various forms, but it all comes back to the question of power. Power, by definition, is only a means; or to put it better, to possess a power is simply to possess means of action which exceed the very limited force that a single individual has at his disposal. But power-seeking, owing to its essential incapacity to seize hold of its object, rules out all consideration of an end, and finally comes, through an inevitable reversal, to take the place of all ends. It is this reversal of the relationship between means and end, it is this fundamental folly that accounts for all that is senseless and bloody right
through history. Human history is simply the history of the servitude which makes men – oppressors and oppressed alike – the plaything of the instruments of domination they themselves have manufactured, and thus reduces living humanity to being the chattel of inanimate chattels.\textsuperscript{35}

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Section III.

Transcription of the Lecture “Globalization and the Crisis of Culture and Religion”

Olivier Roy

At its center, this lecture focuses on the crisis of culture and religion – which essentially condenses to a crisis of the state, as globalization is bypassing the state – by addressing Islamic fundamentalism and by providing a more global view on the topic. Fundamentalism is not a product of tradition, but a modern phenomenon – a result as well as an active player of globalization. It disconnects religion and the concept of revelation from culture (as is the case in Salafism). Thus, an iconoclastic concept of culture and history has emerged (e.g. Daesh in Saudi Arabia). There are common traits between different kinds of fundamentalisms: an explicit system of norms and a social life, which reduces life to living in a faith community with high distrust towards society in general. A problem in the contemporary globalized world is the need to make everything explicit, which is opposed to culture. This trend reflects nothing but a normative system that can only be implemented in an authoritarian way. What follows is the crisis of culture – the destruction of the very concept of culture – that such a type of globalization promotes. Breaking this cycle entails refraining from indulging in this kind of systematic “normatization” of everyday life and trying to reopen a space not only between believers and nonbelievers, but between everyone. Ultimately, this calls for the need to reopen the discussion on the relationship between culture and religion in practice.

Globalization; Crisis; Culture; Religion; Fundamentalism; Iconoclasm; Explicit; Norms; Normatization; Identity

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**Introduction**

Globalization entails a crisis of the very concept of culture. How can we build a political society if we do not share culture at a local or global level? A political society is built on something we have in common. It’s an identity. It could be many things: a social or political contract, an ethnicity, a language, a history, a tradition. By definition in our modern societies it is usually connected to the state. The state is, in a sense, the representation of the society. We can discuss political representation inside the state, but the state in itself is a representation of the society. What we have now is the crisis of the state, because globalization is bypassing the state. The construction of Europe is a very concrete case of local globalization, if I may call it that. So what we see as its revenants (fundamentalism, populism) only form part of a mutation of the relationship to culture. Modern populism is not the same as old populism. It’s not fascism. It’s not Nazism. Of course we come across some common elements like xenophobia, the quest for a Duce and so on; but in terms of norms and values, modern populism is far more complex than it seems. In my lecture I will start with Islamic fundamentalism and proceed to a more global outlook.

1. **Islamic Fundamentalism: a Product of the Crisis of Culture**

The problem with Islamic fundamentalism is that it is commonly perceived as something coming from the past, from a traditional, medieval kind of Islam; medieval is a term very often used to qualify this kind of Islam. The problem is that there never was such an Islam in medieval times. In a sense, as far as Islam is concerned, medieval times were far more enlightened. Another issue is theology: what in Islamic theology triggered what we consider to be fundamentalism today? For instance there is an entire debate on the term “jihad” and the unsubstantiated idea that Islam lacks reformation in order to be adapted to modern times. The question is how a theology called Salafism could be revivified. We had a conference in Beirut two months ago on religion and violence, in which all the professors of Islamic Sunni Theology of the University of Beirut said: “When I was a young student nobody was speaking about Ibn Taymiyyah, nobody was speaking about the Salafi. Now we are confronted with Wahhabism, these strange guys in Saudi Arabia, the Bedus, but we used to teach falsafa, philosophy, at the universities and I do not understand how we could get from this kind of culture of enlightened Islam at the faculty of Theology to this kind of Salafi teaching. It is not traditional Islam at all – it’s new.” My own research shows that fundamentalism in general, not just in Islam, is not a protest of tradition against modernity and globalization. It is, on the contrary, a product and an actor of globalization. Why? Because the strength of this kind of fundamentalism is that it explicitly disconnects religion and culture. Salafism is totally opposed to culture. What is its theological basis?
2. Salafi Iconoclasm: Erasing Culture and History

The theological basis that can be found in Ibn Taymiyyah and Abd al-Wahhab is that you cannot know God, so there is no possible contact. It corresponds to a sort of negative theology. We know God only through his will. We cannot interpret, because if we interpret, that would mean that we can think like God, which is not the case. So we have to take the revelation as something which is not and should not be historical or connected to any culture at all. Everything that happened at the time of the prophet is without interest and at worst heresy and paganism. Salafism puts three things on the market: firstly, norms (dos and don’ts), secondly, explicit norms, since there is nothing implicit there, and thirdly, the absence of a connection to a specific society. So Salafism is a toolkit which works everywhere, in any circumstances. There is clearly an iconoclastic concept of culture and history. If you look at Saudi Arabia – it systematically destroyed what could be called Saudi culture, Saudi archeology, Saudi history, Saudi tradition. The result is Las Vegas plus Sharia, which is Medina today. But it is less fun than Las Vegas. In this sense, with Daesh, we have the explicit dimension of iconoclasm: they want to destroy everything which is linked to history. This is very interesting because, in a sense, Daesh is the logic of Salafism carried out until the end – and with the end I mean the apocalypse. They have no faith in the future. A just Islamic society is not sustainable for them: it’s just the prefiguration of the coming of the Antichrist. To make the coming of the Antichrist happen, they have to get rid of everything that belongs to the past. There is also an interesting dimension of negation of genealogy which is very strong in Daesh. Instead of speaking about a religious ideology, we should see Daesh as a narrative.

3. The Generational Dimension

If you look at the profiles of the people who join Daesh either to perpetrate terrorist actions or to fight jihad, there are two figures: second generation Muslims and converts. They do not join just because they belong to a second generation of whose parents came to Europe in the 60s and 70s or because it is normal to be a Salafist in this situation. No, we have had second generations in radical terrorism for 22 years. They arrived in 1995, and since then there has been the same profile. We don’t have a third generation. After such a long period of time, there should be a third generation, purely in the interest of demographics. However, there appears to be only a first generation, a second generation, and converts, whose profile has been the same since 1997. When looking at origins, it is evident in Germany, for instance, that only 10% of the radicals have Turkish origins, although the Turks represent at least two thirds of the Muslim population.

Everywhere, the Moroccans are overrepresented: the bulk of the terrorists in Belgium are Moroccans, as in Holland, as in Denmark, and to a certain extent in
Germany too. There are a high number of brothers: In every terrorist cell since 1997 until the Bataclan there has been at least a pair of brothers, sometimes sisters, but no fathers. 20 to 25% of the people who have perpetrated a terrorist attack in the West had a child in the year preceding the attack. The best example is the San Bernardino attack in 2015 in California. The man is a second generation Muslim, his wife is from Pakistan. They had a little girl and one day, when the little girl was nine months old, they left the girl at her aunt’s house and went to kill fourteen people and themselves. All of the people who are sent to Jihad are asked to make children and all the girls who go to Syria are requested to be mothers. All the men die in the months following the birth of their sons. So there is a connection to this very concept of generation.

In addition: before killing themselves, be it in Syria or in Europe, the terrorists very often call their mother, never their father, and say: “Mother, you are a bad Muslim, because you will cry once you hear that I am dead. But on the contrary, you should be very happy. Firstly I am going to paradise and secondly I will bring you with me.” By doing this, they turn the generational dimension around. The parents have eternal life thanks to their children. There is this dimension of a shortcut in history and genealogy, which goes along with an apocalyptic vision and a personal apocalyptic religious idol. Of course Daesh is the utmost extreme, but it conforms to the idea that religious life is not sustainable. You cannot live as a good believer, because you are a sinner. Therefore, you have to catch the moment when you can go directly to paradise. Referring back to Salafism: Salafism is not suicidal at all. They believe that life is given by God for you to learn how to get to paradise. You must follow the rules, and if you do that for your whole life, it will work out. There are also explicit dos and don’ts here. There are no grey zones – you are either in or out. This means that you have a problem with socialization, since you cannot socialize with “wrong believers” – with Christians. You are only allowed to socialize within your own community.

4. Two Digressions on the Question of “the Explicit”

Then I worked on Christianity and Evangelicalism. In these cases, the focus is on honor, which is why one is to be born again and fight a second time. Once one is born again, one cannot be associated with “wrong believers”. You can preach to the population, but you cannot socialize with people who do not believe. Here, everything is also explicit. It means that confessions are public. You cannot even confess ad auriculum which is very interesting because Catholicism is, what I would call, the management of the grey zone: secret, implicit and accepting of conformity. There everything stays between you and your confessor.

These are the common traits between all kinds of fundamentalisms: an explicit system of norms and a social life reduced to the life in your faith community with big distrust towards society in general. This creates many problems, because
norms are non-negotiable. Society either conforms to your set of norms or that society is considered to be pagan.

1) If we take the Catholic Church for example, we can say that since Humanae vitae the church has put the issue of norms on the table. The social gap issues like abortion and gay marriage were not linked to the church before the 60s. Abortion was banned in France in 1921 by parliament, without any pressure from the Church. The criminalization of homosexuality was very common in Western Europe until the 60s. It was not a request from the Church, it came from society itself. The 60s were very important, a divorce of values and norms. Suddenly there were no shared norms between the faith communities and mainstream society. This gap has widened since then, the last issue being same sex marriage. There is a problem in this case because the Church – the Catholic Church in particular – does not ask people to follow God’s norms. The Catholic Church has a concept, namely natural law, which is precisely the grey zone, the idea that you do not need to be a believer in order to agree on certain ideas. There can be consensus without sharing faith. Faith is not compulsory. When the church decided to take to the streets against gay marriage, Cardinal Barbarin was very clear: it is not because we are following God, but because the institution of gay marriage is a breach in natural law, an anthropological revolution. He was right by the way; I think it is an anthropological revolution. In doing this, he tried to build a coalition with the grey zone – people who are not believers at all – and with Muslims and Jews, in order to build a coalition of people who are against gay marriage, not on religious but on anthropological grounds. The only people who joined him were some Lacanian psychoanalysts, so it was a great disappointment for the Church. Since this demonstration, we have had the rise of a Catholic party “Sens commun” for the first time in France since the toast of Cardinal Lavigerie in 1891. This party goes into politics with a Catholic program in the name of God. The conference of bishops is no more in charge. So the debate is once again on norms, explicit norms.

2) If we look at the other side we find something interesting: what is the other side? It is freedom, liberty, sexual life and so on. Here, my field work was in California in 2009. California is 1968 squared, “it’s my choice”, it was the self-institution of the self. “I do what I want, I create my life”, freedom as the criteria for building a society – that all started from there. Evangelicalism started from here too. After spending one year in California, I found that it was one of the most regulated societies that I know. You have an extraordinary complex of regulations. Everything is regulated. Strangely, it’s a place where everything is supposed to be “my life and my choice”, but then people permanently regulate their own life. You cannot invite a child, you can only invite your own child’s friend. But when you do, you have to fixate on everything, at which time he comes, at which time he leaves, what he will eat; you have to speak with the other parents. If you invite their kid to a birthday party, you have to check whether they eat kosher, vegetarian, halal etc. Everything is regulated. So I decided to explore that. It is now a real problem. For instance, sexual life and the implicit: You have to have a
ten page contract before asking somebody to date you. Everything has to be explicit. My children had classes on how to say yes and no, how to ask things—they were not even ten! They had classes asking them to be explicit about everything they do. Never touch people. The “explicitation” of normativity, for instance emotions in emails—they are not that much fun, they are the “explicitation”%; you have to explicitly say what your state of mind is. You cannot make a joke without adding: “This is a joke!” It is not just California, now it is systematic. I sent a joke to my secretaries at the institute and they were totally perplexed. They asked me “What is the status of your email?” I said: “It’s a joke.” “How fun! Next time put an emoticon, so we know that it’s a joke.” You cannot make jokes if you do not explicitly point out that it is one and this trend is going very far in language, for example.

5. Globish as a Language without Culture

As you know we speak Globish and we will speak more and more Globish once British is out. When it is no longer in the EU, we will have no cultural references when we speak English—at least we will understand each other, because the people who really speak English will not be here. So there will be a creolization of English, but that will also bring about the “explicitation” of English. If you look at the English of the European Union: that is not British English at all. Once again everything has to be understood by someone who is not a native speaker. So there are words which you will never use. You will never say “siblings”—that would be too complex—you will say “brothers and sisters”. It will never be more than 2500 words plus your right to use 300 technical words like “benchmark” etc. Then everything will be contractual, everyday life will become more and more judicial. There is an extension of the regulations to school administrations etc., which are all based on the same thing: you have to make everything you do and think explicit. Kill the implicit, which is exactly the same as killing the culture.

The status of culture in court is very interesting. Twenty years ago you could argue in court that a client perpetrated a crime but he/she was influenced by his/her culture. Twenty years ago, that was a receivable argument. The judges would accept it as an excuse, but now it’s an aggravation. The status of female excision for example: it has changed in the last twenty years. Twenty years ago the anthropologists would come to court and say: “They have different customs” and the court would be lenient, but not at all now. By the way, the courts now have a tendency not to define that as cultural obligation but as a religious obligation, thus turning something which is in fact cultural into a religious norm. I will stop here on that.
6. **The Collision between the European and the Christian Identity**

The last point is identity. The identity which is brought up now by the populists has nothing to do with culture or history. In what way do we oppose Islam in the European debate on it? We oppose European values and Europe’s Christian identity. The only problem is that European values are totally opposed to Christian values. The German, Belgian and Dutch governments have questionnaires for visa applicants and immigrants which are all about whether they accept “our values” and I would say that the pope could not sign such a questionnaire. In Germany one of the questions is “Do you accept nudity in public space?” You cannot imagine Cardinal Ratzinger saying “I am German, I will tick that box.” The last thing I found was in Belgium: The Flemish government has a questionnaire for Moroccans. It says: “Flemish sleep at ten p.m.” and if you look at all questionnaires, you have an ideal normative life which is the life of nobody, of course, but is constructed as the national identity. For instance, in those countries which consider gay rights to form a part of the European identity there is a big problem, because it means that Catholicism is not part of the European identity; that you have no right to be a conservative religious man. If you were, you would not be able to sign this kind of questionnaire. So where are we going with that? Precisely to the delegation of real cultures which are all based on the implicit. If you make everything explicit, you have no culture anymore. You only have a normative system which, by definition, could only be implemented in an authoritarian way. It’s what I call the crisis of culture, the destruction of the very concept of culture by this kind of globalization. How can we deal with that now?

The first duty is not to indulge in this kind of systematic “normatization” of everyday life. That is exactly what Francesco Ghia said. We went too far in this definition of religion as normative. The question is how can we reopen the grey zone, not only between believers and nonbelievers, but between everybody? The fact is that we consider religions to determine the everyday life of people – we have this idea that “a Muslim is a Muslim”, that he has some kind of Koranic software in his mind and if you want to influence the possibility of a Muslim to adjust to Western society you have to go back to that Koranic software, reopen it, change the concept of “Jihad” and then put it back in. We have a normative concept of theology, which means that in fact we do not address religiosity or spirituality in the way a believer experiences his own religion. It has become this complex area which is not studied anymore, now in our societies we are more and more religiously illiterate and the most vivid forms of religion are culturally illiterate because they do not want to address the issue of culture. We have to reopen the relationship between culture and religion in practice, not by having a big discussion about it.
7. Questions and Answers

Q: You said it is a process of globalization and I appreciate the parallels you have drawn between Salafism and California, but what is it in the process of globalization that is driving this?

R: I think globalization is, by definition, a process of “deculturation” through the loss of traditional or national cultures. It is also a process of mobility and if you want to be mobile, you must travel lightly with as little cultural luggage as possible. Therefore, you develop some sort of travel kit of how to adapt to societies. This is why Salafism and Evangelicalism work with people who are mobile, in a sense, even if it is not so willingly. Those people could be going to California to find a good job or ordinary immigrants or whatever you might think of. So the second point is linked to individualism, this kind of normative system – you do not need to be part of a face community, even though you might think you are part of one, because very often you meet your face community on the internet. You yourself can decide, and do it yourself. It is very interesting to see how these people discuss norms of everyday life between themselves. The infidels wear their watch on their left hand, so should a good Muslim wear his watch on the right hand? This kind of debate is about the little things that show who you are, how you lead your life. That also means that it works well for people who are not well socialized. They reconstruct their second generation identity based on a set of formal norms. The problem is the sustainability of this process: You cannot study a language over ten years, you need a language that is immediately accessible. Globish is one of these languages, but the Pentecostalists have glossolalia which is fantastic – you speak every language.

You do not need a language. God’s word passes from you to someone else immediately. You do not need cultural mediation. I think this is part of the Pentecostalists’ success. Before the internet they invented a way of communicating immediately without the need of a dictionary or grammar. Normativity is a set of regulations for everyday life which could take different forms according to context (religious, non-religious); and the domestication of body language is extremely important. The same thing goes for a Salafi – you should not smile, you have signs which indicate immediately that you are a Salafi (no moustache) and the wording, the use of specific vocabulary. There is a Salafi Globish which is very interesting, because they speak the local language but they have a reservoir of specific terms that they use only in Arabic, e.g. din instead of “religion”, because if you said religion it could imply that Islam and Christianity are the same thing.

You have some sort of a copyright on expressions; for example in Malaysia, the law is that Christians are not allowed to use the word Allah, while in Arabic the term means God. On the secular side, there is the debate on cultural appropriation, which is very interesting. Now if you are not African-American according to some groups you cannot use signs belonging to the African heritage. There was
the Dolezal case in the US – she was a girl who represented the black community in a small city in Montana for years and one day her brother and parents went on television and said: “But she is not black, we are all white! Blond, blue eyes.” It was a huge scandal. She lost her job, her husband who was black divorced her, and she was seen as a traitor by the black community in general (not the local one). The accusation was that of cultural appropriation because she tried to have relatively dark skin and she combed her hair the African way. “You are not black so you have no right to use our way of living.” That is very close to what populists are doing. It is the same thing: “It is our identity.” For instance, the normative approach of the boycott of white Gospel singers; this is linked to the idea that a specific type of music and a way of dressing is copyrighted by a specific group. We used to say that globalization is relation, and now we have the exact opposite; the reappropriation of cultural elements by people who think that they are the legitimate owners of this or that trait of cultural behavior. Often this leads to court in the US, but more and more in Europe too. The courts have to make a decision on this. So here normativity is reinforced. The courts might be relatively liberal and reject the case, but that means that the case is always deferred to a normative system however it may work.

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Representation with/out Representation: Saudia Arabia as a Hidden Face of Globalization

Rüdiger Lohlker

The article discusses the European/North American concept of representation. It offers an alternative approach including the non-Western world. The case study discussed is the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia and Wahhabism/Salafism.

Representation; Aerial Bombing; Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

Following debates about the crisis of representation makes somebody who is thinking about non-Western – if you allow me to cut a very complex discussion very short – ways of living in modern contexts feel uneasy. For us, it sounds like talking about “the crisis of liberal democracy” in the West\(^1\) – and leaving out the discussions about the ‘rest’ – still claiming the West as representing the universal situation. Esp., discussions like these tend to ignore the intimate relation of authoritarian regimes securing the survival of the liberal democracies and thus creating a global crisis.

We will argue in the following that the global crisis is just the cause of the backlash against liberal democracy supported by a global system that is not based on the principles of liberal democracy. The role of Saudi Arabia is the case study we will discuss. But let us turn at first to the idea of representation as understood in these lines.

1. Critique of Representation

The concept of representation and its critique of Deleuze opens up new dimensions of thinking about representation, creates a new logic. As Henry Somers-Hall puts it:

“[W]e saw how Deleuze attempts to introduce this concept of a difference that is not to be understood in terms of negation through the resort to new geometries, and in particular, geometries that are grounded in the differential calculus. In doing so, he attempted to provide us with a new logic, one that operates outside of the categories of representation” allowing “Deleuze to escape from the dialectical reduction of the beyond to appearance. Deleuze tries to achieve this through defining a third way between the two options that Hegel puts forward. On the one hand, difference is not the same as it is for immediate law, so it does not collapse into appearance immediately. On the other hand, it is not the difference of the inverted world, which is a difference taken to the level of opposition, so it is not open to reconciliation through contradiction. What defines this new approach, according to Deleuze, is that it proposes a new set of relations among the concepts of limitation, determination, and negation.”

Which way to follow to get out of the immanent problems of representation leaving “the categories of representation”? Following again Somers-Hall we may say:

“Deleuze […] attempts to overturn the structure of judgment […]. Rather than reconceiving difference and identity through the infinitization of representation, Deleuze circumscribes a domain of representation, pure actuality, paralleling Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Just as Kant shows that the notion of world cannot without be formulated, Deleuze shows that representational actuality requires the supplement of a non-representational moment, the virtual. While the supplement in Kant’s transcendental idealism is purely negatively determined, the noumenon as limit case, Deleuze develops a notion of virtuality that is positive and contentful. The limitations of judgment, therefore, point to the necessity of a moment that cannot be captured by the structure of judgment, just as Bergson’s notion of intuition points to a nospatial conception of time. Rather than extending representation to the point where it overcomes its limitations, Deleuze argues that totalized representation is a form of transcendental illusion, generated by a failure to analyze the genesis of the structure of judgment. Judgment is not merely incomplete, therefore, but is a false approach to the world, once it is severed from these genetic conditions. Without a recognition of a moment outside of representation, we are forced to conceive of difference in terms of the negation of a certain structure of judgment, for instance, rather than as a positive term in its own right. […] It also allows us to explain why within finite representation there can be no specification of a principle of division: representation’s genetic conditions are subrepresentational.

Deleuze’s response to representation therefore also keeps in play both identity and difference. Rather than reconciling these two moments on the same ontological plane through a notion of contradiction, however, Deleuze separates difference and identity by making difference a transcendental condition of identity itself. Identity is grounded in the non-identical.  

According to Somers-Hall we may say that changing the plane of the transcendental illusion of totalized representation to the plane of immanence that is understood as a “spatial flatness like that of a beach with its open horizon allowing Deleuze to coin the notion of the plane of immanence and refer it, esp., to Spinoza. Deleuze comes across this plane of immanence by the attempt to understand Spinoza from his center. Leaving the first and foremost principle of Spinoza aside he wants to turn to whole series of principles: There is one substance for all modi but beyond that there is only one nature for all individuals or bodies and this nature itself again is an individual in its continuous variation, a singular and collective body constantly transforming itself in infinite ways.”

This plane of immanence is “a plane of swarming difference and not full of difference.” Bearing this in mind, we may say, a way out of the problems of representation may be found in this Deleuzian understanding that prefers the turn to the nonidentical avoiding the creation of a position of judgement, subduing the other in a totalized representation, and leading to a hierarchical construction of the world.

Since the importance of the position of judgement in Deleuze may not be understood, some remarks are necessary. As Deleuze wrote in his book on Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza:

“It follows that nobody has the authority to decide my rights. Everyone in the state of nature, whether wise man or fool, judges what is good or bad, and what is necessary for his preservation. Whence natural right is not opposed ‘to strifes, hatred, anger, treachery, or, in general, anything that appetite suggests.’ And if it comes about that we are led to renounce our natural right, this will not happen through the recognition of the wise man’s authority, but from our own consent to this authority, from fear of a greater evil or hope of a greater good.”

3 Ibid., p. 242.
5 Ibid.
6 Gilles Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, New York: Zone Books 1990, p. 260; cf. ibid., pp. 258–259 for the context of a Hobbesian understanding of natural law. As a remark concerning the Saudi case study below: We have to stress that this understanding of Deleuzian concepts avoids the shortcomings of the reductionist reading...
The acceptance of the “wise man”, the judge, means to leave the plane of immanence and producing again the old idea of representation creating hierarchies and excluding non-European, non-civilized humans (see below). Only a new logic beyond this ‘old’ logic of representation (and, e. g., its Hegelian critique) will lead us out of the present impasse. Leaving the non-identical and non-representational aside means an inability to understand the claim of Western representation as representing the universal as a claim of negating difference. This will lead to an ever-growing exclusion of humanity defined as non-European. Being non-European means being the object of violence in European wars and denied the hallowed principles of human rights understood as the core principles of liberal democracy. The crisis of liberal democracy means the disclosure of the real-life fundamentals of modern liberal democracy at a global level for the majority of humans globally, fundamentals that include non-representational powers (see below) acting as representatives of liberal representation. To understand the results of this exclusion of non-Europeans and them being subjected to violence we have to introduce another concept following a critical reading the ‘old’ logic of representation referring to a specific case study.

2. Aerial Bombing, Democracy, and its Web of Preconditions

Having said this, we would like to turn to an issue unlikely to be discussed in a context like this: aerial bombing. Talking about it may help us to conceptualize better the phenomena I want to talk about critically referring to Saudi Arabia and representation. The critical dimension of the rhizomatic conceptualization connecting these real-life facts is to be found in the Saudi bombs killing of thousands and thousands of Yemeni men and women. This is to be discussed in terms of Foucault by Said. We are not writing in the tradition of a critique of Orientalist or neo-Orientalist positions. We are far beyond this very limited debate. The same holds true for any discussion of aspects of international law.

7 We may think, e. g., of an extraversion in the sense of Victor Segalen to conceptualize a European non-Eurocentric view added to a Deleuzian approach as a way out.

8 For those who are not able to understand: It is a play of words. We apologize for this infringement of etiquette of German academic style of writing.

9 We have to bear in mind that a war in Yemen was foreshadowing the decline of another power in the MENA region: Egypt (see W. Andrew Terrill, “The Chemical Warfare Legacy of the Yemen War”, in: Comparative Strategy 10ii (1991), pp. 109–119 and, e. g., Jesse Ferris, Nasser’s Gamble: How the Intervention Caused the Six-Day-War and the Decline of Egyptian Power, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2013). For the recent war in Yemen (and against the Yemeni People) May Darwich, “Machtprestige als Motiv des saudischen Krieges im Jemen”, in: GIGA focus nahost 6/2015, pp. 1–8, Zachary Laub, Yemen in Crisis, April 19, 2016; for the present situation see Holly Ellyatt, Saudi Arabia and Iran’s Feud has entered a new ‘unpredictable’ phase.
international law, but in the framework we developed before: the exclusion of humans from the liberal order of representation.

Why talking about aerial bombing as a phenomenon interrelated to representation this way? We have to approach in an unconventional manner: There is an important transition in the 19th century from personal/governmental wars to national wars; the “levée en masse” springs up to our mind.

In the laws of war, there are during the nineteenth century, “two, partly contradictory, developments. On the one hand, the citizens are increasingly mobilized for military duties, and compulsory military service is being instituted. The armed forces and the nation, in other words, tend to merge. On the other hand, however, international law is being set up in order to protect non-combatant immunity, and thus to establish legally that unarmed civilians and armed combatants have to be treated differently. On the one hand, conscription tends to assimilate all citizens to the nation-state and its apparatus of violence, but, on the other hand, international law forbids private citizens being treated as representatives of their countries or states.”

The negation of representation mentioned by Hippler is the secret history of Western modernity. But:

“To the extent to which the limitation of warfare within Europe relied on the common ground of similar social organization and a shared civilization, the non-European ‘others’ were excluded from this habitual settlement and equally from codified international law. Hence, the practice of colonial war has always been very different from the limited forms of warfare that were, at least in principle, applied in Europe. Outside the European centre, the civilian populations have never been considered as having a right to protection from military action.”

Deliberately targeting civilian populations was part and parcel of colonial warfare producing ideas that were later on used on European civilians. Targeting of civilians – who are not perceived as civilians – has a long history in colonial warfare. In his Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice, British Colonel C. E. Callwell wrote – quoting a South African experience – in 1896 that a ‘real war’

11 For those who are not able to understand: We are arguing at the plane of immanence (see above).
12 Ibid., p. 8.
13 South Africa is a case at hand when thinking about Africans and Afrikaners as people living in Africa and as such: non-Europeans and the British against them as paradigmatic colonial wars.

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“may be terminated by the surrender or capitulation of the hostile sovereign or chief, who answers for his people; but in the suppression of a rebellion the refractory subjects of the ruling power must all be chastised and subdued … the main points of difference between small wars and regular campaigns … are that, in the former, the beating of the hostile armies is not necessarily the main object even if they exist, that effect on morale is often far more important than material success, and that the operations are sometimes limited to committing havoc which the laws of regular warfare do not sanction.”

There is also a long history of attacking civilian population by naval attacks that have been taken over by the emerging airforces. After WWI military theorists conceptualized attacks by aircrafts as the first wave of attacks in a new war. The people shaping these new strategies were deeply influenced by their experiences in colonial warfare. And is not surprising that the first aerial bombing was done by an Italian pilot fighting Arab/Muslim rebels against Italian colonialism in 1911. At the same time the new air force was imagined, e.g., by the famous Italian theoretician of air wars, Giorgio Douhet, paradoxically a pacifist, as a means to end the wars, to control the enemies of a global peace among the – civilized – states – not the barbarous, uncivilized people everywhere else.

As we heard from Calwell, the decision is up to “the sovereign/chief,” no representation is needed, it is only at the moral level that indirectly an indirect influence by his subjects may be exerted on “the sovereign/chief” to capitulate. The native population is constructed as an intermediary no laws of – civilized – warfare applies to a group not to be represented or representing. So a civilized way of representation even if a ruler-subject structure is conceded to the people who are fought by the civilized armies in a non-civilized manner, but it is still a “subrepresentational” representation.

The dichotomy civilization vs. non-civilization exerts influence into European discussions after WWI when another non-civilized enemy appeared in Europe: the working class uprising after the victory or defeat of the old powers conceived as endangering liberal democracy. In this case, the airpower theoreticians reflected upon the need to quell these uprisings by using airplanes in different ways, workers. Male and female, being seen as an un-civilized mass, a threat to civilization. As such they are amalgamated with the other non-civilized forces, the colonialized people fighting for their independence.

Another aspect: Thinking of the conscription as a process of assimilating the population into the nation-state, the distinction between representatives and represented disappears. The population becomes a legitimate target of aerial attacks as workforce supporting the military efforts, as supporters of the gov-

15 Ibid., pp. 41–42.
16 See for this and the following remarks Hippler, Bombing.
ernmental politics whose moral may be attacked to destroy their support, another way of putting “civilized” Europeans at the same level as “non-civilized” colonized people.\textsuperscript{17}

Colonial warfare creeps into European warfare, a bitter irony we may call it. Representation may be the wrong term to discuss these developments, or we might say representation is only applicable to people that are not subjected to European warfare – be they European or not. Not allowing representation to non-Europeans lead to non-representation of Europeans.\textsuperscript{18} We will look into a non-European case study! Saudi-Arabia and the Wahhabi definition of Islam provide us with a case at hand beyond the simple of fact of Saudi (and allied) aircrafts are bombing non-Europeans as European and US aircrafts did before.

3. \textit{Wahhabism & Saudi-Arabia}

Turning to religion, we may see another non-representative representation\textsuperscript{19} being part of representation liberal democracy style. A brief sketch what the religious variety in Saudi Arabia means in Saudi Arabia, at an Arabic level and a global level may be helpful. To begin with, we have stated that there are some limitations to a thorough understanding of the transformations taking place in Islamic communities since the sixteenth century by many observers. We may, however, discern some trends that are characteristic for this period\textsuperscript{20}:

1) Islam has to become a religion, turning away from the fluid, complex, and even contradictory ways to interact with the revelation starting from a pre-text (or some pre-texts), be it theological, philosophical, natural philosophy, art, music, poetry, mysticism etc.;
2) this new \textit{religion} of Islam has to produce claims of validity or truth projects for the social order of the communities competing with other – older – claims. Esp., the claims have to be understood as the basis for a new complex set of rules for the way of ruling and the way of public behavior;
3) a new political community, i.e., a state, emerges as the basis of this Islam, theology becoming political;\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} This will be important for the discussion of the Saudi aerial bombing.

\textsuperscript{18} When non-Europeans defended themselves successfully against European armies it was worse. E.g., think of the “savage” Mahdi followers in Sudan or the “Mad Mullahs” etc. We can’t follow this line of thought.

\textsuperscript{19} For those who are not able to understand: This is to read as an ironic remark.


\textsuperscript{21} For interesting reflections on the relations of religion, theology, and the political see Wolfgang Palaver et al. (eds.), \textit{Politische Philosophie versus Politische Theologie? Die
4) a new understanding of the Islamic sources, distancing itself from other traditions regarded as non-religious;
5) general rules of conduct of the individuals are transformed general, binding standards for the community;
6) at least one group or community of Muslims agrees on these standards;
7) this group/community (jama’a) raises a claim to rule.

This community pretends to be the direct expression of the will of the Muslim community at large or the unmediated realization of God’s will on earth. We might say these movements (including Wahhabism) claim a representation without representing anyone but God.

The transformation movement at the Arabian Peninsula that became the dominant religious tendency is usually called Wahhabism. This tendency emerged in the 18th century as part of the larger movements of transformation in the Islamic world. For us it may be interesting that the adherents of Wahhabism called themselves, e.g., “professors of the oneness of God” (muwahhidun) or just “Muslims” (muslimun) claiming as such to be the true incarnation of Islam and Muslims negating the possibility of mediating authorities between god and the believers, that existed before and still continued to exist. And it destroyed the seeds of an emerging representative process, e.g., a modernized, reformed Islam, be it modernist or traditionalist, in the wake of modern forms of globalization. So we talk – based on historical evidence – of a non-representational form of Islam eradicating every of pre-modern intermediation and representation.

This non-representational Islam is discernible if we look into the basic theological tenets of the exclusivist forms of Islam like Wahhabism. Starting with tawhid, the profession that there is only one god, a second tenet is the interdiction of adding an object of worship to God. A third one is the need to dissociate from anybody who is not accepted as a true Muslim and the association who are not true Muslims. A very elaborate theology of hell is enforcing these attitudes. Strict condemnation of any other ways of being Muslim is another aspect of this theology of exclusivism claiming to be the only way of relating to god islamically.

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It is well known Wahhabi Islam depends on the support of the Saudi ruling family and vice versa, the rulers turned the servants of Islam being entitled to use religion for their own ends. This connects the Saudi-Wahhabi polity to the globalized petrol-economy since the 1930s and as such being part of the societies that became the epitome of liberal democracies at first economically. From this starting point, the economic influence of Saudi-Arabia crept into world economy, esp., in the so-called liberal democracies and after the 1970s. Seen, full of resentment by Western media, e.g., in the figure of the ‘Arab sheik’ attacking the resources of the Western world during the so-called oil crisis 1973. The intricate relations of Saudi (and other Arab) investments and ‘Western’ interests would deserve a thorough discussion that cannot be done here. But for our purpose, we may say – without turning to Marxist arguments – these economic dimensions are another “subrepresentational” aspect of global Saudi influence.

Since the 1960s another process begins. Feeling threatened by the mounting influence of Nasserist Arab Socialism (and other varieties of Arab nationalism), the Saudi government established a body of scholars of Wahhabi scholars and non-Wahhabi scholars, the Islamic World League. The main function was the propaganda for the true Islam, i.e., Wahhabi Islam, at a global level. This global propaganda effort deeply transformed the structure – material and mental – of the global Islamic community, the umma, into an Islamic modernity influenced by the structures of Wahhabi (and Salafi Islam, partly an offspring of Wahhabism). The umma is conceived as a global nation-state of Islam, the leading power of contemporary Islam – in their perceptions – the Saudis/Wahhabis, have the right to speak for – another form of non-representational representation legitimated by power and economical means. This is furthered by the establishment of the Islamic University of Medina, giving students worldwide an opportunity to study Islam Wahhabi style. The alumni of this university form another network spreading the Wahhabi and Salafi brand of Islam. Another element is sending missionaries everywhere, promoting mosques and Islamic centers (often funded by the Saudi dominated Islamic World League), producing and disseminating copies of the Quran, activities aiming at the acquisition of symbolic or religious capital. These activities are truly globalized using every means of communication available.

We will not talk about the involvement of Saudi-Arabian nationals and of Saudi funding into the Jihadi movements worldwide. But there is another inter-

27 See the chapters on Saudi Arabia in Lohlker, *Die Salafisten*. A treasure trove of information on the globalized aspect of Wahhabism (and Saudi Arabia) is to be found at “Saudi Cables”. Internet source: The Saudi Cables. Cables and other documents from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
esting fact. Jihadis are threatening, e.g., the voters in US elections, do not accept any distinction between governments, security forces, and civilians, all of them legitimate targets of Jihadi attacks. Structurally speaking this can be seen as a parallel to the justification for attacks of civilians in wartime by nation states. Terrorists claiming statehood on another level, too, and doing another step of integration into the globalized world. In this respect acting very similar to their Saudi-Wahhabi relatives, threatening the very act of representation.

Turning to the example of the war in Yemen this gets another meaning: it is a punitive war against rebels, i.e., criminal violating the hallowed principle of Saudi dominance at the Arab Peninsula and, coming back to religion, challenging another principle: the subordinate status of Shiite people in the same region, since the sole representation of Islam accepted is the representation by the true Muslims, i.e., Wahhabis. People not accepting are judged as being criminals, to be eradicated from earth not to be represented by any/body. As to the Shiites this can be easily detected by the sayings of Wahhabi scholars supporting the alternative for Shiites: conversion to Wahhabi Islam or complete eradication. This does not allow for any representation at all, since no sovereign/judge/mediator for Yemeni Shiites is accepted.

Any representation disappearing in the havoc of a totalized warfare has far-reaching effects: a non-representative representation of being – true – Muslim overtly declares its willingness to act as a terrorist entity following the modern policy of the colonial police bombings. And – as a logical consequence – this way of great/small warfare is supported by many liberal democracies that are ‘liberal’ at home. Another element of this kind of cohabitation is the conspicuous way Iran – as the important regional competitor of Saudi Arabia – is described as a global evil or criminal not to be treated as a national state like others linking the interest of global powers to regional powers to a totalized religious system cutting out any method of mediation.

This can be read “as a result of internal tensions in representation’s organizational structure, what Deleuze calls the ‘catastrophes’ […] of representation.”

It is evident why it seems legitimate to describe Saudi Arabia as “an ISIS that has made it”, as Kamal Daoud, the Algerian writer, puts it, using the same terrorist practice and denial of the right to exist for anybody who does not follow the same theology of violence as jihadists do.

If we think of representation as the only face of liberal democracy, we should be reminded that there is another face, less attractive but part of the same head becoming visible in the age of globalization. Globalization, we have been told,
includes a fading away of nation-states and the emergence of a ‘global culture’\textsuperscript{32} but the exemplum of the aerial war tells another story:

“At the same time, however, strategic bombing already looks beyond the national horizon of war. The essential weakness of the concept of national war is the fact that it tends to take the nation as a given unity. Sovereignty had formerly been conceptualized as emanating from the person of the monarch: the further removed from the monarch’s vision, the more sovereignty became diluted. This is why it has been said that ‘real’ sovereignty was invented by the emerging national state during the time of the French Revolution. This ‘real’ sovereignty – popular sovereignty – replaces the absent vision of the monarch with the omnipresent vision of the panopticon. The nation as a whole becomes the realm of sovereignty. Nation, state, and sovereignty are the same, but this sovereign national state is conceived on the model of monarchical sovereignty, as a unity. But at the same time, it is evident that bombing strategies allow the inevitable fragility of this unity: hence strategic bombing relies on the idea that it can be undone; centres of political decision-making can be ‘beheaded,’ and workers can be induced to rebel against their governments. If the state apparatuses no longer function and become unable to protect citizens from being targeted, national unity will fade away into anarchy and civil war. In other words, the nation is unstable in itself, and beneath national unity lurks the threat of civil war.”\textsuperscript{33}

That a nation-state is unstable in itself is demonstrated by the Saudi-led coalition and its US- and other supporters destroying the Yemeni nation state as a moral lesson for everybody aiming at a dissolution of the nation-state of KSA and creating a situation a civil war may occur in Saudi Arabia itself.

But there is more to it: Looking beyond the horizon of the national states from another angle we may see states \textit{cum} movements like Saudi-Arabia, we see a truly globalized world-view transcending any national state and privileging a religious framework for understanding the global system, claiming to be dominated by a kind of true Islam embodied in the KSA with a global outreach.

This political aspect is strengthened by the support of an economical and politico-military power by other global powers, ignoring the religio-theological realm established by the Wahhabi-Salafi influence as a collateral damage that is justified by the overwhelming gains to be earned, be it economic\textsuperscript{34} or military/political.


\textsuperscript{33} Hippler, \textit{Bombing}, pp. 258 seq.

This may best be illustrated by the meeting on February 14, 1945 on board of an American warship of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud shaping the future of the MENA region. The US-president accepting the important role of the Saudi ruling family and implicitly the truth claims of Wahhabi clerics for the Arab and Islamic world; the king supporting the role of the USA in the region.

The justification to be – not to represent! – true Islam may be based on spurious grounds looking at the globalized actions of the offspring of Wahhabi-Salafism I would like to call Jihadism. It is a competition between two varieties of exclusivist Islam both claiming to be the legitimate heirs of the Wahhabi movement emerging in the eighteenth century. The Jihadi one focussing on the use of violence as its main characteristic, the Saudi one drawing legitimacy from its relation to the KSA and its rulers. Both of them are acting and thinking globalized. The Jihadi one fighting a global war, the Saudi one building institutional and investment networks; sometimes both forms of exclusivism are overlapping. In a wider comparative view we may be reminded of another phenomenon of illegal activities, global organized crime, ignored in the usual way of conceptualizing representation and globalization often connected to Jihadism. That is another line we cannot follow here.

Conclusion

To summarize the picture of globalized representation/non-representation, we may say liberal democracies and its ideas of representation are not as universal as they try to project it. On a theoretical level it is easy to demonstrate that the claims of representation are not successful. Theoretically speaking, looking into the hidden face of liberal demonstration reveals that this conceptualization of representation means the permanent exclusion of ‘non-civilized’, ‘non-represented’ sectors of humanity.

There are other sectors of contemporary world society that are supported by states claiming ‘civilized’ representation. The case study discussed here is Saudi Arabia, a paradigm of a unique view of Islam cutting off any link to the variantology of Islamic history, a possible source for constructing another form of

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representation than the dominant one. Thus the representation conventional style is built on a system of non-representation claiming the representation of non-difference. This affects all aspects of representation – Western style.

This is the true meaning and the hidden face of the admiration of dictators who seem to guarantee or have guaranteed order and security – as long as they comply with the interests of the liberal democracies. Fitting well into the construction of and the judgement on the nature of the Other.

Reflecting this difference by using ideas of Deleuze helps to rethink conventional ideas of representation and deconstructing the hierarchical structure inherent in these ideas of representation.

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Saudia Arabia as a Hidden Face of Globalization


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The Ideology of the New Right and Religious Conservativism. Towards an Ethical Critique of the New Politics of Authoritarianism

Hans Schelkshorn

This article analyses the ideological matrix of the so-called right-wing populist movements, which was developed by Alain de Benoist, the founder of the Nouvelle Droite in France. The ideology of the New Right breaks with two dogmas of the old fascism: racism and the abolition of democracy. De Benoist replaces racism with ethnopluralism and aims at a radical reform of democracy. Inspired by the model of Athenian polis, de Benoist propagates the concept of an “organic democracy” based on ethnic homogeneity. Thus, the idea of pre-state human rights is criticized as ideological product of Christianity and the Enlightenment. For that reason, the ideology of the New Right has not only an illiberal but also an e-o-pagan agenda. For that reason Christian alliances with new-rightist movements involve themselves in ideological contradictions. The perversions of Christian ethics through an ethnic concept of democracy can be illustrated by Victor Orbán’s foundation of an “illiberal state” in Hungary. Thus, this ideology aims to erode both the democratic constitutional state and the universalistic dimension of Christian ethics.

Theories of Democracy; Populism; Human Rights; Christian Ethics

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Introduction

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama celebrated liberal democracy as the endpoint of the ideological evolution of mankind (Fukuyama 1989). A few decades later, liberal democracy is challenged not only in some peripheries but

1 The present article is a revised and extended version of Schelkshorn 2017.
even in the core states of the so-called Western world. Since the victory of Donald Trump, even the democratic order of the United States has been shattered.

The Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea, however, already criticized Fukuyama’s euphoria on liberal democracy in the early 1990s. According to Leopoldo Zea, Fukuyama ignored the most important historical lesson of the 20th century, namely that the liberal world-order provoked the emergence of fascism that threw the whole of mankind into a humanitarian catastrophe. In the light of Fukuyama’s uncritical over-emphasis of liberal democracy, the 20th century appears only as a lost century (una centuria perdida) (Zea 1996, pp. 13–22). In fact, at the beginning of the 21st century neo-liberal globalization and intensified migration flows have led to the emergence of new right-wing parties in almost all western countries, including Latin America (Heinisch / Holtz-Bacha / Mazzoleni 2017) The rise of the New Right, however, is not a completely new event in recent history. The Front National, the first important New Right party in Europe, was founded in 1972. In the mid-1980s, Jörg Haider, the head of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), became a second leading figure of the New Right in Europe. Meanwhile, the spirit of the New Right has crossed the limits of right-wing populist parties, spreading its ideological topics into the middle-classes and civil society including Christian milieus. In present times, Viktor Orbán, a Christian Democratic politician and member of the Reformed Church, is generally acknowledged as the new political leader of the New Right in Europe.

Christians aren’t only uninvolved spectators or blind followers of the New Right. Jörg Haider was already supported by ultra-conservative bishops. Nowadays conservative Catholics as well as evangelical Protestants are engaged in the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Viktor Orbán holds a strong alliance not only with the Reformed Church, but with the Catholic episcopate, too. Jarosław Kaczyński, the Leader of “Law and Justice” (PiS), expressed his gratefulness to Radio Maryja movement without whose support the election victory in 2015 would not have been possible.²

In public media as well as in social sciences extreme right-wing parties are usually analyzed as “populism”, referring mainly to certain strategies, for instance friend-enemy scheme, separation of society into the “true people” and the “corrupt elite”, simplification of complex facts, the mobilization of resentments, etc. (Canovan 1981; Mudde 2007; Müller 2016, pp. 11 f.). In this view populist parties are considered as political movements without a thick ideological orientation, adapting political issues mainly to the fluctuating moods of the “people” (Taggart 2000; Priester 2012). The rise of populisms seems to react only to a crisis of representation within the hegemonic liberal political culture, a crisis which is hidden by the so-called mainstream media.

² For detailed analyzes of the relationships between Christian groups and new rightest movements in Europe and the USA see Marzouki / McDonell / Roy 2016.
The public image of populism as an almost unideological political movement, however, underestimates the political agenda of the New Right, which aims at an erosion and ultimately authoritarian transformation of liberal democracy. Thus, Víctor Orbán’s well-known proclamation of an “illiberal state” clearly expresses the ideological focus of the new rightest movements despite their political differences.

The question of the relation between populist parties and a crisis of representation presupposes an accurate analysis of their ideological orientations. Thus, in the following sketches I would mainly analyze the ideological matrix of the New Right referring to Alain de Benoist, the founder of the Nouvelle Droite in France (chapter 1). In a second step, I will examine the ideological orientation of Fidesz as the most important example of a Christian New Right politics today and its contradictions with Christian ethics (chapter 2). In a final remark I will indicate deficits in contemporary political philosophies which undermine a strong secular criticism of the New Right.

1. The Ideological Matrix of the New Right: Alain de Benoist

As political analysts often emphasize, populist parties pursue quite different social and political objectives due to the history and heterogeneous members of these parties. For instance, the FN and the FPÖ were originally successor parties of former fascist groups. Having evolved to the largest worker’s parties in their countries, FN and FPÖ adopted some socialist themes in their programs. By contrast, the German AfD originally founded by conservative liberals promotes primarily neoliberal economic views criticizing the socialist agenda of the FN. Populist parties differ also in the foreign-policy interests. Since Víctor Orbán intensified the relationships to Putin, the Polish government still maintained a distant attitude towards Russia.

Despite all the different political issues, the so-called right-wing populist parties share a common ideological matrix which modifies their conservative, liberal or socialist orientations in a certain way. The main ideological elements of the broad spectrum of new rightest movements can be found in the philosophy of Alain de Benoist, the master mind of the Nouvelle Droite in France. Inspired by Antonio Gramsci, de Benoist aimed to break the cultural hegemony of left and liberal thinking in the Western World. Therefore de Benoist didn’t found a new party but a forum for right-wing intellectuals, the “Groupement de recherche et d’études pour la civilisation européenne” (GRECE) in 1968. As de Benoist declares in his “Manifeste pour une renaissance européenne (1999)” the Nouvelle Droite “is not a political movement, but a think-tank and school of thought” (de Benoist / Champtier2012, p.11).

According to de Benoist, the New Right must dissolve itself from two dogmas of fascism, concretely the biological racism and the option for a violent destruc-
tion of democracy. Thus, the New Right replaces racism with ethnopluralism and aims at a radical reform of democracy.

In the early 1960’s, Alain de Benoist himself publicly justified racism and the superiority of the white race in his early neo-fascist period (Taguieff 1994, pp. 111–122–135; Böhm 2008, pp. 160–172). The emphatic claim to abandon the racist dogma of “old” fascism marks a certain break within his intellectual biography. Indeed, de Benoist distanced himself from all the three elements of racism: the postulate “of qualitative inequalities between races, such that, on the whole, one can distinguish races as either ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’; that an individual’s value is deduced entirely from the race to which he belongs; and that race constitutes the central determining factor in human history. These three postulates may be held together or separately. All three are false.” (de Benoist / Champetier 2012, p. 33; cf. de Benoist 1974–75). At the same time de Benoist refuses the cosmopolitanism of the enlightenment, because its abstract universalism ignores the integrity of other cultures. In addition, modern cosmopolitanism served as ideological justification for imperial expansion and “its subsequent attempt of convert the rest of the world: in the past, to its religion (the Crusades); yesterday, to its political principles (colonialism), and today, to its social model (development) or its moral principles (human rights)” (de Benoist / Champetier 2012, p. 28). Thus, criticism of imperialism and globalization are no longer a monopoly of left wing intellectuals, but a core feature of representatives of the New Right, too.

Beyond racism and abstract antiracism the New Right defends a “differ-entialist anti-racisms” acknowledging the irreducible plurality and Otherness of cultures (de Benoist / Champetier 2012, p. 34). De Benoist views modern world as a “pluriversum, a multipolar order in which great cultural groups find themselves confronting one another in a shared global temporality”3. “Rather, the struggle against racism is waged by the refusal of both exclusion and assimilation: neither apartheid nor the melting pot” (de Benoist / Champetier 2012, p. 34). Despite his break with racism de Benoist continues some perspectives of his early neo-fascist thinking. Just as the races in his early thinking also cultures should coexist in spatial separation. Thus, the critique of immigration is reaffirmed within the new culturalist framework (de Benoist / Champetier 2012, p. 34 f.).

3 De Benoist / Champetier , p. 29. The term “pluriversum” originally introduced by William James was adopted by Max Scheler in his early philosophy of war (Scheler 1982) Like de Benoist Scheler described global modernity as a plurality of co-existing civilizations. In contrast to Hegel and later Husserl who justified the Europeanization of the whole world, the early Scheler negates cultural penetrations. The influences of European culture on China maintained only on the surface, as Scheler stresses with Ku Hung-Ming (Scheler 1982, p. 172 f; Hung-Ming 1911). As is well known Scheler corrected his early philosophy of separated civilizations in his late essay about “the age of adjustment” (“Das Weltalter des Ausgleichs”), developing the vision of reciprocal penetration between eastern and western cultures (Scheler 1976).
The defense of the plurality of cultures is intimately linked with the new-righted project of a radical reform of democracy, which is guided by the model of the Greek Polis and the egalitarian order of German and Scandinavian tribes (de Benoist, 2011, p. 16 f.). The emergence of populist movements is often analyzed as a symptom of a representational crisis in democracies in the Western world. The New Right, however, not only tries to close the gap between established governmental parties and the people but questions the idea of parliamentary democracy itself. Alain de Benoist explicitly denies the usual preference of “modern” representative democracies suited to great populations over the model of direct democracy in antiquity. “In this respect, to argue that Greek democracy was only a direct democracy because it encompassed a small number of citizens is again rather simplistic. Direct democracy need not be associated with a limited number of citizens. It is rather primarily associated with a relatively homogeneous people conscious of what makes it such. The effective functioning of Greek democracy, as well as of Icelandic democracy, was first and foremost the result of cultural cohesion and a clear sense of shared belonging” (de Benoist 2011, p. 28).

Favoring traditions of direct participation, Alain de Benoist adopts a second element from ancient democracies. The Athenian democracy was based on ethnic homogeneity, which was ensured by the Periclean Citizenship Law of 451 B.C., as de Benoist explicitly indicates. “The most essential feature of citizenship was one’s origin and heritage: Pericles was the ‘son of Xanthippus from the deme of Cholargus’. From 451 B.C. one had to be born of an Athenian mother and father in order to become a citizen” (de Benoist 2011, p. 23). Far beyond historical reminiscences the ethnical basis of ancient democracy serves as a guideline for a deep reorientation of modern democratic states. “Democracy was rooted in a notion of autochthonous citizenship, which intimately linked its exercise to the origins of those who exercised it” (de Benoist 2011, p. 24). Attacking liberal democracy, the principles of freedom and equality aren’t based on pre-state human rights but on ethnically anchored civil rights, as de Benoist frankly declares. “Liberty” means “first and foremost the liberty of the people, from which the liberty of citizens follows. In other words, it is the liberty of the people (or of the city) that lays the foundations for the equality of individual political rights, which is to say the rights enjoyed by individuals as citizens” (de Benoist 2011, p. 25).

Against this background liberalism as “the dominant ideology of modernity” becomes the “Main Enemy” of the New Right (de Benoist 2012, p. 14). Then, liberalism dissolves human beings from all forms of organic society. De Benoist’s criticism of the liberal ideology does not refer only to the social atomism of the homo economicus who seeks only his own advantage. Furthermore, de Benoist attacks also the idea of human rights as a dangerous ideology which undermines the priority of collective identities. The idea of pre-statal human dignity is criticized as an ideological product of Christianity and the Enlightenment. Thus, de Benoist denies modern liberalism, precisely a democratic state based on human rights, as a secularization of Christian individualism and abstract enlightened
universalism. “Modern democracy organises atomised individuals into citizens, primarily viewing them through the lens of abstract egalitarianism. Ancient democracy was based on the idea of organic community; modern democracy, as an heir to Christianity and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, on the individual. The meaning of the words ‘city’, ‘people’, ‘nation’ and ‘liberty’ radically changes from one model to the other” (de Benoist 2011, p. 28). In this perspective de Benoist proposes the concept of an “organic democracy” as an alternative to liberal state. For the strength of a democracy depends on the “existence of a relatively homogeneous people”. “The closer the members of a community are to one another, the more likely they are to have common sentiments, identical values, and the same way of viewing the world and social ties, and the easier it is for them to make collective decisions concerning the common good without the need for any form of mediation” (de Benoist 2011, p. 28). Strengthening the homogeneous national community, the idea of an “organic democracy” reaffirms the old idea of fraternity purified from Christian and transnational elements. “Fatherlands are the natural settings of fraternity whenever this is used to express one’s duty towards those who share his heritage. The homeland is the natural framework of fraternity, whenever it expresses our duties to those who share a common heritage with us” (de Benoist 2011, p. 99).

Struggling for cultural hegemony of right-wing thinking, Alain de Benoist built up an international network of right-wing intellectuals. Thus, de Benoist held contact with Armin Mohler, the author of “Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932” (1949), who tried to separate conservatism from Nazism like the Nouvelle Droite in France. Since 1991 de Benoist also cooperates with Alexander Dugin, the main ideologue of neo-Eurasianism in Russia (Camus 2015), to mention just two examples.

The relationships between de Benoist and right-wing populist parties are a complex field. Certainly, the New Right parties in Europe don’t simply adopt de Benoist’s idea of an organic democracy. Their ideological orientations result from power struggles between different groups within the parties. Furthermore each right-wing populist party articulates its own idea of “national homogeneity” re-affirming and modifying local illiberal ideologies of the 19th and 20th century. Nonetheless, de Benoist’s concept of an “organic democracy” obviously serves as a theoretical matrix for New Right parties offering a certain framework for their diffuse ideological orientations.

4 Armin Mohler, a Swiss citizen, who entered into the Waffen-SS 1942, offers a comprehensive panorama of illiberal political traditions after the First World War. Mohler’s work, originally a dissertation under Karl Jaspers and still published in new editions, became an important sourcebook for new rightest movements in the German speaking world. See Weiβ 2017, pp. 39–63. The Nouvelle Droite was the model for the German New Right, especially of the “Thule-seminary” (Weber 1997, pp. 31–37).
The direct and indirect influence of de Benoist on political parties can be observed in the Front National and the Austrian Freedom party. The FN was founded by neo-fascist movements (volunteers of NS organizations, collaborators of the regime of Maréchal Petain, supporters of the OAS in Algeria et al.). The spectacular rise of FN began with its ideological change which was mainly influenced by the think-tanks of the New Right. “This change in the ideological framework of the party went along with the decision taken in 1978 to put immigration at the core of its political platform, renouncing the neo-fascists’ references in favor of a contemporary populist approach.” (Roy 2016, p. 83). Although the new FN could not be understood without the ideology of the New Right, de Benoist still kept a certain distance to FN, even sharply criticizing its primitive theses and polemics (Taguieff1994, p. 225; Böhm 2008, pp. 122–125).

The ideas of de Benoist indirectly influenced also the ideological turn of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) initiated by Jörg Haider in 1986. After having marginalized liberal groups within the FPÖ, Jörg Haider proclaimed an ethnical reorientation in politics: “If politics is not built on ethnic principles, mankind has no future at all.” (Haider 1994, pp.224) In the 1990’s, Haider successfully perfected the strategies of the New Right-politics. Like the populist parties today, the FPÖ staged itself in the public sphere as the unique voice of the “people” which is exclusively defined by the FPÖ itself. Thus, Haider denounced political competitors as enemies of the state and even attacked democratic institutions, above all the constitutional court. Avant-garde artists such as Elfriede Jelinek, the later Nobel Prize Laureate for literature, socialist politicians and left-wing intellectuals were denounced as enemies of the Austrian “people” in public pamphlets. The slogan of the referendum of the FPÖ against foreigners in 1993 “Austria first” was adopted by a lot of populist parties meanwhile.

Jörg Haider even propagated the foundation of the Third Republic in Austria (Haider 1994, pp. 189–249), a project which can be compared with de Benoist’s vision to transform the liberal state into an organic democracy. For this purpose Haider demanded to supplement the catalogue of the human rights with the ethnically defined “right to homeland” (“Recht auf Heimat”) in the Austrian constitution (Haider 1994, pp. 86–106). The “right to homeland”, however, is not a mere supplement to the catalogue of the human rights, because it reduces the universal dimensions of human rights into ethnic defined citizen rights as de Benoist propagates. Furthermore, the “right to homeland” understood as conservation of ethnic homogeneity paves the way for an authoritarian state. In a liberal and pluralistic democracy, “national identity” is the subject of public debates based on certain human rights, especially the freedom of expression and assembly. Since different groups have different views on “national identity”, the “right to homeland” secured by public authority unavoidably represses social pluralism. For this account, instead of adapting themselves to the fluctuating moods of the people, new rightest movements already know “the” will of “the” people, and, above all, who really belongs to the people.
At this point we can observe the dialectical role of the New Right in the politics of representation. On the one hand, the New Right emerges as a reaction against the representational crisis in modern societies during the last decades. On the other hand, promoting a new politics of representation, the New Right produces a deep crisis of political representation. Claiming to represent the “people”, the so-called populist parties paradoxically excludes all groups which don’t belong to the holistic corpus of the “people” (“Volk”). This is the central thesis of Jan-Werner Müller’s approach to populism which can be applied both to right-wing and left wing parties: “populists claim that they, and only they, represent the people […] The populist core claim also implies that whoever does not really support populist parties might not be part of the proper people to begin with.” (Müller 2016, p. 20)

In regard to right-wing populism I would like to specify Müller’s thesis. In the long run, right-wing populist parties aim at an organic democracy outlined by de Benoist.

In order to re-construct modern liberal states into an organic democracy, the New Right meanwhile developed a set of political strategies which are inspired by de Benoist: strengthening direct democracy through referendums; weakening the separation of power and the judicial institutions, specifically the Constitutional Court; fostering cultural and ethnical homogeneity by state control over the media and cultural life; and not at least a restriction of immigration policy.

Thus, the ideology of the New Right tends to a new authoritarianism but not to a simple renewal of old fascism. Identifying the right-wing populist parties with Neo-fascism in public debates is a counterproductive strategy which mistakes their real ideological agenda and allows them to renounce critique as left-wing propaganda. Nonetheless, elements of the old fascism are not totally eliminated in the heterogeneous populist parties which consist of quite different groups, including neo-fascist milieus. As is well-known, Jean Marie Le Pen often expressed antisemitism and posed in question the historicity of the Holocaust. And Jörg Haider defended members of the Waffen-SS and the employment policy of the Nazis. Neo-fascist expressions of some members of populist parties, however, must be differentiated from the ideological orientations recorded in party programs.

2. Viktor Orbán’s Contradictory Synthesis between New Right Ideology and Christianity

Jörg Haider could only articulate a diffuse vision of a Third Austrian Republic based on ethnic principles. The dreams of the new state inspired by the ideology of the New Right were paradoxically realized by a Christian democratic politician and member of the European People’s Party group (EPP Group), namely Viktor Orbán. The rise of Fidesz, which was originally a liberal party, reveals the dialectical links between extreme economic liberalism and the New Right.
the liberal era after 1989 important industries and the financial sector came under the control of foreign investors. In 2008 the Hungarian people severely suffered under the financial crisis. The GNP fell by 20 percent in one year; families lost thousands of US-dollars within a few months. Hungarian companies control only 10% of the industrial and financial economy of the country. The overwhelming victory of Orbán 2010 obviously was an eruptive reaction against the economic liberalism during the last decades.

Victor Orbán, however, did not just take a more protectionist course in economic politics, but used the two-thirds majority for a radical reconstruction both of Hungarian state and civil society. The state media were brought under the control of the government. The constitutional court was disempowered. The main project of the new government, however, was a new constitution, which had been enforced without agreements with oppositional parties, a coup, which was legally possible, but stands in contrast to the democratic ethos. Only a party which understands itself as the authentic voice of the “people” is able to adopt a new constitution beyond a broad consensus of all political groups. In 2002, Orbán already expressed his new-rightest thought in a well-known statement after his electoral defeat: “The Mother Country (Haza) cannot be in opposition!” (cited according to Péteri).

The preamble of the new constitution describes Hungary no longer as a republic, but as a Christian nation founded by the Holy Stephen. After the national narrative which doesn’t mention the historical role of other groups as the Jews or the Roma, the constitution integrates a catalogue of human rights. Unlike other Western constitutions, which start with idealizing representations of the national history, too, the new Hungarian constitution explicitly obliges the constitutional court to justify its decisions in the light of the nationalistic preamble (Müller, 2012, pp. 28 f.; Halmai 2014). Thus the ethnic community defined only by one party became the normative basis of the whole state order prior to the human rights. For this reason, the new Hungary promulgated the first constitution which was built on the core principle of the ideology of the New Right. Orbán himself underlined the ethnic roots of the Hungarian state on a speech in the Ópusztaszer in 2012. “From the moment of our births, our seven tribes enter into an alliance, our St-King Stephen establishes a state, our armies suffer a defeat at the battle of Mohács, and the Turul bird is the symbol of national identity of the living, the deceased and the yet-to-be-born Hungarians.”

Moreover, Orbán publicly affirmed the priority of the ethnic community over human rights, a core element of the organic democracy of de Benoist. As Orbán frankly stated in the Swiss journal “Weltwoche” (No 46/2015), the European elites are only debating about “shallow and secondary topics. Nice things as human rights, progress, peace, openness, tolerance. We do not talk about freedom, we do not talk about Christianity, we do

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5 Viktor Orbán 2012; the English translation is adopted from Ádam / Bozóki 2017, p. 136.
not talk about the nation, and we do not talk about pride. Brutally said: What dominates the European public today is only European liberal blabla over nice, but secondary topics.”

At this point the question arises, how it is possible that a Christian politician questions the universality of the human rights in the name of ethnic identity which de Benoist justified with a new anti-Christian paganism. We can find an answer for the question in the speech of Orbán in Kötcse on the 5th of September 2015, in which Orbán explained the opposition between liberal identity and identity as the most important ideological frontline in present times; “if we fight well in this debate, to restore the prestige and appeal of national identity and Christian identity, in opposition to the liberal identity (Orban 2015)”. Orbán’s speech is explicitly a commentary to the new constitution, because “the Hungarian constitution – adopted at a time when an immigration crisis was still nowhere to be seen – is superbly suited to strengthening this Christian and national identity in the eyes of all and in opposition to the ruling liberal identities in Europe today” (ibid.).

Orbán identifies liberalism with an egalitarian moral cosmopolitanism fostered by legal regimes of human rights. In accordance to de Benoist, human rights are qualified as a set of particular values of Western culture, which has been violently imposed upon foreign peoples. The refugee crisis is one of the consequences of the missionary imperialism of Europe. “After having proclaimed global, universal human rights, having forced our ideology on them and having elevated freedom of information above all else, having sent our celebrities into their homes, now we are surprised that they are knocking on our door” (ibid).

Transforming the world into a global village, liberal cosmopolitanism endangers prosperity and self-assertion of Europe. For this reason liberal identity must be replaced by a by Christian identity as Orbán programmatically proclaims. The core of Christian identity is defined by an ethics which differentiates moral responsibilities according to concentric spheres of social live:

“[W]e know that the liberal feels responsible for the whole world because they are a good person, everything happening in the world causes them pain, and their soul feels heavy with the burden. In opposition to this approach, how does our identity stand up? I think that the Christian identity [...] reveals to us a completely clear order of importance or priority. First of all, we are responsible for our children, then for our parents. This comes before all else. Then come those with whom we live in our village or town. Then comes our country, and then everyone else may come.” (Orbán 2015)

Orbán criticizes Christian circles to be eager to the liberal ideology, too. Against Christian demands for humanitarian refugee politics, Orbán attacked even Church officials who are transforming Christian charity into a political principle. The Christian commandment of love refers only to the private space as Orbán stresses.
Victor Orbán’s defense of the “Christian identity” obviously mixes pagan and Christian elements into a highly ambiguous synthesis. However, a critique of the contradictions between the combination of New Right ideology and Christian ethics need further clarifications.

Firstly: From a historical viewpoint, the “liberal identity” attacked by Orbán as abstract cosmopolitanism was originally a Christian idea. Admittedly, the ethics of global responsibility cannot be traced back to the Bible, but it was developed by Christian philosophies in the 16th century. According to the famous parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, Christians are obliged to help people in need regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. However, the Samaritan doesn’t feel immediately responsible for the whole humankind. For instance, the victims of Roman imperialism were not subject to Christian responsibility in the early era of the church. The idea of concrete global responsibility was developed by the “School of Salamanca” during the European expansion since the 15th century (Schelkshorn 2009, pp. 205–298; Schelkshorn 2012). Shocked by the imperial violence of the Spaniards in Peru, Francisco de Vitoria laid the foundation for the modern theory of international law, which contains not only the right to travel and to trade, but also the right to migration and even to become a citizen in a foreign country. In addition, reacting to the reports on human sacrifices of the Aztecs, Vitoria postulated to defend innocent men from unjust death even if they live far away from our own life world as a universal moral obligation. Extending moral responsibility to the whole mankind, Vitoria paved the way for an ethics of global solidarity including humanitarian intervention which still is a subject of controversies until now.

That means: The moral cosmopolitan condemned by Orbán as liberal ideology originally was a utopian vision of Christian philosophy of the 16th century based on the Stoic and biblical idea of the unity of humankind. No doubt, Vitoria’s cosmopolitanism was already criticized by Christian theologians, for instance by Luis de Molina in den 16th century. Hobbes completely rejected international law, which was theoretically founded again mainly by Kant (Cavallar 2011, pp. 39–108). Nonetheless, the current international conventions on asylum and aliens however, restrict Vitoria’s Christian vision of a new world society (Cavallar 2002).

Secondly, the doctrine of concentric spheres of moral duties opposed to “liberal cosmopolitanism” by Orbán originally can be found both with Cicero and the Mencius. The idea of a gradation of moral duties was a critical response to the problem of excessive demands of universalistic morality and to an extreme egalitarianism. For instance, the Chinese philosopher Mo Ti, who developed one of the first universalistic ethics in China, propagated that we have the same obligations to all men whether they were family members or foreigners. The ethics of Mo Ti was sharply criticized by Mencius who focused on the priority of familiar duties. Moral education has to start with the relationship between the members of the family. However, the doctrine of different spheres does not contradict ethical universalism. Both Cicero and Mencius advocate a step-wise expansion of moral
responsibility, which primarily is applied by the family and ultimately should encompass the whole of mankind. In this sense the theory of concentric circles was adopted by Christian ethics, too.

Thirdly, the relationship between Christian morality and politics addressed by Orbán is an extremely complex problem that can’t be systematically treated in this context. I would like to outline only one aspect: Certainly, the biblical commandment of love firstly is directed to Christians in their everyday and private life. In a strict sense Christian love (agape) isn’t a moral norm but a gift or an effect of the divine grace. Thus it is impossible to deduce concrete political norms immediately from the Christian agape. For instance, biblical commands to respect foreigners surely foster moral sensibility for refugees; but they don’t dispense us from searching for strategies to deal with the extremely complex refugee crisis in these present days. Certainly, an ethics of global responsibility has to take into account the limited capacities of states that accept asylum seekers. Overall, we have to concede that nobody has all of the convincing answers to this great problem in the early 21th century.

The problem with new right policies concerning migration and asylum doesn’t consist in articulating certain and neglected problems but in the ethnically reduced view of the refugee crisis as a whole. New right parties don’t discuss difficult questions concerning the quantity of refugees and the limitation of the social institutions. The main aim of migration politics is to avoid any migration in order to protect the ethnic composition of the nation. Under the spell of an ethnic ideology even the moderate quote of about 1400 refugees was refused by Orban as an intolerable pressure from abroad.

The question of asylum is the pitfall for any universal ethics. The exclusive focus on ethnic identity contradicts the universal claims of Christian ethics. Therefore Christians engaged in the refugee crisis must not agree in the strategies, but they will recognize central values of its own morality in the secular human rights conventions, including the conventions on asylum and aliens. By the way, those who transformed the Hungarian republic into a Christian state should not accuse Christian human rights groups of ignoring the difference between private and political ethics.

6 See Mencius 1970, p. 143 f; A7: “Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated – do this, and the kingdom may be made to go round in your palm […] The language shows how king Wen simply took his kindly heart, and exercised it towards those parties. Therefore the carrying out his kindness of heart by a prince will suffice for the love and protection of all within the four seas, and if he do not carry it out, he will not be able to protect his wife and children.” Cf. also Opitz 2000, pp. 113–156 (Mencius); pp. 159–190 (Mo Ti).
Fourthly: Alain de Benoist affirms and reverses Hegel’s thesis that the French Revolution is based on the ethical universalism of Christianity. In the middle of the 20th century Christian thinkers as Jacques Maritain laid important foundations for a plural democracy and even the UN Declaration of Human Rights on the basis of the Christian doctrine of natural law. According to Maritain, the dignity of the human person transcends historical communities based on ethnic descent. If the ethnic community obtains a principal priority over the person, there is no bulwark against political totalitarianism. The respect for the human person, however, does not negate the relative importance of national or ethnic forms of the community. Like de Benoist, Maritain criticizes social atomism and laissez faire economy as liberal ideologies (Maritain 1996, ch. 1, 3; IV, 4). In contrast to de Benoist, however, Maritain affirms the universal horizon of the modern ideal of fraterniy: Under the inspiration of the Gospel in history the “secular conscience has understood that in the temporal social and political order itself, not only is there civic friendship, as the ancient philosophers knew it [...] but this very friendship between citizens cannot prevail in actual fact within the social group unless a stronger and more universal love, brotherly love, is installed in it, and civic friendship, itself becoming brotherhood, overflows the bounds of the social group to extend to the entire human race” (Maritain 1945, p. 36).

To sum up: The synthesis between Christianity and the ideology of the New Right unavoidably negates core intuitions and innovative theological traditions of Christian ethics. The self-appointed defenders of the Christian Occident paradoxically question the historical achievements of European culture, namely the democratic constitutional state and the human rights which were inspired by Christian Ethics as philosophers from Hegel to de Benoist himself acknowledged. Unable to recognize their own Christian thoughts in the emancipatory ideals of modernity Christian alliances with the New Right appeal to old models of Christian authoritarian state continuing antimodernist traditions of the 19th and early 20th century.

At this point I would like to add a reflection concerning the critique of de Benoist of the doctrine of human rights as imperialist ideology of the West. Without denying the abuse of human rights for geopolitical interests it must be remembered that the UN declaration of the human rights already emerged from some cross-cultural dialogues. The erosion of a mere Eurocentric foundation of the human rights can already be observed in the philosophy of Maritain. In the 1940s Maritain still insisted that human rights cannot be founded outside Christian morality (Martin 1944). As chair of the French delegation of the UN counsel, however, Maritain was confronted with different foundations of human rights, especially by the Chinese and Indian thought. The UNESCO symposium documented a broad spectrum of views of human rights, containing “in itself an important object lesson” (Maritain 1950, p. 12). Not by chance, the Chinese member of the counsel, referred to Mencius (Chung-Shu Lo 1950, p. 187). The cross-cultural experience provoked a certain shift of Maritain’s social philosophy.
differentiating between theoretical and practical levels in the search for a consensus about human rights.\textsuperscript{7} Although the “ideological contrast is irreducible and no theoretical reconciliation is possible” (Maritain 1950, p. 13),\textsuperscript{8} the idea of the human rights could find general acceptance in concrete political praxis. “In the field of practical conclusions […] agreement on the joint declaration is possible, given an approach pragmatic rather than theoretical” (Maritain 1950, p. 11).\textsuperscript{9} Anticipating Rawls theory of an “overlapping consensus” Maritain makes first steps towards a cross-cultural foundation of human rights. After more than half a century, philosophies of Africa, the Islamic World, Latin America and East Asia question the limits of former Eurocentric and even colonialist distortions of former philosophical frameworks. Thus, de Benoist’s ethno-pluralist vision of world society could be overcome through a global and continuous cross-cultural dialogue on human rights.

3. Final Remarks: Some Challenges for an Ethical Critique of the New Right

The New Right outlined by Alain de Benoist refuses the universality of the human rights as an ideology of Christianity and Enlightenment. Therefore, Christian alliances with new-rightest movements involve themselves in ideological contradictions. The ideology of the New Right, however, is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, de Benoist breaks with old fascism; on the other hand, he restores the priority of an ethnic concept of the “people” (“Volk”). While appealing to the great ideals of the French Revolution their universalistic claims are eroded by the ethnic concept of fraternity which restricts the pluralism in modern societies in a dangerous way. Since New Right parties engage themselves in the democratic competition playing even the language game of democracy and “human rights”,

\textsuperscript{7} Maritain 1950, p. 10 f.: “I am quite certain that my way of justifying belief in the rights of man and the ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity is the only way with a firm foundation of truth. This does not prevent me from being in agreement on these practical convictions with people who are certain that their way of justifying them, entirely different form mine or opposed of mine, in its theoretical dynamism, is equally the only was founded upon truth.”

\textsuperscript{8} According to Maritain the different foundations of the human rights can be divided into two main schools, on the one hand theories of “Natural Law”, on the other hand theories, which interpret human rights as “relative to the historical development of society, and are themselves constantly variable and in a state of flux” (Maritain 1950, p. 13).

\textsuperscript{9} Cf. Maritain 1950, p. 10: “it is necessary to make the appropriate distinction between the rational justifications involved in the spiritual dynamism of a philosophic doctrine or religious faith, and the practical conclusions which, although justified in different ways by different persons, are principles of action with a common ground of similarity for everyone.”
the authoritarian agenda of their political aims often remains hidden for great parts of the people. Thus, the regime of Orbán and the Polish PiS reveal the authoritarian politics of the New Right.

Ethical criticism of the New Right, however, is not only confronted with its hidden agenda but traced in the complex history of human rights itself. Finally I would like to briefly hint at some of the problems.

In the French Declaration in 1789, human and citizen rights build an ambiguous unity. For that reason, the universal claims of the human rights were reduced in a certain way during the 19th and early 20th century. After the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy huge masses of stateless persons revealed the painful reduction of the human rights to citizen rights in the constitutional regimes of European states. Shocked by the NS-barbarianism the assembly United Nations reaffirmed emphatically the universal claims of the human rights. The UN Declaration as such is a moral declaration which had to be implemented by legal frameworks, both national and international, in the Post-war era. For that reason liberal constitutions of the Western world contain a complex mixture of citizen rights and transnational human rights. Liberal theories of democracy don’t totally dissolve the “nation” by atomistic individualism. The debate between liberals and communitarians in political philosophy judged different constellations between nation, state and human rights. Even Jürgen Habermas doesn’t eliminate the concept of “nation” in his philosophy of right (Habermas 1997, 128–191). At this point we can specify the ideological thrust of new-righted movements and parties: The New Right dissolves the tense balance between human rights, state and nation in favor to an ethnic concept of nation. In addition, the liberal idea of human rights knows not only individual, but also collective rights, which are restricted to minority groups. Thus, the New Right transposes minority rights on the legal order of the society as a whole.

The confrontation with the New Right, however, cannot be restricted to political philosophy in a strict sense of the term. As de Benoist denies the universality of human rights, a radical critique of the New Right is faced with the search for a rational justification of universal ethics. The current philosophical debates in political philosophy and social sciences are dominated by postmodern, poststructuralist, non-foundationalist discourses which de-construct problematic universalistic paradigms without constructive foundations of universal ethics. For this reason, philosophers of the New Right use not only Gramsci for their own ideology but also Foucault and elements of differentialist culturalism. Of course, poststructuralist and non-foundationalist philosophies offer sharp instruments to criticize the holistic view of an organic democracy. Nonetheless, constructive justifications of universal ethics still remain a neglected and sometimes even an eliminated field in contemporary philosophies.

Michel Foucault distinguished between two families of founders, on the one hand philosophies which lay the foundation stone and build up, on the other hand philosophies which dig and open a space for new forms of thinking (cf. Foucault
1994, p. 534). Foucault dedicated his work to the second type of discourses. Insofar modern philosophy is reflecting on its own time since Kant philosophical discourses are faced with the task of a critical diagnosis of the social and cultural world. Lacking an ahistorical point of view the question “What are we now?” has to be treated from our own experiences and involvements in historical processes and struggles. Thus, modern philosophies emerge from a certain decision as Foucault emphasizes: “I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger” (Foucault 1983, p. 232). I suppose that the rise of the New Right requires philosophies which are engaged in the cross-cultural foundations for a global ethics and human right regime.

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The Ideology of the New Right and Religious Conservativism


Internet Sources


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Liberal Democratic Representation and the Politicization of Religion

Astrid Mattes

Political representation, as key concept of liberal democracy, is under multiple pressures. Across many liberal democracies, populist parties, who claim to have a mandate for more direct representation, are on the rise. In their rhetoric, religion plays a crucial role. Religion is, however, not only relevant on a discursive level but in fact involved in all dimensions of political representation and their crises. I deploy Hanna F. Pitkin’s concept of representation together with Michael Saward’s concept of discursive representation and discuss examples from empirical research on the politicization of religion in Austria in the context of migration. This case is of particular interest when discussing the crisis of representation, as political representation in contemporary Austria is characterized by a strong populist far right party and a recent renunciation of a longstanding inclusive tradition towards politics of religion. I conclude by discussing empirical analyses that show strong exclusionary tendencies towards Muslims while representatives frequently claim to act as, and speak for, Christians against the increasing pressure on liberalism.

Liberal Democracy; Political Representation; Religious Diversity; Politicization of Religion; Austrian Politics

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Introduction

Papers about politics and religion all too often start with a reference to the return of religion to the public sphere or a similar observation. The fact that social scientists are eager to write about politics and religion confirms and reinforces this development. When talking about religion and representation, this is no exception. Within the liberal democratic setting that coined most European states in
their more recent history, religion played a minor role in the sphere of formal politics. A variety of developments, among them the diversification of religious landscapes, the prominence of religious fundamentalism and religiously motivated violence, growing public resentments against some religious groups, and the (re-)discovery of religion as a resource for voter mobilization, brought religion high on the political agenda.

This politicization of religion happens while political representation, as a central concept of democracy, is under multiple pressures. The crisis of representation, which is debated in this issue, relates to religion in a variety of ways, but as neither religion, nor representation, are enclosed concepts, it is a complex task to pin them down. On the one hand, liberal democratic representation aims to include and mirror societal diversification, also with regards to religion. On the other, religion and the claim for religious representation are used in rhetoric to prevent this inclusion. What is more, the inner diversity of religions makes an apparently simple category of difference difficult to represent and the neutrality mandate of the liberal state prevents state actors from taking sides, at least in theory.

In this paper, I want to ask how religion relates to the idealistic concept of liberal democratic representation and its inherent pitfalls, and which underlying problems of liberal democratic representation are understood with the help of the case of politicized religion. The paper proceeds as follows: First, I will present concepts of political representation, in particular the political system centered approach by Hanna F. Pitkin and Michael Saward's idea of discursive representation. This conceptual introduction will be followed by a discussion of the pitfalls of liberal democratic representation in times of diversifying societies. In a third part, I discuss religion and the crisis of representation, using the Austrian example as a particularly information-rich case, suited for purposeful sampling (Patton 1999). In this third part, I will introduce the case of political representation in Austria, present the empirical data base and discuss the particular role of religion along the empirical results and the theoretical concepts of Pitkin and Saward. In a concluding discussion, I argue that the current crisis of political representation is first and foremost a crisis of liberalism and therefore a question of competing norms.

1. Conceptualizing Liberal Democratic Political Representation

When talking about a crisis of liberal democratic representation, it is useful to distinguish the three concepts involved. Representation and its theorization predate democratic systems. Although representation is nowadays mostly discussed in democratic settings, it is in itself not bound to democracy. Thomas Hobbes as one of the most influential thinkers of political representation argued his Leviathan not at all in a democratic perspective, but it is still discussed by
scholars of representation (Hobbes 1651; Runciman 2010). Democracy, most basically understood as a political system whose members exercise power collectively, can hardly be thought of without any form of political representation. Usually, voting is the mechanism to install “a necessary correspondence between acts of governance and the equally weighted felt interests of citizens with regard to these acts” (Saward 1998, 1). Such voting also takes place in a mere issue oriented direct democratic setting. In reality, even political systems with well-developed direct democratic instruments are representative democracies, as they install representatives to govern beyond referenda. Political systems that are further characterized by the acceptance of human rights, the rule of law and its emphasis on the individual as holder of rights and the normative goal of striving towards equality among, and freedom for, their members can be considered liberal democracies (Kelly 2005). Representation in liberal democracies and its proclaimed crisis is this papers’ focus.

One of the most well-known scholars in this debate is Hanna F. Pitkin, who calls representation “the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact” (1967, 8). This approach to representation is rooted in formerly religious references that have increasingly been understood as political. In a democracy, the something that is not present is the sovereignty of the people, meaning the shared power of the members of the democratic entity, which is not embodied or personalized. Classical questions that theories of political representation consider in this process are what makes a person or institution and their actions representative and for whom or what (individuals, groups, interests, etc.).

Following Hannah F. Pitkin, we can differentiate between formalistic, standing-for (descriptive and symbolic) and substantive representation1. Formalistic representation refers to authorization and accountability of representation. While authorization is central to any form of representation, it is not a distinct process. Not every authorized person acts as a representative, which makes authorization a necessary condition but not an exclusive marker for representation. Even non-democratic representation requires authorization. Pitkin points out that Hobbes’ concept of representation can be understood as an authorization concept, but remains essentially anti-democratic as once authorized, a representative cannot be held accountable (Pitkin 1967; Runciman 2009, 16). For political representation to function democratically, representatives must be accountable for their acts. Through the possibility of sanctioning, responsiveness is formally established.

Descriptive representation looks at the extent to which representatives mirror the characteristics of their representees (a term used by Pettit 2009) and usually

1 Other authors discuss representation along the lines of simulative, enactive, interpretive representation (Pettit 2010); standing, acting and speaking for someone (Shapiro et al. 2009); For an excellent overview of different concepts see Dovi 2017.
refers to categories of difference, such as gender, age, ethnicity, language, skin color, sexual orientation, class, etc. Accuracy of resemblance is the ideal of descriptive representation. Jane Mansbridge describes descriptive representation as representation by representatives who are “in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent” (1999, 629). Thereby she wants to point out that descriptive representation is not necessarily limited to outward criteria but also involves shared experiences, like a certain profession. For federal political systems, regional representation is usually also an important descriptive issue. Particularly in feminist theories of representation, the issue of descriptive likeliness received great attention. The presence of women in representative functions is a long standing claim (Campbell, Childs, and Lovernuski 2010); one that has been extended to minorities and marginalized societal groups.

Pitkin discusses symbolic representation a second aspect of “standing for” representation. She describes it as the meaning representees ascribe to the representatives. Whether a representee identifies with a representative because they share features or for any other symbolic ascription is irrelevant, as symbolic representation happens on the level of emotions (Stokke and Selboe 2009, 59). This aspect relates to non-formalistic ways of authorization. As representees are not involved in acts of representation, their non-objection functions as some kind of presence in absence, as David Runciman argues (2009, 94). Ascribed meaning and the acceptance related to it is then a crucial element to stabilize the process of representation.

Substantive representation refers to actions of representatives and the extent to which they serve the interests of the represented. Such interest representation is then the most straight-forward aspect of representation. Pitkin assumes, in a rather essentialist manner, the presence of social groups within society whose interests can be fed into the political process. This involves a general responsiveness to group needs as well as the according voting behavior. Interests, in Pitkin’s view, are relatively stable and given, something that can be picked up for the purpose of representation.

There is an ongoing debate on how standing-for and substantive representation relate. Older social scientific studies have already shown that female representatives do not necessarily act according what is understood as women’s interests (Diamond 1977). Clearly, female representatives are not necessarily feminist representatives. In fact, not only mediating factors, such as party political logics and institutional norms, might prevent them from doing so, but differing political attitudes can be a reason for female representatives not to act in what is identified as the substantive interests of women (Celis and Childs 2012). Still, scholars like Iris Marion Young (Young 2002), Jane Mansbridge (Mansbridge 1999) and Michelle L. Swers (Swers 2002) have demonstrated how descriptive representation of women has effects beyond the most direct aspect of “acting for”, namely raising responsiveness to women’s interest on a more general level, and
most importantly the inclusion of women into the circle of those perceived as able to rule.

Pitkin’s work is still a useful starting point when thinking about representation. Her differentiation of aspects of representation is a well-structured approach, useful to analyze different facets of political representation. There is, however, severe criticism concerning the accuracy of approaches to representation that focus closely on the political system and its institutions and understand representation as a principal agent relationship (Severs and Dovi 2018, 309). Pitkin’s essentialist view on both groups and interests is definitely outdated.

Following the cultural turn in social sciences, groups are rather understood in the sense of ‘imagined communities’ than as bounded entities (Anderson 1991). Equally, a more complex understanding of political processes includes the making of both interests and groups in the course of representation, rather than their given presence (Celis and Childs 2012). The performative act of representation constitutes and constructs political realities (Diehl 2015, 10). Such discursive views understand representation as “a ‘practice’ in which the object of representation and the grounds on which it is defended, co-determine ‘who’ and ‘what’ is considered politically legitimate and how ‘interests’ are to be represented” (Crivits et al. 2018, 475).

As much as Pitkin’s work is central to political system centered approaches to representation, Michael Saward’s work is central to the scholarly debate about discursive representation. In his book “The representative claim”, Saward put forward a constructivist understanding in studying representation and suggests focusing on discursive representation and claims-making instead of investigating representation as a principal agent relationship (2010). His arguments also strongly built on the disability of political system focused approaches to grasp power relations and the (non-)representation of marginalized groups, non-state centered, international forms of representations and dynamics of representation. In short, Saward and scholars of discursive representation increasingly try to avoid the shortcomings of ‘standard accounts of democratic representation’ (Urbinati and Warren 2008) by perceiving discursive acts, defined as claims, as representation.

This way of thinking denies theorists the possibility to identify what the interests of representees are and, in consequence the assessment of their representation. Only the perception of representees with regard to representative acts can be assessed. In this perspective, also representatives are not concerned with making claims according to women’s or worker’s interests but aim at making claims that resonate among their voters. The conditions in which these claims are made are then the focus in analyzing discursive representation.

Despite a heavy reception, Michael Saward’s “representative claim” is considered as a dead end by some scholars. The constructivist perspective does not allow the identification of interests and thereby questions every concept of democratic representation and, in consequence, the possibility of democratic
politics itself (Disch 2015). Such contrasting of a political system orientation and a discursive approach is hardly fruitful. Rather, I suggest combining these ways of thinking to enhance the standard perspective on political representation. Saward himself points out “that democratic representation contains, but is not exhausted by, the familiar machinery of liberal representative democracy” (2012, 78). And, although national political systems have lost power to corporations, civil society and supra-national political actors, they are far from being irrelevant.

A combination of both perspectives is useful when we look at the different aspects of representation and their crises. Therefore, I will stick to Pitkin’s concept in structuring this article but include a wider understanding of representation than that as a principal agent-relationship. Informed by the constructivist perspective on groups and interest, I analyze the crisis of representation along standard procedures of political representation in a liberal democratic setting.

2. Problems of Liberal Democratic Representation

If we ask for the crisis of political representation, we find pressing issues for each of the aspects of representation described by Hanna Pitkin that relate inherently to the concept of representation, triggered by recent societal transformation processes. While these transformations are not the only possible way in which the concept of political representation might be challenged, their current dense constellation leads to a perception of crisis.

a) Formal Representation

Regarding formal representation, elections as an institution to grant both authorization and accountability is delegitimized by a growing gap between those who are involved in decision making and those that are affected. This boundary problem (Dahl 2000; Goodin 2007; Gruber and Walter 2013) is both the result of increasing numbers of residents who are not citizens and shrinking voting rates due to decreasing interest in “mainstream representative politics” (Saward 2010, 1) on the nation state level. Here lies the first currently pressing problem of the concept of liberal democratic political representation, as formal representation in a liberal democracy strives for widest inclusion to grant equality. Those affected by representative acts should be involved in authorization processes and be able to hold representatives accountable.

As David Runciman discusses, this accountability is crucial to the very concept of representation, as the represented become somewhat present only through their ability to object: “Representation implies that the represented do not merely bear the consequences of another’s action, but have some presence in the action...”

Authorization and accountability are also a challenge on a global scale, as currently most evident in climate politics (see for example Caney 2005).
itself by dint of this fact. In other words, they must be capable of asserting their stake.” (2007, 96) This is not the case when significant parts of the population are excluded from both aspects of formal representation or refuse to participate.

The question of how the electorate is constituted and who is actually (not) voting has become ever more pressing over the past years. The number of residents who are not entitled to vote is rising due to migration movements and small naturalization numbers, which results in a crisis of representation (see Bauböck and Carens 2018). For Austria, the share of foreign citizens grew from 8.6 percent in 1999 to 15.3 percent in 2017, and similar trends are observable across Western Europe. In cities, these numbers are usually higher and in particularly diverse areas, those entitled to vote are only a thin majority. In the Austrian capital Vienna, the share of foreign citizens is on average 25 percent and as high as 42.8 percent in some districts (Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus).

Another aspect that limits representativeness in a formalistic sense is citizens who do not exercise their right to vote. As they are not formally excluded from participation, falling turnouts are also a matter of symbolic representation and will be discussed below. From the perspective of formal representation, both the exclusion of larger shares of the population and the refusal to participate are not foreseen and limit the legitimacy of liberal democratic political representation.

b) Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation is a challenged concept as migration processes and changing perceptions of difference result in ongoing diversification both in width and in depth. In the debate over descriptive representation, scholars distinguish microcosmic and selective approaches. While the former aims at an exact mirroring of the total population and can only be achieved through lottery, the latter is the reality of liberal democratic representation. “In the far more frequent ‘selective’ form of descriptive representation, institutional design gives selected groups greater descriptive representation than they would achieve in existing electoral systems in order to bring the proportions of those groups in the legislature closer to their percentages in the population.” (Mansbridge 1999, 633). For most parts of Europe, current informal section criteria result in an over-representation of males, the highly educated, white people and a certain age group.

Despite the growing acceptance for the representation of some group characteristics, there is little reason for enthusiasm. Descriptive representation follows larger societal trends regarding the perception and acceptance of diversity. For example, changing societal stands (as well as significant court rulings) on diversity allow for more visibility of some groups (especially women and LGBTQ people, see Reynolds 2013; Wängnerud 2009). Although women’s voting rights are well established by now, Cuba (49 percent), Bolivia (51 percent) and Rwanda (63

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4 See ORF.at (2017), “Jeder vierte Wiener nicht wahlberechtigt”.
percent) are the only countries in the world that reach a representation of women in parliament that matches the population (data.worldbank.org). Regarding other forms of diversity, especially concerning markers of difference that relate to migration, it seems acceptance for descriptive representation remains low.

As Iris Marion Young pointed out, the descriptive likeliness of representatives is crucial for democratic inclusion but any group inclusion bears the danger of excluding another (2002, 87 f.). Which marker of difference is the most important to be mirrored in political representation? Gender, religion, age, region, language, class? And when, if at all, can we assume common interests of women, homosexuals, Protestant Christians, best agers, Tyrolians, Carinthian Slovenes, construction workers? The vast literature on “groupism”, “imagined communities” and intersectionality discusses the multiple ways in which descriptive representation therefore clearly has limits (Gold and Haynie 2014; Brubaker 2002; McCall 2005).

This further relates to a crucial point for the following discussion of liberal democratic representation: Descriptive likeliness relates to group characteristics and thereby group representation. The liberal democratic concept by contrast, puts the individual at the center of political representation, which brings along the challenge of weighing individual and group interests. Some individuals will experience inequality due to group membership, whether or not these groups are imagined or ascribed. Also to guarantee freedom might require acknowledging group needs, as the examples of religious freedom and the non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation show. Ignoring groups therefore undermines the liberal goals of equality and freedom. Governing groups by contrast always limits the fundamental liberal democratic focus on the individual as bearer of equal rights.

The inherent dilemma of descriptive representation can then be subsumed as the most likely permanent inability to mirror societal diversity in its fluidity and multitude, while at the same time, such mirroring is needed to prevent exclusion. Growing numbers of characteristics people claim representation for, as well as a refusal to allow for the representation of some characteristics, results in a virulent problem and contribute to the current crisis of representation.

c) Symbolic Representation

The symbolic view on representation looks at the meaning people ascribe to their representatives. Here, we simultaneously observe a growing disaffection from formal politics and the increasing success of politicians of populist and authoritarian style who push for a symbolic charging of the nation (Beyme 2018). Both developments are symptoms of a crisis of representation.

Identification with political parties that where formative for many post-war European democracies has been declining for decades now. In many cases, political parties used to have an all-encompassing agenda for their partygoers’ life courses (Andeweg and Farrell 2017). While these parties are still most relevant to
the formal political system, the dissociation of voters and mainstream parties is growing and results in low turnouts. This is further pushed by dissatisfaction with these established actors. Scholars name a series of reasons for this dissatisfaction, reaching from economic insecurity in a post-industrial economy to powerlessness of political actors in the light of technocracy, supra-national governance and all-mighty corporations, and a cultural backlash in a retro reaction to societal value change (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Cox 2018; Torre 2014).

Such manifold transformation processes allowed populist parties to step in and gain significant success by claiming to speak “for the people”, used synonymously for the claim to represent more immediate than mainstream parties. Populist actors are then often perceived as an alternative to the established system of political parties. Populist rhetoric is charged with symbolic references aimed at the stimulation of emotions. Mobilizing fear, nostalgia and a romanticized vision of the nation characterizes the successful strategies of right-wing populists across Europe. While their claims are not necessarily anti-democratic, they usually turn against the liberal ideals of freedom and equality.

Populists’ claim to speak for the people is increasingly accepted as a valid claim, and their agenda is adopted by mainstream parties (Bale et al. 2010; Gruber and Bale 2014), resulting in mainstream and right-wing actors who push an illiberal agenda. In fact, as Fielitz and Lalloire argue, “illiberal models of democracy”, such as in Poland and Hungary, prove populist actors’ “capacity to transform entire political systems” (2016, 15). It can be reasonably assumed that this relates directly to the crisis of symbolic representation: Dissociation of established party structures, anti-establishment attitudes, political discontent are symptoms of the diminishing meaning a growing number of people no longer ascribe to mainstream political representatives.

As Runciman argues, representees’ non objection is required to allow their presence in absence in processes of representation. A diminishing ascribed symbolic meaning results in an objection that limits this presence. In this case, liberal democratic representation foresees to hold representatives accountable and replace them. The current challenging of representation by actors that actually oppose the liberal foundation of contemporary democracies makes evident that this system of representation is unable to protect itself against its abolition (as famously discussed by Böckenförde 1976).

d) Substantive Representation

Substantive representation is expressed in the prioritization of policy preferences of the represented. Here, Michael Saward’s thinking is crucial, as he argues that we cannot simply assume interests are taken for granted. He states that a claim is not merely representing the interests of those represented but that representativeness depends on the extent to which a claim is accepted as being representative and resonates among the represented.
What political analysts often overlook is that the interests looked at might not be quite accurate. For example, being female might not be the group identity that a person develops her interests upon. As a study on female Trump voters shows, holding sexist and racist attitudes was more influential to women in their decision to vote for Trump than what is understood as gender related interests (Setzler and Yanus 2018). Also, a policy might actually hurt a particular group but is sold to them as being in their interest. Timothy Snyder speaks of “sadopopulists” (2018), when referring to populist actors who make policies against the interest of the people they claim to speak for.

When looking at substantive representation, the critique of Pitkin’s approach becomes most evident. Still, the complete dissolution of interests questions democratic representation as such, therefore I view (group) interests as heavily influenced by discourses but not as inexistent. For some time, strong party ties and a greater congruency of societal cleavages and political parties aligned interests, representative’s claims and their acceptance. However, as discussed above, these societal structures are increasingly eroding. The concept of democratic representation still builds on these societal structures. Unaligned interests and changing group identifications are a pitfall to the concept of liberal democratic representation and a central element in the crisis of substantive representation.

The crisis of representation then includes formal aspects with regard to authorization and accountability in democratic entities that exclude more and more people from these processes. It further constitutes a limited descriptive representation due to the (ongoing) exclusion of people with certain markers of difference and inability of microcosmic reflection of a growing diversity. In symbolic terms, we observe a dissociation of people and established structures of representation. This relates to the crisis of substantive representation, which results from diverging societal interests and, as revealed by a discursive perspective on representation, a limited ability to understand interests as something given in society instead of something created through representation itself.

3. Politicized Religion and the Crisis of Representation

In the course of the ongoing, severe societal transformations described above, religion plays a crucial role in multiple ways. Having described the crisis of political representation in more general terms, I want to discuss recent developments in Austrian politics on religion, against the backdrop of these developments in the following. Therefore I briefly describe the Austrian case and the empirical studies I draw on, followed by a discussion of religion and the crisis of representation in Austria.
3.1. Austria: Land of Milk and Honey for Religious and Far Right Populists alike?

I chose this provocative headline, as Austrian politics is a prominently featured case both in studies on right-wing populism and religious inclusiveness (see for example Kitschelt and McGann 1997; Hainsworth 2016; respectively Foret and Itçaina 2013; Mattes, Goetsch, and Rosenberger 2017). Today, Austria has, despite recent setbacks, a highly inclusive system of state-religion relations and one of the strongest populist far right parties in Europe (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ), which is, since 2017, also in government. Both relate closely to Austrian history and, in a way, the shirking of dealing with it.

Austria’s religious inclusiveness is a relic from the Hapsburg monarchy, when for tactical reason, and maybe as well in the spirit of Enlightenment, rather tolerant legislation allowed for religious diversity (Klieber 2010). After 1945, the Austrian body of law was mostly adopted from the pre-WWII and pre-Austro-fascist period. Also, the 1912 Islam Law was still in force when growing religious diversity became an issue in post-war Austria. A group of Muslims founded a *Kultusgemeinde* in the 1970s, which resulted in a legally acknowledged Islamic Religious Community in Austria that became the official representation for Muslims in Austria (Kroissenbrunner 2002). Until 2013, when an Alevi religious community was granted the same legal status, it served as a single point of contact for state actors.

The inclusiveness of Austrian state religion relation is not limited to an institutional setting that guarantees a broad set of privileges for 16 legally acknowledged religious communities (see Bundeskanzleramt, *Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften*); it also led to inclusive decision making when it came to issues of religious freedom. Examples for this, could be found when the Muslim headscarf was discussed across Europe in the early 2000s (see Rosenberger and Sauer 2013), or in the case of male circumcision (Wieshaider 2016). In these and other cases, coalition governments including the populist far right, as well as grand coalitions of Social Democrats (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, SPÖ) and People’s Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, ÖVP) refrained from restraining religious rights. This tradition of inclusiveness has changed in recent years, in particular with regard to Islam (Hafez and Heinisch 2018). Here, longstanding claims from the far right, such as the ban of face veiling, were recently implemented.

This relates to the second characteristic of the particular information-rich Austrian case, a strong and long-established populist right. Unlike Germany, Austria did not go through a phase of severe examination of its National Socialist past, as it was claimed to be “the first victim” of Nazi-aggression (Rathkolb 2015). This also resulted in the continued existence of a political representation of the, traditionally anti-cleric “third camp”. In 1949, the Association of Independents

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5 In the interwar period, Austrian politics was split into three camps: socialist,
Formed as a political gathering place of former National-Socialists and fascists (Pelinka 2002, 286 f.). In 1956, the Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) absorbed this party. Anton Pelinka argues that the FPÖ as a whole stood in the National Socialist tradition. After a liberal phase between 1970 and 1986, Jörg Haider became party leader and the party position shifted to right-wing populism. Since 1986 the Austrian Freedom Party was successful in most elections and gained up to 26 percent of the votes at national elections. A party schism brought the current party leader Heinz-Christian Strache, who entered a coalition government with the Austrian People’s Party in 2017, to the forefront. Under Strache’s lead, the party did not only put anti-Islam campaigns at the center of their political strategy, it also contrasted these with references to Austria’s and their own Christian character (Sauer and Ajanovic 2016).

3.2. Empirical Database and Analysis

This paper draws on the empirical work from a larger project on the politics of religion and migration in Austria (Mattes 2017a, 2017b, 2018). This project built on four sources of data material: Policy documents on immigrant integration issued in Austria between 2005 and 2013, a formative phase for Austrian immigrant integration policies; Press releases and campaign material in relation to the policy documents were used to complement the picture; Parliamentary protocols allowed the inclusion of data material within a larger period, namely 1993–2013; For this article, the data collection has been further extended to 2017. Finally, qualitative interviews were conducted to bring in policy makers’ and religious representatives’ voices.

Also in post-war Austria, the latter is usually referred to as the “third camp”.

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Policy documents were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Parliamentary protocols were analysed using a simple version of quantitative content analysis in combination with a qualitative content analysis (Kelle 2004). Interview transcripts were analysed using a ‘themed analysis’ (Froschauer and Lueger 2003). In the following part of the paper I will, though not exclusively, draw on this study to build and underline my argument.
3.3. Religion and the Crisis of Representation in Austria

The guiding question for this paper is how religion relates to the idealistic concept of liberal democratic representation and its inherent pitfalls, and which underlying problems of liberal democratic representation the case of politicized religion helps to understand. To answer this question I want to look at the current crisis of representation in Austria and the ways religion is involved in it. I start by looking at each aspect of Pitkin’s concept of representation and assess religion’s general relevance to liberal democratic representation, followed by a discussion of elements of politicizations identified in the empirical analysis of the Austrian case.

a) Formal Representation

When we look at formal political representation in liberal democracies, religion should simply be irrelevant. Religious affiliation is not only protected by anti-discrimination legislature, freedom of religion is also guaranteed by the commitment to universal human rights and constitutional regulations. In a narrow understanding of formal representation through elections, neither authorization nor accountability can be formally based on religious affiliation or attitudes towards religion.

When we look more closely and apply a slightly wider understanding, we find that religion can be a relevant factor on a formal level of representation, and in fact for both representees and representatives. Unlike the liberal democratic ideal of strict religion-state separation, many European states installed so called “systems of cooperation” that foresaw privileges and duties of acknowledged communities on a constitutional level (Minkenberg 2003). Political scientists like Wayne Hudson (2003), or Julia Mourão Permoser and Sieglinde Rosenberger for Austria (2009) argue that within a concept of multiple citizenships (national, local, EUropean, global, etc.), what they call “religious citizenship” is often overlooked. While this “religious citizenship” is not a legal status like nationality, membership in a religious community can open windows of opportunity through group representation, also in formal terms.

For Austria, Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger argue, that due to the Austrian system of cooperative state-religion relations, religious membership is in fact a benefit for non-citizens. People might be entitled to vote for a religious representative (e.g. in the legally acknowledged Islamic and Jewish Communities), despite not being entitled to vote for state representatives. While migrants in general do not have an official representative channel, they might have one through their religious affiliation. The system of cooperation between state and legally acknowledged religious communities foresees consultation of religious organizations for all matters of religion politics, and, to a lesser extent, also in other legislative procedures. “Religious citizenship” entails both a legal form of representation and a more general discursive one. This is especially relevant for
religious communities that have large shares of migrant members, such as the Islamic community and Christian-Orthodox churches.

On the other side, there is a utilization of religious communities to implement immigrant integration policies, treating them as representatives of migrants, rather than as religious actors. As discussed by various authors, religious communities and Islamic communities in particular, become subject of the practice of governing through community (Tezcan 2012; Ragazzi 2016). While for some time in the early 2000s and especially through a multiculturalism lens, these practices have been assessed as inclusive, the specific politicization of Islam and Muslims, as well as growing resentments among the public and policy makers alike, lead to the assessment that such representation is barely able to lead towards more legitimate authorization or wider accountability (Mattes 2017a). As an interviewee from the Islamic Religious Community in Austria put it: “Even in my official function I encounter people who really have a hard time digesting that it is possible to be Muslim and Austrian. Islam is something out of Austria, tolerated in a guest status, at best.” (AT2, 04:08)

As it bears the danger of further exclusion I do not view a stronger involvement of religious communities as a solution for better formal representation of religious migrants. The selective process of acknowledging religious communities only considers a very specific sub-group of religiously affiliated people and therefore cannot function as a way to include foreign citizens. Rather, an individual involvement through the acquisition of citizenship is desirable to improve liberal democratic representation. There are no official numbers of religious affiliations among migrants and naturalizations. Looking at the most politicized example of religious migrants, Muslims in Austria, it is estimated that around 50 percent of the 700 000 Muslims living in the country hold Austrian citizenship (Hager and Peternel 2018).

Obviously, naturalized members of religious minorities are entitled to participate in elections, which means that representatives are accountable to them. However, even if religious minorities are involved in representation processes, a minority position in democratic election only allows for limited influence. There are various concepts and reform ideas to improve minority representation, reaching from affirmative action to quotas, but all of them bear the danger to undermine the liberal focus on the individual. In fact, representative democracy is conceptualized to avoid the “tyranny of the masses”, as representatives are supposed to act in the democratic interest of minority representation. In light of the current politicization of religion – Christianity and Islam as markers for self- and otherness – the extent to which representatives fulfill this task is questionable.

6 There are no estimations of the share of Austrian citizens among the 500 000 orthodox Christians and around 15 000 Jews living in Austria (Goujon, Jurasszovich, and Potančoková 2017).

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Therefore, religious representation is hardly suitable to address the formal problem of the growing number of non-represented.

b) Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation is, as argued by Young, a potential source for democratic representation that aims towards justice (2002, 82). But to what extent is religion relevant for descriptive representation? As religion is a typical category of difference, it is regularly discussed with regards to descriptive representation. Young differentiates between cultural and structural differences and would, in the first place, view religion as a cultural difference, as opposed to a structural one like gender, sexual orientation and race. For Europe, scholarly literature increasingly assesses a racialization of religion and Islam in particular. As Fatima El-Tayeb argues, in a European context where race is a historic societal taboo, veiled Muslim women become the visible other to the essentially white European self (El-Tayeb 2011, 16).

In addition to whether difference is cultural or structural, we can look at the perception and presentation of difference. While many members of Austrian parliament are religiously affiliated, very few make their religious position explicit. Assessing the composition of the Austrian National Assembly in the XXVI legislative period (which began in 2017 and does not significantly differ from former periods), four among the five members with a migration background have roots in Muslim-majority regions (Draxler and Schaffer 2017). None of them presents him/herself as a devout believer or claims to stand for Muslims in Austria. Some explicitly see themselves as secular or not practicing Muslims (Pink 2008; Rajkovic 2017); another Muslim parliamentarian explicitly states his skepticism about the relation of religion and politics in general (Dönmez 2017). There are two Jewish members of parliament, one of them claims to be the first “active Jew” in post-war Austrian Parliament (kurier.at 2017). With regard to different Christian representatives, one way to assess their presence is the affiliation of MPs with Christian organizations (see webpage Meine Abgeordneten) but only few Christian parliamentarians proactively communicate their religious affiliation.

Findings from the “Giving Voice Project” that investigated descriptive representation in Austrian parliament show that religion, mingled with the label “immigrant background”, is a double edged sword. While religious affiliation is increasingly pointed out among male candidates of Turkish origin, other candidates (especially Muslim women who do not wear a headscarf) are perceived and addressed as religious candidates to a lesser extent (Rosenberger and Stöckl 2016). Instead of standing for Muslims in Austria, these candidates aimed to be perceived as party representatives. Even if political actors of a particular faith would want to stand for the religious community, it would be unclear whose religion they represent, as spectrums of religiosity reach from secular affiliation to active practice and devout dedication. Descriptive religious representation, then, is
limited to single representatives, who explicitly claim standing for very specific groups.

Rather than looking at descriptive likeliness in relation to substantive interest representation, we can assess the relevance of the presence of minority characteristics among representatives parallel to Michelle L. Swers findings on women’s representation (2002): Presence of especially marginalized religious people is crucial to raise the responsiveness to minority interest on a more general level, and can include these marginalized people into the circle of those perceived as able to rule.

c) **Symbolic Representation**

The relevance of religion for symbolic representation relates closely to the problem of diverse groups and homogenous labels. According to Pitkin’s concept, symbolic representation considers the role of “irrational belief” and “the importance of pleasing one’s constituency” (1967, 111). Descriptive likeliness might occur, but representation also requires the represented to view the representatives as standing for them. In recent years, religion played an increasing role in both the “irrational beliefs” of voters and the attempts to please them by representatives.

According to surveys, the share of people who view Austria as a “Christian country” is high, at about 76 % (IMAS 2016, 3). Recent numbers from a study on Christians in Western Europe show that while 80 percent view themselves as Christian, only 30 percent go to church from time to time or regularly (Pew Research Center 2018). 39 percent even stated that one needs to be Christian to be “one of us” (ibid.). Christian religious representation then seems to be not so much about descriptive likeliness but about symbolic representation and the “irrational belief” related to it.

The politicization of religious symbols functions as a prime example. In many European states, among them Austria, full-face veiling has been legally banned. Despite minimal numbers of women wearing this particular clothing, the measure has been argued to be integrative and necessary to stop “counter-society” (Marchart 2016). In the course of the same legal brief, religious symbols for magistrates in court were to be dismissed, but the government representatives immediately stressed, that this would not concern the crucifixes, which are installed in Austrian court rooms. Despite rapidly shrinking numbers of practicing Christians in Austria, the crucifix in public places like courts and schools has been heatedly debated and representatives mostly favor or refrain from opposing their presence. Current Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, from the far right and-populist Austrian Freedom Party, famously held a speech against “Islamization”, holding a crucifix in his hand and publicly talked about his Catholic confirmation at the age of 39 (derstandard.at 2009). Here, religion becomes a

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7 In the end, this measure was not introduced by law, but through an executive order.
symbol to please voters and serve the irrational believe that religion relates to belonging.

Saward’s focus on the discursive construction of meaning, and in particular the concept of boundary drawing, helps to assess this symbolic level of representation. Symbolic boundaries are ‘conceptual distinctions’ that social actors implement to ‘separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership’ (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168) and these examples for the current politicization of religion demonstrate its functioning.

In theory, the usage of religion for symbolic boundary drawing puts liberal democratic actors in a dilemma, as they commit to state neutrality (Madeley 2003). However, drawing on religion for boundary-making is in practice not limited to Austria’s far right populist representatives. As shown in other studies on mainstream integration policies, what it means “to be Austrian” is often linked to Christianity, which is presented as the source of liberalism and secularism (Mattes 2017b). An extreme example from an Austrian policy document states:

“The following discussion will show that the problem of integrating foreigners predominantly concerns members of the Islamic culture, to a lesser extent also those of other (for example African or Asian) cultures.” (BMI 2008, p. 18)

This statement is followed by a discussion of ‘Austrian values’, a listing of liberal norms. On the basic principle of equality the document states:

“The principle of equality derives from statements of the Old and especially the New Testament, that all men are equal before God.” (BMI 2008, p. 20)

This raises the question to which extent symbolic representation for non-Christians is in possible, if legitimate representation is, in the current climate of politicized religion, discursively linked to a Christian character of representees. The electoral success of those representatives who engage in symbolic boundary drawing on religion allows the assumption that the meaning representees ascribe to representatives is equally dominated by the othering of Islam and Muslims.


d) Substantive Representation

Substantive representation relates to the contents of political representation, which frequently involve religion in many ways. Above, I discussed the difficulties of unaligned interests for the purpose of representation. As became evident in the discussion of symbolic representation and as frequently discussed by political scientists, identity politics is becoming a societal cleavage along which some political representatives increasingly align themselves (Bale 2017). While it is discussed whether identity conflicts replace economic conflicts or disguise them, their current predominance severely affects substantive representation. The alignment of representatives along cleavages of identity politics also involves a
repositioning towards liberal democracy. Increasingly, mainstream actors from the center-right engage in the politicization of religion and Islam in particular.

This can be demonstrated when looking at claims about Islam and Muslims in Austrian parliament. When asking who makes claims about Muslims, and what the content of these claims is, results from a long-term study, that investigated Islam in immigrant integration policy debates in the Austrian National Assembly from 1993 onwards, show the processes of alignment along the cleavage of identity politics.

The overall development of average claims made per session (Fig 1) shows an unsteady picture. While in 2001, the year the terror attacks of 9/11 were committed, a small peak is observable, the years that followed did not experience a significant politicization of Islam and Muslims. Only in 2006/2007 much higher numbers of claims made are observable, reaching up to 11 claims per parliamentary session. This 2007 peak was not observed in the following years, when, on average 2–3 claims were made.

It is worth splitting up these results with regard to political parties to see which actors make these claims. Between four and six parties held seats in Austrian parliament. The traditionally large mainstream parties are the Social-Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Christian-democratic People’s Party (ÖVP). Since 1986 (until 2017), the Green Party was represented in the National Assembly. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) had a split-off party (BZÖ) between 2005 and 2013 with an almost identical position, which was later on absorbed by the FPÖ. Since 2013, there has been a liberal party in parliament (NEOS), and a billion-
aire’s populist short term party project (*Team Stronach*) was present from 2013–2017.

In 2001 (Fig. 2), we observe substantive representation of Islam as an issue for niche parties. While the far right pushed the debate about Islam with security claims, the Green party called for diversification. Both “niche parties” on the left and right could have benefited from the politicization of the issue (Gruber 2014).

In 2007 (Fig. 3), when the far right (the Austrian Freedom Party and their split-off BZÖ) decided to put anti-Islam rhetoric at the center of their voter mobilization strategies (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2013), their share climbed up to 75 percent of the claims of a much higher total (as seen in Fig. 1).

In 2015 (Fig. 4), the populist far right no longer made an absolute majority of claims (33 percent), but the Christian-democratic ÖVP (32 percent) and the liberal NEOS (28 percent) each have a similar sized share. The Austrian Social-Democratic Party (5 percent) and the Greens (1 percent) hardly made any claims on Islam/Muslims anymore.

Over the years, we see a development from niche, to far right, to mainstream. Politicization started as a niche party phenomenon (2001), was then pushed by the far right (2007) and resulted in politicization throughout the right of the political spectrum (2015).

To provide information on the content of these claims, the data was also coded with regards to the issues addressed. Through inductive category development, six
Figure 3: Claims on Islam/Muslims in Austrian National Assembly in 2007 by political party, n=216

Figure 4: Claims on Islam/Muslims in Austrian National Assembly in 2015 by political party, n=105
issue clusters were identified. If we look at the issues addressed (Fig. 5), we see that populist far right claims (FPÖ/BZÖ) focused on security (36 percent) and values (33 percent), to a lesser extent on establishment issues (then usually directed towards the withdrawal of rights). Overall, the ÖVP made most of their claims on differentiation (26 percent), followed by values (22). 18 percent of the party’s claims were made on establishment and dialogue. Social-Democrats made 46 percent of their claims on differentiation, followed by establishment and values (15 percent each). The Green Party focused on differentiation (56 percent) or general issues of integration. Two parties were in parliament only for the last legislative period under observation (2013–2017) and show very different patterns. Team Stronach’s claim-making resembles the far right pattern, focusing on security (47 percent) and values (30 percent). The liberal NEOS focused on differentiation (36 percent), establishment (32 percent) and values (18 percent).

If we merge these results (Fig. 6) and look at the overall claims-making, we see distinct patterns. First, the far right (FPÖ and BZÖ) dominated the debate and made, overall, 62 percent of the claims during the 20 year period of observation. All other parties played a much smaller role, they made less claims and if they did, they addressed different issues. The left pushed for differentiation, but in the overall picture, these claims played a minor role.

While the study is not suitable to assess the role of religion for substantive representation as such, the empirical data clearly shows an interest alignment on the right of the political spectrum along the lines of religious identity politics over the past years. Rather than arguing that it is in Christians’ interest to claim the exclusion of Islam and Muslims, as the populist far right suggests, we have to deploy Saward’s perspective on discursive representation: Interests are never essential; they are not something that is just there, waiting to be picked up by political representatives but something that is both produced and reproduced in the process of representation. The boundary drawing against Muslims is also therefore an interest that is discursively produced, resonates among representees and is again represented by political actors.

Equality might be the liberal goal, but it is inequality that many voters are calling for. Populist actors are willing to represent this call for inequality and, at
the same time, promote the exclusionary and often racist ideas behind it. Among representatives of other parties, we observe three strategies: First, some left wing actors might oppose the right-wing populists’ argument directly, as the Green party did in the early 2000s. Secondly, they might adopt the right-wing populist’s argument, as the ÖVP has done in recent years. Finally, they might refrain from engaging in the debate, as the SPÖ has done in recent years (and to a lesser extent
the Green Party). So far, right-wing populists seem to benefit from each of these strategies, as the first one creates a broader politicization, the second allows for the implementation of measures through coalitions and the third enables the attraction of voters that are concerned by the issue and feel their former representatives are not providing solutions. Together, these strategies result in the alignment of representatives on the right, along an identity politics cleavage.

4. A Crisis of Liberalism, Not a Crisis of Democracy? Towards a Conclusion

The above discussion of empirical results shows us that the politicization of (religious) difference is closely related to the current crisis of representation in its different facets. Formal representation depends on participation, which requires both the willingness and the ability of the population to participate in authorization and accountability processes. This is currently challenged by growing numbers of foreign citizens who are not entitled to vote and low turnouts among those who hold citizenship. Religious citizenship, a concept described as bringing privileges to the religiously affiliated, even if they do not hold citizenship, is not a viable alternative as it bears the danger of exceptionalization and exclusion. Descriptive representation is challenged by societal diversification on the one hand, and the questionable essential character of societal groups on the other. The extent, to which descriptive representation is possible, depends on the formation of societal groups and their acceptance among the wider population. The politicization of religion means that representatives who belong to religious minorities are in a difficult situation, as they are asked to stand for a religious community, while at the same time being confronted with a lacking acceptance of their affiliation. Symbolic representation, the meaning ascribed to representatives, also faces the problem of increasingly exclusionary tendencies. Here, religion is among the central elements representatives use to draw symbolic boundaries that resonate among their voters. This relates to substantive representation which is challenged by the dissolving societal cleavages and unaligned interests. The now observable alignment of interests along an identity politics cleavage involves religion and bears the danger to allow for a tyranny of the masses, something liberal democratic representation is supposed to prevent.

Political liberalism names equality and freedom as the basis for a just system and only operates within these limits. In the light of political representation it becomes ever more evident that this principle of equality is under distress. Equal representation for all, by all and of all is questioned not only at the intersection of religion and migration but in more general terms. As Kemmers et al. impressively demonstrate for people with anti-establishment attitudes in the Netherlands, explaining their behavior through deviance or viewing them as “losers of modernity” only works so far. Rather, the qualitative study shows that people con-
sciously develop such attitudes, which involves “a profound change of their ideas on, and subsequent evaluation of, the workings of politics and society” (2016, 768). As the aforementioned study on female Trump voters shows, holding sexist and racist attitudes was more influential to women in their decision to vote than the gender specific interests they were expected to vote on (Setzler and Yanus 2018).

The unpleasant part for those in favor of liberal democracy, which definitely includes the majority of Europe’s political elites, is that the representation made by the populist right and demanded by their voters is not undemocratic, it is just not liberal. Following the logic of political system centered approaches to representation, making these interests present in the political arena is still a democratic act. The constructivist’s perspective would add that these interests are equally produced instead of just adopted and might lead to different conclusions. Together, both perspectives allow the assessment of the crisis of political representation, which seems to be, first and foremost, a crisis of competing norms and the turn against liberalism. Yascha Mounk argues that liberalism and democracy do not fit together as naturally as many people, and experts, believe. “The will of the people increasingly goes against the rule of law and dissolve liberal democracy.” (2018, 116 f) While I do not share his perception of the people’s will, as I am with Saward’s conception of interests, Mounk makes an important point regarding the concepts of liberalism and democracy. The success story of the liberal ideal to maximize freedom and equality goes hand in hand with democratization process in many places. They are however, not inextricably linked.

As I argued in this paper, liberal democratic representation is currently under multiple pressures. It is liberalism that is under attack, as well as the specific form of representation that the normative concept of liberalism demands. Illiberal forms of democracy are possible and in fact currently observable in European states like Hungary and Poland. The question of how to prevent other countries, like Austria, from this development is more than pressing and for sure there are no simple solutions. A de-politicization of religion seems crucial, as liberal democracy’s ability to function on group representation is limited. Both equality and freedom are first and foremost norms for the individual. In the politicization of religion, inequality is fostered on the basis of group affiliation. Liberal democracies, therefore, require a juggling act to balance the two. Illiberal actors who are not interested in holding up that balance have an easy game. Some scholars then point at rule of law and the justice system as a security mechanism in liberal democracy. In my view, this is not sufficient. Liberal democracy has to be won discursively through the better argument and claims that resonate. These have to include plausible places for religion in society that allow for the normalization of religious diversity.

9 Translated by the author.
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Liberal Democratic Representation and the Politicization of Religion


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Section IV.

Symbolische Praxis und normative Struktur. Die Krise der politischen Repräsentation in der Perspektive einer „Soziologie des Sakralen“

Thomas M. Schmidt

The paper takes its starting point from Paula Diehl’s study Das Symbolische, das Imaginäre und die Demokratie (2015) which examines the connection between the normative structures and the symbolic practice of a democratically constituted polity. A crisis of the political is to be understood as the result and expression of a disturbance in this reciprocal condition of normative structure and symbolic practice of the political community. In her description of the conditional relationship between normative structure and symbolic practice, Diehl places special emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of political representation. By contrast, Diehl largely rejects the meaning of religion for the symbolic dimension of political representation. Therefore, I would like to draw contrasting attention to the project of a “Sociology of the Sacred”, as developed by Georges Bataille and his colleagues in the thirties, following Emile Durkheim’s sociology of religion. This approach is useful to emphasize the importance of religious content for the symbolic dimension of political representation.

Sociology of Religion; Political Representation; Symbolic and Imaginary Dimension of the Political; Bataille; Castoriadis

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Einleitung


Daher möchte ich im Folgenden das Augenmerk auf das Projekt einer „Soziologie des Sakralen“ lenken, wie sie Georges Bataille und seine Mitstreiter in den dreißiger Jahren im Anschluss an Emile Durkheims Religionssoziologie...

1. Paula Diehl: Das Symbolische, das Imaginäre und die Demokratie. Eine Theorie politischer Repräsentation


4 Vgl. Dennis Hollier (Hg.), Das Collège de Sociologie 1937–1939, Berlin 2012.
6 Ebd.


Struktur und Wirkung des Symbolischen sind aus der Sprache vertraut, Symbole sind Signifikanten. Im Raum der Gesellschaft handelt es sich bei den durch symbolische Signifikanten bezeichneten Signifikaten um Ideen, die etwa als

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8 Diehl (2015), 20.
10 Ebd.


Der von Castoriadis geprägte und verwendete Begriff des gesellschaftlich Imaginären hat, wie er selbst stets betont hat, „nichts mit den Vorstellungen zu tun, die gegenwärtig unter diesem Titel in Umlauf sind“18. Castoriadis grenzt seinen Begriff vor allem von dem ab, „was gewisse psychoanalytische Strömungen als ‚imaginär‘ vorstellen: das Spekulare, Spiegelhafte, das offensichtlich nur ein

18 Castoriadis (1994), 12.


19 Ebd.
20 Ebd.
21 Ebd.
22 Diehl (2015), 22.
23 Ebd.
25 Ebd.
Voegelins systematische Bezugsnahme auf Religion relativiere daher die Bedeutung, die das Autonomieprinzip, „also die Idee, dass der Mensch seine eigene Gesellschaftsordnung erschafft“26, für die moderne Demokratie besitze.


26 Ebd.

2. Collège de Sociologie: Die Soziologie des Sakralen

Die von Paula Diehl geforderte Erweiterung des Gegenstandes der Politikwissenschaft, welche die symbolischen, mentalen und emotionalen Prozesse der Konstruktion der politischen Wirklichkeit stärker berücksichtigte und die Politikwissenschaft insgesamt dazu brächte, stärker auf die Soziologie einzugehen und kollektive Vorstellungen sowie die symbolische Praxis zu beachten – dies ist genau das, was die Intention der Soziologie des Sakralen des Collège de Sociologie kennzeichnet.


Aufgabe jener „Soziologie des Heiligen“ genannten Aktivität ist die „Untersuchung des sozialen Lebens in all den Erscheinungsformen…, in denen die aktive Präsenz des Heiligen zutage tritt“. Als Orte einer aktiven Präsenz des Heiligen werden jene Punkte im sozialen Leben bestimmt, an denen innere Erfahrung und allgemeine Strukturen, individuelle Psychologie und politische Or-

29 Hollier (2012), 30.


Auch Jürgen Habermas’ *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, die eindeutig an einer Fortschreibung des philosophischen und politischen Projekts der Moderne interessiert ist, bezieht sich auf Durkheims Begriff des Heiligen.\(^{32}\) Gerade eine Theorie des gesellschaftlichen Handelns, die sich am Vernunftideal moralischer Autonomie orientiert, muss zeigen können, dass Normen, die gesellschaftliches Handeln, also kollektive Aktionen und soziale Institutionen, generieren und koordinieren, eine solche moralische Autorität besitzen können. Genau zu diesem Zweck greift Habermas auf Durkheims Religionssoziologie

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31 Kuba (2012), 93.


Religion ist für Bataille innere psychische Erfahrung und äußere soziale Wirkung des Heiligen, genauer gesagt die Erfahrung der Überschreitung der Grenze zwischen dem Heiligen und dem Profanen. Mit dieser Auffassung einer dyna-

33 Habermas (1981), 75.
mischen und fließenden Grenze zwischen dem Heiligen und dem Profanen stimmt Bataille mit Henri Hubert und Marcel Mauss\textsuperscript{34} überein und widerspricht in diesem Punkt Durkheims Vorstellung einer festen Grenze und eines relativ starren Dualismus von heiliger und profaner Sphäre. Als Macht der Überschrei-
tung ist das Religiöse mit dem Erotischen verwandt – aber gerade nicht oder nicht überwiegend als Kraft der Attraction, sondern der Repulsion. Es ist nicht in erster Linie das Anziehende, Reizende, sondern vor allem das Abstoßende, Ekel und Abscheu Erregende, das der erotischen Erfahrung die Kraft verleiht, die Grenze zwischen Ich und Nicht-Ich gewaltsam niederzureißen. Gerade auf diese Weise stiftet sie aber eine tiefe Form von Gemeinschaft zu der die verschachtelten Be-
ziehungen in der profanen Welt nicht in der Lage sind. Bataille betont die Ambi-
valenz in der kommunikativen Erfahrung des Heiligen, das gerade durch seinen Schrecken anzieht, durch seine Fähigkeit zur Unterbrechung und Erschütterung verbindet und Gemeinschaft stifft.

Den sozialen, gemeinschaftsbildenden Effekt, der gerade in der Gleichzei-
tigkeit von Anziehung und Zurückweisung besteht, hat Bataille in seinem Vortrag „Attraction et Repulsion“ thematisiert, den er Anfang 1938 in zwei Teilen am Collège de Sociologie gehalten hat. Die zu Integration und sozialer Homogenität führenden Kräfte wirken nicht unmittelbar durch direkte Anziehung. Es ist vielmehr der bannende Blick auf die abschreckende und erschütternde Erfahrung des Heiligen, die Repulsion, die sie auslöst, die indirekt gemeinschaftsbildend wirkt. Es ist die geteilte Erfahrung des Erschreckens und Zurückweisens, die verbindet.


Allerdings folgt Hegel in den Augen Batailles nur der Freiheitsgeschichte des Knechtes und lässt den Herrn gewissermaßen am Rande der Geschichte liegen. Hegel habe das Zentrum der Negativität, den Tod gerade nicht mehr zureichend bedacht. In seinem Aufsatz „Hegel, la mort et sacrifice“35 bezieht sich Bataille auf jene berühmte Passage aus der Vorrede der Phänomenologie des Geistes, die schon für Kojève von entscheidender Bedeutung war:

„Aber nicht das Leben, das sich vor dem Tode scheut und vor der Verwüstung rein bewahrt, sondern das ihn erträgt und in ihm sich erhält, ist das Leben des Geistes. Er gewinnt seine Wahrheit nur, indem er in der absoluten Zerrissenheit sich selbst findet.“36


Für Bataille steht außer Frage, dass es sich beim Opfer um einen a-moralischen Akt der Überschreitung handelt, der gewaltsame Formen annehmen kann. Aber Bataille verherrlicht nicht die Gewalt um ihrer selbst willen. In Übereinstimmung mit den normativen Prinzipien der Kantischen Tradition kritisiert er menschliche Handlungen und Verhältnisse, in denen Personen instrumentalisiert werden. Aber die Quelle der Missachtung der moralischen Selbstzwecklichkeit des Menschen liegt für Bataille in jener Nützlichkeitslogik, die uns scheinbar be-


3. Souveränität und Totalitarismus


mogenität wird positiv durch die produktiven Kooperationszusammenhänge im Kontext der Ökonomie hergestellt, negativ durch den Ausschluss des Unnützen, durch die Exklusion jener „Elemente“, die keinen Beitrag zu wertvoller Arbeit leisten können oder sollen. Auf diese Weise „wirken die ökonomischen Verhältnisse direkt auf die homogenen Elemente ein und disintegrieren sie“

Die sakralen Objekte, Beziehungen und Lebensbereiche, die aus der Sphäre der produktiven Ordnung der Dinge ausgelagert werden, verkörpern die heterogenen Elemente einer Gesellschaft, deren Homogenität ökonomisch durch Nützlichkeit und Produktivität definiert wird. Die Welt des Heterogenen begreift Bataille zufolge „alles in sich, was durch unproduktive Verausgabung hergebracht worden ist“

Dazu gehören die sakralen Dinge. Sie sind Teil des unnutzen Abfalls, den „die homogene Welt von sich abstößt“


„In ihrer Opposition gegen die demokratischen Politiker, die in den verschiedenen Ländern die der homogenen Gesellschaft innenwohnende Plattheit repräsentieren, erscheinen auf den ersten Blick Hitler und Mussolini als das ganz Andere.“ Sie durchbrechen mit Gewalt den normalen Lauf der Dinge, die „friedliche, aber langweilige Homogenität, die ohnmächtig ist, sich aus eigener Kraft zu erhalten“

Der Anspruch des faschistischen Führers, das ganz Andere zur Homogenität der bürgerlichen Welt zu verkörpern, begründet sich gerade aus dessen Verweigerung, sich jenen Kräften zu unterwerfen, die für die profane Welt der Homogenität maßgebend sind: Produktivität, Nützlichkeit, Recht und Gerechtigkeit, Anstand, Geschmack und gute Manieren.

Aber gegenüber den Elenden, Unterdrückten und Ausgeschlossenen, die sich durch den faschistischen Herrn repräsentiert wähnen, stellt sich diese Form der Repräsentation psychologisch als Sadismus dar. Denn in der Selbsterhöhung des politischen Führers zum ganz Anderen, zum unvermittelten Widerspruch zur

41 Bataille (1997), 16f.
43 Ebd.
45 Ebd.
Welt der Homogenität, werden nicht nur die abgewerteten schmutzigen und niedrigen Aspekte der Heterogenität ausgeschlossen, sondern auch die von ihnen ausgehende sexuelle Anziehung und Erregung. An die Stelle der sprengenden, das Individuum stets neu belebenden und überschreitenden Kraft, tritt die perfekte Reinheit der symbolischen Figur des Herrn, der alle Kraft in sich vereint. Erotische Überschreitung kann dann nur noch in der bedingungslosen Unterwerfung unter dessen grausame und unberechenbare Lust erfahren werden.


47 Castoriadis 225.


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48 Castoriadis 220.  
49 Castoriadis 246.  
51 Castoriadis 265.
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Bewährung der Gleichheit. Dialektik und radikale Demokratietheorie

Andreas Gelhard

Hegel’s criticism of Kant’s philosophy of representation can be understood as a shift from representation (Vorstellung) to presentation (Darstellung). This shift affects not only theoretical but also practical philosophy. A basic idea of Hegel’s Phenomenology is that freedom can only be realized if individuals present themselves as free. Hegel often calls this conflictual process of presentation “probation” or “verification” (Bewährung). In acts of practical verification, individuals do not simply assert their identity, but carry out a liberating break with given identities. This motive was very important for Adorno’s philosophy of the non-identical, but was lost in the following generations of the Frankfurt School. The essay shows that it currently lives on in Jacques Rancière’s theory of radical democracy. It argues that Rancière is closer to some important intuitions of early Critical Theory than Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition. To this end, it examines a discussion between Honneth and Rancière that took place in Frankfurt in 2009.

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Einführung

Jamais l’égalité n’existerait que dans sa vérification.
Jacques Rancière

Die Bezüge zwischen den verschiedenen Generationen der Frankfurter Schule sind locker. Das zeigt sich nirgends deutlicher als im Bedeutungsverlust des Begriffs Dialektik. Was bei Adorno noch die Grundlinie des gesamten philosophi-


nicht als Produkt politischer oder pädagogischer Lernprozesse setzen. Gleichheit kann nicht als ein „Ziel“ von Emanzipation verstanden werden, das bei hinreichender Bemühung irgendwann erreicht wird, sondern nur als „unbedingt anzunehmende Voraussetzung aller Emanzipation“.\(^5\)

Die These von der unbedingten Voraussetzung der Gleichheit ist unvereinbar mit einer postmetaphysischen Teleologie, die sozialen Konflikten „eine Art von praktisch-moralischem Lernpotential“ zuschreibt.\(^6\) Sie ist Teil einer radikalen Demokratietheorie, die die Idee einer „konsensuellen Demokratie“ als Widerspruch in sich betrachtet.\(^7\) Nach Rancière verwirklicht sich Demokratie in Akten der Emanzipation, in denen sich die Anteilslosen einer bestimmten sozialen Ordnung ihren Anteil aneignen. Solche Akte sind nur möglich, wenn es gelingt, den Streit zwischen der bestehenden Ordnung und einer alternativen Ordnung, in denen die Anteile anders verteilt sind, öffentlich zu führen. Honneths Idee sozialer Lernprozesse ist aus dieser Perspektive doppelt problematisch. Sie droht nicht nur den Tag, an dem die Subjekte alle Kompetenzen erworben, die sie zur Teilhabe am politischen Prozess befähigen, endlos aufzuschieben; sie tendiert auch dazu, Konflikte in „Probleme“ zu verwandeln, die nicht im politischen Kampf ausgefochten, sondern mit Hilfe von „Expertenwissen“ gelöst werden.\(^8\)


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8 Vgl. ebd., S. 119.
9 Rancière, Das Unvernehmen, S. 51; Rancière, La Mésentente. Politique et Philosophie, Paris 1995, S. 64.

1. Der Begriff der Bewährung (Vorstellen vs. Darstellen)


„Erfahrung“ kennzeichnend war, fällt in dieser transzendentalphilosophischen Bestimmung aus. Erfahrung ist, mit Kant’s kürzester Formel gesprochen, „empirische Erkenntnis“.


12 Ich komme in Abschnitt 4 darauf zurück.
14 Ebd., 298, 300.
15 Der *Pluralism* der Denkungsart, den Kant in seiner Anthropologie den verschiedenen Spielarten des *Egoism* gegenüberstellt, bezeichnet die „Denkungsart“: „sich nicht als die ganze Welt in seinem Selbst befassend, sondern als ein bloßer Weltbürger zu betrachten und zu verhalten“ (AA VII 130).

„Nicht bloß in Beziehung auf Gott, sondern auch in sonstiger Beziehung geschieht es häufig, daß man sich der Kategorie des Wesens in abstrakter Weise bedient und dann bei Betrachtung der Dinge das Wesen derselben als ein gegen den bestimmten Inhalt ihrer Erscheinung Gleichgültiges und für sich Bestehendes fixiert. Man pflegt so namentlich zu sagen, es komme bei den Menschen nur auf ihr Wesen an und nicht auf ihr Tun und ihr Betragen. Darin liegt nun zwar das Richtige, daß dasjenige, was ein Mensch tut, nicht in seiner Unmittelbarkeit, sondern nur als vermittelt durch sein Inneres und als Manifestation seines Innern zu betrachten ist. Nur darf dabei nicht übersehen werden, daß das Wesen und dann weiter das Innere sich eben nur dadurch als solche bewähren, daß sie in die Erscheinung heraustreten“ (TW VIII 234).


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Denken der Darstellung, das den dramatischen Aspekt des Erscheinens unter anderen hervorhebt.\footnote{19}

2. Die Dramatik des Dissenses


\footnote{19} „Le savoir sera donc, non pas une représentation (Vorstellung: position d’objet devant un sujet-de-savoir et pour lui, conforme à sa ‘vision des choses’, c’est-à-dire à sa pauvre limitation), mais une présentation (Darstellung: ‘position-là’, mise en place et en scène, exposition, surgissement de l’être-sujet en tant que tel), et par conséquent la négation de toute présence donnée, qu’elle soit d’objet ou de sujet“ (ebd., S. 18).

bestimmen, in dem sie leben, geraten sie notwendig in Konflikt mit anderen Bestimmungen dieses Ganzen, die mit demselben Anspruch auf Ausschließlichkeit auftreten; wenn sie das Ganze bestimmen, in dem sie leben, finden sie den Widerspruch „in allen Gegenständen aller Gattungen, in allen Vorstellungen, Begriffen und Ideen“ (TW VIII 128).


21 Vgl. z. B. den §14 der Einleitung in die Philosophie („Wir teilen uns in die Unverborgenheit des Seienden“).


23 Vgl. ebd., S. 12.

24 „Diese Verteilung der Anteile und Orte beruht auf einer Aufteilung der Räume, Zeiten und Tätigkeiten, die die Art und Weise bestimmen, wie ein Gemeinsames sich der Teilhabe öffnet und wie die einen und die anderen daran teilhaben“ (ebd., S. 12 f.).
Behaupten kann: „Eine gemeinsame‘ Welt ist niemals bloß ethos im Sinne eines gemeinsamen Aufenthaltsortes, der sich aus der Sedimentierung einer bestimmten Anzahl verflochtener Handlungen ergibt. Sie ist immer auch eine konfliktreiche Verteilung von Seinsweisen und ‚Beschäftigungen‘ in einem Möglichkeitsraum.“25


Nach Christoph Menke besteht die eigentlich philosophische Bedeutung des Geständnisses, durch das Antigone die Ordnung der Sittlichkeit „stört“, in der Demonstration, dass das Spiel der Mächte, aus dem die bestehende Herrschaft hervorgegangen ist, nur scheinbar zur Ruhe gekommen ist:

„Kult und Tragödie sind Medien eines Gedächtnisses des Unterlegenen. Dadurch werden sie zu Instanzen der Revision des geschichtlichen Prozesses. Nicht jedoch, indem sie den Sieg der neuen, politischen, über die alten, naturhaften Götter durch ein anderes Urteil ersetzen, sondern indem sie, was historisch ebenso einseitig wie eindeutig entschieden

25 Ebd., S. 66.
war, in die Situation eines unbeendbaren Konfligierens gleicher Mächte zurückversetzen. Die Tragödie nimmt einen Kampf wieder auf, der längst beendet erschien”.26


3. Kampf um Anerkennung

Die Bestimmung des Dissenses als Konflikt zwischen Welten markiert die Perspektive, aus der Rancière auch das Problem der Anerkennung in den Blick nimmt. Diese Perspektive unterscheidet sich signifikant von Honneths sozialpsychologischer Bestimmung des Anerkennungsbegriffs. Was den prinzipiellen

27 Vgl. Gelhard, Skeptische Bildung, Kap. III.
28 Ich übernehme die Unterscheidung zwischen Agonalem und Antagonismus von Oliver Marchart, Das unmögliche Objekt, Berlin 2013, Kap. II.
29 Rancière, Das Unvernehmen, S. 38 f. (Übers. modifiziert).


Honneths Modell der Anerkennung droht – so kann man Rancières Bedenken kurz zusammenfassen – das Moment des Konflikts aus dem „Kampf um Anerkennung“ zu verdrängen. Zur Konkretisierung dieses Arguments ist vor allem der Text interessant, den Rancière als Diskussionsgrundlage für das Gespräch mit Honneth verfasst hat. Wie, so fragt Rancière darin, muss der Kampf um Aner-
kennung verstanden werden, wenn die Vokabel des Kampfes mehr sein soll als eine entfernte Hegel-Referenz? Seine kritische Perspektivierung von Honneths Konzept leitet er dabei schon damit ein, dass er die Gemeinsamkeit der alltäglichen Verwendungsweisen des Anerkennungsbegriffs, von denen sich die philosophische Verwendung absetzen muss, in einer starken Vorstellung substantieller Identität situiert.\(^{35}\) Dem setzt er eine Bestimmung von Anerkennung entgegen, die auf die sozialen Bedingungen der Identifizierung fokussiert:

„Anerkennung [im alltäglichen Gebrauch des Wortes] ist ein Akt der Bestätigung. Im Gegensatz dazu konzentriert sich der philosophische Begriff der Anerkennung auf die Bedingungen, die hinter einer solchen Bestätigung stehen; er konzentriert sich auf die Konfiguration des Feldes, in dem Dinge, Personen, Situationen und Argumente identifiziert werden können. Er ist nicht die Bestätigung von etwas bereits Vorhandenem, sondern die Konstruktion der gemeinsamen Welt, in der Existenzen erscheinen und bestätigt werden.“\(^{36}\)

Das Argument markiert einen entscheidenden Punkt, in dem Rancière Hegel näher ist als Honneth. Der Kampf um Anerkennung erscheint bei ihm nicht als ein „intersubjektives“ Geschehen, sondern als Konflikt zwischen Anerkennungsordnungen, die festlegen, als wer oder als was die Beteiligten unter diesen Bedingungen identifiziert werden können. Ich hatte oben schon bemerkt, dass sich der Weltbegriff, den Hegel im Geist-Kapitel der Phänomenologie entwickelt, als „Aufteilung des Sinnlichen“ im Sinne Rancière erläutern lässt. Das liegt vor allem daran, dass Rancière und Hegel die Welt gleichermaßen als einen Horizont des praktischen Erscheinens fassen: als Bühne, auf der nicht jeder als sozialer Akteur auftreten und sich als berechtigter Sprecher aussprechen kann. Weil das nicht jeder kann und weil also Alternativen denkbar sind, hat es in dieser Perspektive Sinn, von Welten zu sprechen, die miteinander in Konflikt geraten.

Ich glaube, es ließe sich zeigen, dass Hegel hier im Abstoß von Kants transzendentaler Dialektik genau die Ebene erschließt, die Rancière in seiner politischen Theorie eher unvermittelt ansteuert: Wenn Welt nicht als Horizont des Erkennens, sondern des Handelns begriffen werden soll, kann es nicht mehr um die antinomische Verfassung metaphysischer Weltbegriffe gehen, sondern darum, dass die Identifizierung von Personen, Situationen und Argumenten, die unter den Bedingungen einer bestimmten Welt erscheinen, umstritten sind. Wie ich oben schon gezeigt habe, liegt der Begriff des Streits, mit dem wir es dabei zu tun haben, nicht auf der Ebene einzelner Akteure, sondern auf der Ebene der Anerkennungsordnungen – der Welten –, die darüber entscheiden, was unter diesen Bedingungen als rationale Handlung, als artikulierte Äußerung etc. gilt. Darauf zielt Rancière Begriff des Dissenses: „Ein Dissens ist kein Interessen-, Mei-

\(^{35}\) Vgl. Rancière, „Critical Questions“, S. 84.

\(^{36}\) Vgl. ebd., S. 84 f.
nungs- oder Wertekonflikt, sondern eine Teilung im „Gemeinsinn“: ein Streit darüber, was gegeben ist, und über den Rahmen, in dem wir etwas als gegeben wahrnehmen.“

Auf dieser Grundlage zeigt Rancière, dass man politische Subjektivierung nicht als Prozess der Identifizierung, sondern als Geschehen der dissensuellen Desidentifizierung denken muss. Diesen Grundgedanken kann man – in den konkreten Formulierungen, die Rancière ihm gibt – als negativistisch bezeichnen. Es scheint daher kein Zufall, wenn Rancière in der Zusammenfassung seines Vorschlags, wie der Kampf um Anerkennung zu denken sei, ausdrücklich von *Dialektik* spricht:


38 Rancière, „Critical Questions“, S. 90.
zerrter Selbstverhältnisse“. Honneth ist offenkundig schon zu weit entfernt vom negativistischen Denken Adornos, um dem Gedanken der dissenzuellen Desidentifizierung mehr als eine marginale Rolle in Prozessen der Anerkennung zuzugestehen.

4. Befreiung zur Gleichheit


40 Vgl. ebd., S. 108 f.
43 Ebd., S. 309.
44 Ebd., S. 310.
Spiel, wenn Hegel von Bildung spricht: Die Befreiung zur Identität des Selbst, die seine Unabhängigkeit von natürlichen Zwängen sichert, und die Befreiung von der Identität des Selbst, die positive soziale Ordnungen aufbricht.45


45 Vgl. ebd.


5. Supposition, vérification

Ich komme abschließend noch einmal auf die bekannte Stelle der Phänomenologie zurück, an der Hegels Bruch mit Kants Denken der Repräsentation im Begriff der Bewahrung greifbar wird. Hegel bestimmt den Kampf um Anerkennung an dieser Stelle als ein Geschehen, in dem sich die Beteiligten als frei dar-
Dialektik und radikale Demokratietheorie


„Das ist es, was ich als demokratisches Prinzip bezeichnet habe: das Fehlen eines Kriteriums, das diejenigen, die dazu bestimmten, sind zu regieren, von denen unterschiedet, die dazu bestimmt sind, regiert zu werden. Wenn wir es umgekehrt lesen, dann bedeutet das die Voraussetzung einer Kompetenz derer, die keinen bestimmten Regierungskern, eine Kompetenz, die von allen geteilt wird. Das bedeutet für mich, dass das demokratische Prinzip nicht das Prinzip einer bestimmten Regierung ist. Es ist das Prinzip der Politik selbst.“52

Rancières Nähe zu Hegels Idee einer Befreiung zur Gleichheit markiert hier zugleich den Bruch mit dem wichtigsten hegelischen Motiv, das in Honneths Modell der Anerkennung überlebt hat: mit der Teleologie sozialer „Lernpro-

52 Ebd., S. 112 f.

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53 Vgl. ebd., S. 119.
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55 Ebd., S. 196.


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Bewährung der Gleichheit. Dialektik und radikale Demokratietheorie

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Peter Zeillinger

The article reads the invention of the Exodus-Narrative in its historical context of the religious and political system of the Ancient Near East. It reconstructs the revolutionary different approach to political power and theological foundation in the development of the Moses- and Exodus-Narrative and its innerbiblical Fortschreibung. For this development, it is most decisive that the Exodus-Narrative is not based on a historical migration-movement from point A to point B, but located in a historical confrontation with the political powers at that time. The foundation of a strict monotheistic understanding of theology and the invention of a “textual authority” that diverged from the status of scripture in the Ancient Near East and which can be reconstructed through the structure of the Exodus-Narrative and its canonical form as the Torah of Moses, has laid the foundation for the identity of Israel and the basis for the three Monotheistic Religions. The article’s argument is development strictly in correspondence with contemporary exegetical and historical research (esp. E. Otto and Chr. Dohmen) and is brought together with contemporary accounts to political thought from poststructuralist and deconstructive philosophers like Derrida, Levinas, Badiou and Agamben. The outcome of this study is articulated as a contribution to an affirmative reading of the so-called “crisis of representation”.

Crisis of Representation; Exodus-Narrative; Biblical Exegesis; Textuality; Political Theology; Sovereignty; Future Antérieur; Derrida; Badiou; Levinas

Für Eckart Otto,
in dessen Werk ich das Projekt
einer „neuen Politischen Theologie“
meines Lehrers Johann Baptist Metz erkenne.

Ein Text ist nur dann ein Text, wenn er dem ersten Blick, dem ersten, der daher kommt, das Gesetz seiner Zusammensetzung und die Regel seines Spiels verbirgt.


0. Vorbemerkung: Die Krise der Repräsentation und das Nicht-Repräsentierbare

Ich beginne mit einer These, die sich im Folgenden zu bewähren haben wird: Die vielerorts beschworene politische „Krise der Repräsentation“ betrifft nicht den Vollzug von repräsentierendem Handeln, sondern die Identifizierung der Relata, also die Bestimmung des Repräsentierenden bzw. des Repräsentierten. Nicht der Akt des Repräsentierens, nicht das Repräsentieren selbst ist fragwürdig geworden, sondern die Bestimmung jener Instanzen, die „repräsentierend“ handeln, sowie die Klärung dessen, was genau dabei repräsentiert wird. Und vor allem: Wo findet sich jener Standpunkt, von dem aus zu entscheiden wäre, dass eine Repräsentationsbeziehung tatsächlich statt hat? Die Frage nach der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit politischer Repräsentation ist somit zugleich eine Frage nach dem Grund und der Letztinstanz, auf die sich repräsentierendes Handeln bezieht.


„representation means, as the word’s etymological origins indicate, re-presentation, a making present again.‖

Pitkin schließt damit unter anderem an die erstmalst 1929 erschienene Habilitationsschrift *Das Wesen der Repräsentation* von Gerhard Leibholz an, dessen Umschreibung sich ebenfalls an der Etymologie orientiert und ähnlich knapp ausfällt:

„Rein sprachlich gesehen bedeutet Repräsentieren, daß etwas nicht real Präsent wie-der präsent, d. h. existentiell wird, etwas, was nicht gegenwärtig ist, wieder anwesend gemacht wird. Durch die Repräsentation wird somit etwas als abwesend und zugleich doch gegenwärtig gedacht.“ (ebd. 26)


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bislang „als zureichend empfundenen Repräsentationssysteme (insbesondere die Sprachen) sich als der „Wirklichkeit“ nicht mehr adäquat [erwiesen] und somit Repräsentation ihre die Ordnung der Dinge verbürgende Allgemeingültigkeit als Erkenntnisform verliert.“


„Die Grenze der Repräsentation zu denken heißt, das Nichtrepräsentierte oder das Nichtrepräsentierbare zu denken […] über die Repräsentation hinaus zu denken, um die Repräsentation von ihrer Grenze her zu denken […]. Ich nenne hier das riesige Problem des Verbots bezüglich der Darstellung (représentation), bezüglich dessen, was man von einer jüdischen oder islamischen Welt ausgehend mehr oder weniger legitim (ein anderes unerhörtes Problem) mit „représentation/Darstellung“ übersetzen könnte.“ (Derrida, Sendung, 137 f)

8 Derrida, Sendung, 139.

1. Einleitung: Die Exoduserzählung und ihre politische Rezeption

Im Folgenden wird eine scheinbar rein theologische Quelle im Zentrum der Überlegungen stehen: die biblische Exoduserzählung. Allerdings ist hier gerade nicht ihre theologische Bedeutung von Interesse, sondern die Aufmerksamkeit gilt der Beziehung dieses Textes und seiner Komposition zum geschichtlichen Kontext ihrer Entstehung. Erst von dieser geschichtlichen Lektüre her kann der eminent politische Anspruch, den dieses Narrativ erhebt, deutlich werden. Dieser Anspruch und die politische Relevanz ergeben sich dabei nicht so sehr vom offensichtlichen Inhalt der Erzählung als solchem – der Befreiung des Volkes Israel aus der Zwangsherrschaft in Ägypten bis hin zum Einzug in das „Gelobte Land“ –, vielmehr wird erst eine genauere Beachtung und Berücksichtigung der außergewöhnlichen textuellen Gestalt und literarischen Struktur, die diese bekannte Gesamterzählung prägt haben, den noch heute relevanten politischen Kontext erkennen lassen.

In der Rezeptionsgeschichte, insbesondere auch in der jüngeren politischen Rezeption, ist das Exodus-Motiv immer wieder für eine politische Interpretation herangezogen worden.9 Auffällig ist dabei, wie sehr gerade diese ausdrücklich

politische Rezeption noch von einem sehr traditionellen Verständnis des bibli- 
schen Exodus als dem historischen Modell einer realen Auszugsbewegung ge- 
prägt ist und daran – zum Teil in kritischer Absetzung vom theologischen Narrativ 
der Etablierung einer neuen Ordnung – anzuknüpfen versucht. Die folgenden 
Überlegungen wollen dagegen aufzeigen, worin die grundlegende politische 
Kritik des Exodus-Motivs in seinem geschichtlichen Kontext konkret bestanden 
hat, an die heutige politische Theorie vermutlich direkter anknüpfen könnte als an 
das Modell einer kollektiven Auszugsbewegung.

Allerdings stehen einige Grundannahmen dieser – sich meist vom biblischen 
Text mehr oder weniger weit entfernden – politischen Rezeption des Exodus 
durchaus im Fluchtpunkt einer langen Traditionsgeschichte. In traditionellen 
Bezugsnahmen auf den Exodus – insbesondere dort, wo das erzählte Ereignis einer 
göttlichen Intervention vor etwa dreitausend Jahren als geschichtliches Modell 
einer politischen Befreiung im Sinne eines realen „Auszugs“ aus einer Unter-
drückungssituation verstanden wird, – gehen viele der politischen Bezüge, die 
dem Narrativ innenwohnen, bereits im Ansatz verloren. Wenn es tatsächlich um 
eine einmalige geschichtliche Einführung eines Modells politischer Befreiung 
ginge, so wäre zwar die Analyse dieser historischen Erfahrung von größerer Be-
deutung und der Modell-Charakter wäre von den geschichtlichen Ereignissen 
nicht zu trennen. Worin genau würde dann jedoch der politische Anknüpfungs-
punkt in der Gegenwart bestehen? Lassen sich die politischen Erfahrungen einer 
altorientalischen Kultur so ohne weiteres in eine andere Zeit und einen anderen 
politischen Kontext übertragen? Wird demgegenüber der Name „Exodus“ aber 
bloß als Metapher verwendet und damit das Exodus-Motiv lediglich als Chiffre 
für eine allgemeine Idee politischer Befreiung verstanden, die zufällig erstmals in 
der Kultur des Alten Israel erkennbar geworden ist, dann bliebe der historische 
Kontext ohne weitere Relevanz für die Gegenwart. Lediglich das Motiv würde 
aufgegriffen werden. Allerdings bliebe dann ungeklärt, was genau die Entstehung 
dieses Motivs an Neuem in die Geschichte eingebracht hat und in die heutigen 
politischen Debatten einbringen könnte. Für eine ernsthafte „Politik des Exodus“ 
bleibt es daher unverzichtbar, das „Exodus-Motiv“ anhand der überlieferten 
Texte und zugleich im Kontext ihrer geschichtlichen Entstehung in seiner Rele-
vanz für die Gegenwart verstehbar werden zu lassen. Eine solche Aufgabe sieht 
sich jedoch einer bemerkenswerten Schwierigkeit ausgesetzt, die es sorgfältig zu 
bedenken gilt und die den Ausgangspunkt der weiteren Überlegungen bildet.

Isabell Lorey, *Figuren des Immunen. Elemente einer politischen Theorie* (Zürich: dia-
phanes, 2011), bes. 17ff („Exodus und Konstituierung“); Dies., *Die Regierung der Pre-
kären* (Mit e. Vorwort v. Judith Butler; Wien-Berlin: Turia+Kant, 2012), bes. 127ff;
Klaus Neundlinger, *Social Media und #brennender Dornbusch. Politisch-theologische 
Skizze zum Exodusbegriff*, in: Isabell Lorey / Roberto Nigro / Gerald Raunig (Hg.), 
*Inventionen 2. Exodus, Reale Demokratie, Immanenz, Territorium, Maßlose Differenz, 
2. Über einen kulturellen und politischen Bruch im Alten Orient und die Vermeidung von Missverständnissen

Heute ist es sowohl für den theologischen wie auch den säkularen wissenschaftlichen Diskurs selbstverständlich, dass alle biblischen Texte als nachträglich von Menschen komponierte Dokumente gelten, die zudem mehrfach überarbeitet und redigiert wurden bevor sie in einem sowohl theologisch wie auch kulturell relevanten Sinn als „kanonisch“ und damit nicht weiter veränderbar galten.10

Dieses geschichtliche Faktum lässt noch völlig offen, welcher religiöse oder nicht-religiöse Status mit der Entstehung dieser Texte verbunden wird. Sie stellen jedenfalls die bewusst konzipierte Gestalt eines kollektiven Weltbildes dar, indem sie die Vorstellung einer konkreten, gesellschaftlich und politisch relevant ge-wordenen Ordnung – das, was in weiterer Folge die kulturelle Identität Israels prägen wird – innerhalb eines textuellen Narrativs erkennbar werden lassen. In diesem Sinn können sie auch als der imaginäre Ausdruck einer symbolischen Ordnung bezeichnet werden.

Ich stelle hier also nicht eine theologische Bedeutung in den Mittelpunkt meiner Ausführungen, sondern vielmehr den existenziellen Aspekt einer kulturellen Identität, deren Struktur in ihrem geschichtlichen Kontext sehr sorgsam wahr- und ernstgenommen werden sollte. Somit können und dürfen die zentralen Texte der Hebräischen Bibel heute nicht mehr einfach als nachträgliche Auf-zeichnung einer mündlichen, mehr oder minder mythischen Überlieferung verstanden werden. Sie sind vielmehr das Ergebnis einer geschichtlich motivierten, durchaus rational durchgeführten und mit einer noch zu bestimmenden Autorität verbundenen Intervention von Schreibern.11 Gerade dort, wo die literarische Gattung von biblischen Texten der des Mythos zu ähneln scheint, gilt es in Er-

innerung zur rufen, dass die Texte der Bibel nicht wie mythische Überlieferungen anonym geschichtlich gewachsen sondern im Kern das Produkt einer kompositorischen Tätigkeit von selbstbewussten Autoren sind, die in einem bestimmten kulturellen und politischen Kontext diese Texte genau so und nicht anders formuliert haben. Darin – so wird sich zeigen – liegt die Besonderheit und zugleich das politisch Ungeheuerliche dieser Texte. Emmanuel Levinas hat die Ambiguität einer Ausdrucksgestalt an einer entscheidenden Stelle seines Werkes (von der sein Spätwerk seinen Ausgang nimmt), im Moment der Entfaltung seines Begriffs der *Spur* (trace) als einer „rätselhaften Verwirrung (dérangeMENT)“, die die herrschende Ordnung unterbricht, in ihrer Produktivität anerkannt. Diese spahnte Störung der Ordnung ist kein Manko und sie ist auch dort nicht irrational, wo sie die Rationalität übersteigt: „Niemand ist irrational mit dem Bewusstsein, es zu sein.“


„An author [im Alten Orient, Anm. PZ] does not invent his text but merely arranges it; the content of a text exists first, before being laid down in writing.“\textsuperscript{15}

Schriftlichkeit und geschriebene Dokumente hatten seit ihrer Entstehung somit vor allem eine archivarische Funktion. Die Erfindung der Schrift im Mesopotamien des 4. Jtsd. v. Chr. war zunächst auch nicht darauf ausgerichtet, lesbare Texte zu produzieren.\textsuperscript{16} Die Schrift erfüllte vielmehr ökonomische, buchhalteri-


\textsuperscript{15} van der Toorn, Scribal Culture 47.

\textsuperscript{16} Der Begriff des *Lesens* wird hier und in weiterer Folge im heutigen Sinn als ein Zugang zu Texten verstanden, der über das *Entziffern* oder *Decodieren* einer Information hinausgeht und daher mit einer der *Interpretation* offenen Bedeutung und damit ihrer Mehrdeutigkeit umzugehen vermag. Schriftliche Aufzeichnungen (Dokumente, Listen, Briefe, Verträge) wurden daher in der altorientalischen Schriftkultur nicht im engeren Sinn „gelesen“, sondern *entziffert* bzw. *decodiert* – was der Eigenart der Keilschrift, die zunächst keine Alphabetschrift war, entspricht.


„If the author took the initiative, he made sure that he wrote under the auspices of either the palace or the temple. The gentleman author, writing for his own pleasure, did not appear on the scene until the Hellenistic period.“

Selbst bei prophetischen Botschaften und religiösen Befragungen der Götter (Divination) kam es niemals zu grundsätzlich neuen Erkenntnissen, sondern lediglich zu Variationen und Klärungen innerhalb der gegebenen Überzeugungen. Stets wurden die Aussagen in die vorgegebene Kommunikationssituation eingepasst.


„In Babylonia, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, „people who recorded an orally delivered statement did not feel obligated to register it in the precise form in which they heard it. As it reached different ears, the statement was shaped to suit the perspective of the hearer.” (Jack M. Sasson)"20


Souveränität – sowohl im Feld des Politischen (Königs- und Herrschaftskritik) als auch des Religiösen (Kritik des antiken Religionsverständnisses). Dieser Bruch mit den kulturellen und politischen Überzeugungen des Alten Orients verlangt nach einer aufmerksamen Wahrnehmung und Erläuterung des geschichtlichen Kontextes wie auch der Mittel, in und mit denen diese Veränderungen erkennbar werden.


21, die bei der geschichtlich und politisch zuverlegenden Entstehung des Exodus-Narrativs im Zentrum stehen. Auf sie soll im Folgenden die Aufmerksamkeit gerichtet werden. Um eine solche Lektüre aber nicht von Anfang an mit möglichen Missverständnissen zu belasten, sollen zunächst drei mögliche Fehlschlüsse identifiziert werden.


Man könnte (2.) etwas ängstlich darauf insistieren, dass die Exodus-Erzählung entweder auf eine tatsächlich geschehene und nachträglich beschriebene historische Erfahrung einer politischen und gesellschaftlichen Befreiung zurückgehen muss, – oder aber die gesamte Erzählung nichts weiter sei als eine literarische Erfindung, die ein bloßes Wunschdenken zum Ausdruck bringt. Tatsächlich wird man sagen müssen, dass der Exodus als die beschriebene kollektive Befreiungserfahrung

21 Diese ungewöhnliche, bewusst mit Bindestrichen zu einer Einheit verbundene Formulierung zielt nicht auf ein Gemeinschaftsverständnis, das (gewissermaßen nachträglich) den Aspekt souveräner Herrschaft eliminieren würde oder könnte, sondern das sich vielmehr von Anfang an vom Aspekt eines „ohne Souveränität“ her inszeniert. Inwiefern eine solche Vorstellung mit dem Exodus-Narrativ zu verbinden ist und darüber hinaus politisch relevant werden kann, müssen die folgenden Beobachtungen und Überlegungen erst sichtbar werden lassen.
historisch nicht stattgefunden hat. Dennoch ist ebendiese Erzählung schon zur Zeit ihrer Entstehung zur Grundlage der Identität eines Volkes geworden sowie zur Basis von drei Weltreligionen, die bis heute über geographische und kulturelle Grenzen hinweg von Bedeutung sind. Insofern jedenfalls deutlich gemacht werden kann, dass die Struktur der Erzählung eine eminent politische Bedeutung besitzt, die auch für die gegenwärtigen politischen Herausforderungen von Relevanz ist, wird sich auch diese Alternative (– entweder realer geschichtlicher Erfahrung oder literarisches Wunschdenken –) als eine falsche oder zumindest zu kurz greifende Opposition herausgestellt haben.

Der dritte (3.) mögliche Fehlschluss ist vermutlich der schwerwiegendste, da er zugleich eine strukturelle Kritik des Narrativs selbst beinhaltet: Man könnte nämlich meinen, dass die Erzählung zwar auf den ersten Blick eine Erfahrung von Befreiung und Emanzipation vermittelt (unabhängig davon, ob sie geschichtlicher oder anderer Art ist) und damit zugleich die Hoffnung auf eine verheißungsvolle Zukunft eröffnet. Am Ende jedoch läuft der gesamte Prozess des Auszugs erneut auf die Etablierung einer juridischen und politischen Ordnung hinaus, der sich jeder einzelne bedingungslos unterzuordnen hat: dem Gesetz vom Berg Sinai, an das Israel von nun an gebunden ist. Damit stellt sich die durchaus berechtigte Frage: Kann eine politische und emanzipatorische Lektüre der Exoduserzählung von diesem Narrativ all jene Aspekte negieren oder entwerten, die neuerlich auf die Einrichtung eines hierarchisch verordneten Gesetzes hinauslaufen? Im Kern ist hier jene Schwierigkeit benannt, die von vielen der zeitgenössischen politisch-philosophischen Bezugnahmen auf den Exodus formuliert und kritisiert wird und die dazu führt, dass die biblische Erzählung lediglich als zumeist unbestimmt bleibendes „Motiv“ rezipiert wird. Wird es also möglich sein, das Exodus-Narrativ auf eine andere Weise zu lesen?


23 Vgl. dazu die oben (Anm. 9) zitierten Ansätze insbesondere von Chantal Mouffe, Isabell Lorey und Paolo Virno.
3. Der historische Kontext der Entstehung des Exodus-Narratifs

Die exegetische Diskussion zur Entstehung, Schichtung und Redaktion der biblischen Texte ist keineswegs abgeschlossen. Sie ist in den Details der Textinterpretation immer noch von zahlreichen divergierenden Thesen geprägt und damit immer wieder auch Wandlungen unterworfen. In den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten sind allerdings zahlreiche historische Untersuchungen und kulturgeschichtliche Studien erschienen, die den geschichtlichen Rahmen wie auch den sozialen und politischen Kontext der Entstehung der monotheistischen Traditionen, ihrer religiösen Institutionen sowie die Entwicklung ihrer zentralen Schriften doch in einer wachsenden Übereinstimmung deutlich erkennbar werden lassen.\(^{24}\) Es sind vor allem die geschichtlichen Eckdaten zur Entstehung und zum Kontext von Schriftlichkeit im Alten Israel, an die sich eine Deutung der vorliegenden, kanonisch gewordenen und damit sowohl für die innerreligiöse wie auch für die breitere kulturelle Rezeption relevanten Textgestalt rückbinden muss und auch ihren Ausgang nehmen kann.

Altestamentler stimmen heute darin überein, dass es vor dem Fall des Nordreichs Israel Ende des 8. Jh. v. Chr. keine eigenständige Mose- oder Exodus-Erzählung gegeben hat.\(^{25}\) Die Eroberung durch das neuassyrische Königreich im Jahr 722 v. Chr. spielt für die zentrale Thematik des später komponierten und redigierten Narrativs sogar eine zentrale Rolle. Weitere historische Eckdaten, die die Entstehung, die Gestalt und die Grundaussagen der biblischen Botschaft entscheidend geprägt haben sind die Eroberung Jerusalems durch die Babylonier.


\(^{25}\) Siehe dazu die Literaturangaben zum Exodus in Anm. 10.


26 „Only in the ninth century was a script devised that was used for the production of texts in Hebrew, Moabite and Ammonite, followed by the emergence of a distinctly Hebrew script towards the end of the ninth century.“ (Schaper, Literary history, 110) – Vgl. dazu auch Johannes Renz, Die vor- und ausserliterarische Texttradition. Ein Beitrag der palästinischen Epigraphik zur Vorgeschichte des Kanons, in: Joachim Schaper (Hg.), Die Textualisierung der Religion (FAT 62; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 53–81, sowie Seth L. Sanders, The Invention of Hebrew (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
27 „Ancient Hebrew text production started, as in so many other ancient cultures, in the administrative and economic realms.“ (Schaper, Literary history, 110)
28 Schmid, Literaturgeschichte, 86 f.


Dieser Zugang zur Textualität und textuellen Autorität eines Textes über den im altorientalischen Kontext bereits bekannten Charakter einer schriftlichen Aufzeichnung hinaus, ist keineswegs eine moderne Attitude. Wie der Altoriental- und Alttestamentler Eckart Otto an zahlreichen Textbeispielen aufgezeigt hat, war es den LeserInnen und HörerInnen im Alten Israel sehr wohl bewusst, dass die Exoduserzählung (wie auch die gesamte Toraj) sie nicht einfach über eine vergangene kollektive und danach verschriftlichte Erfahrung informierte, sondern eine sehr zeitgenössische politische und religiöse Botschaft entfaltete, die auf Israels gegenwärtige und zukünftige Identität zielte.

„Die Autoren der Mosebücher fügen an zahlreichen Stellen Hinweise darauf ein, dass sie in einer späteren als der erzählten Zeit schreiben, was die Erzählung der Mosebücher transparent für die Erzählzeit macht. Dieses literarische Verfahren der Autoren, Hinweise auf ihren Standort jenseits der Mosezeit in den Text einzufügen und so ihre Adressaten auf die hermeneutische Mehrschichtigkeit der Erzählungen hinzuweisen, setzt voraus, dass die Autoren und ihre Adressaten davon ausgingen, dass nicht Mose diese Erzählungen verschriebene, sondern postmosaische Schreiber. [...] Wird nun postkanonisch Mose mit den Autoren der Mosebücher unter Einschluss der Erzählungen der Urgeschichte identifiziert, so geht die von den Autoren der Mosebücher intendierte hermeneutische Mehrdimensionalität der Erzählungen, die zwischen Erzählzeit und erzähler Zeit differenzieren, verloren und eine Fülle von narrativen Inkonsistenzen belastet nun die Liquidation der biblischen Texte.“

In seinem Opus magnum hebt Otto diese Hermeneutik der Zeitebenen schließlich sogar als auch gegenwärtig zu beachtenden Lektüreschlüssel der Endgestalt der biblischen Texte hervor:

„Widersprüche und Spannungen im Pentateuch sollten weder synchron fortinterpretiert werden noch der diachronen Analyse nur als Einstieg in die Rekonstruktion von Texten hinter den Texten dienen, sondern als gezielt für den Leser stehen gelassene oder gezielt eingefügte Marker begriffen werden, die den Leser in die Lage versetzen sollen zu erkennen, dass die Erzählungen nicht in der erzählten Zeit allein ihren Horizont haben, sondern eine hermeneutische Strategie der Applikabilität auf die Erzählzeit als die des Lesers verfolgen, also ein tue res agitur zum Ausdruck bringen wollen, wenn sie von der Mosezeit erzählen.“

Damit wird auf eine gänzlich andere Art erneut der Blick auf die Geschichtlichkeit der biblischen Erzählungen gelenkt. Geschichtlichkeit und gesichtliche Autorität werden in den biblischen Überlieferungen nicht mittels des Charakters


32 S.o. Anm. 9.
4. Der politische Hintergrund der Exoduserzählung:
die altorientalische Königs- und Herrschaftsideologie

Inwiefern ist es unhintergehbar, die bekannte Exodus-Erzählung als politisches Programm zu lesen, wenn die erzählte Befreiung offensichtlich nicht auf eine reale historische Erfahrung zurückgeht? Der Münchner Alttestamentler und Altorientalist Eckart Otto hat in mehreren Studien die politische Dimension insbesondere der Mose-Figur und ihrer zentralen Stellung in der Tora des Judentums – und damit fast identisch auch für das Christentum sowie motivlich auch für die koranische Botschaft – aufgezeigt. Auf sie und den darin verarbeiteten aktuellen Forschungsstand zur altorientalischen Kultur- und Rechtsgeschichte werden sich die folgenden Ausführungen stützen.

Als Ausgangspunkt der politischen Bedeutung der Mose-Exodus-Erzählung erweist sich bereits die Einführung der Mose-Figur im Rahmen der Geschichte.


35 Ein erster Gesamtüberblick findet sich in Otto, Tora des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 10].


37 Zum komplexen Faktum, dass die Mosegestalt zum einen den Autoren der Mose-

Erzählung bereits vorgelegen war, diese aber zugleich in einen völlig neuen Kontext gestellt wurde, vgl. Otto, Tora des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 10], 32, Anm. 85.


40 Otto, Tora des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 37], 11–17.


42 Otto, Tora des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 10], 16; zu den subversiven politischen Konsequenzen siehe auch ebd. 31 f. Vgl. auch Otto, Gesetz des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 30], 185; sowie zusammenfassend mit einigen weiterführenden Anmerkungen zur jeweiligen literarischen Gestalt der Sargon- und der Mose-Erzählung, ihrer intertextuellen Bezüge


45 Maul, Schöpfungsmysterien, 44.

der das Chaos in Gestalt der großen Urmutter Tiamat besiegen konnte, erschafft aus ihr den Himmel und die Erde und beginnt damit jene Ordnung herzustellen, die für den antiken Menschen erfahrbar war.

„Er erschafft Gestirne, Flüsse und Berge und erwählt inmitten der Erde Babylon zu seinem Wohnort. Dort wird nach seiner Weisung der Mensch erschaffen, um die anderen Göttern von ihren Arbeiten zu entlasten. Diese nun erkennen Marduk auf ewig als ihren König an und errichten ihm zum Dank seinen Wohnsitz, den Marduk-Tempel Esagil und die Stadt Babylon, die als wahre Heimstatt aller Götter gilt."


„So wie im Mythos Marduk zum Götterkönig erhoben wurde und das Schicksal der Welt bestimmte, indem er die Schöpfung einrichtete, so wurde im Neujahrsfest der amtierende König von Marduk und den Göttern in seinem Amt bestätigt und sein Schicksal für das kommende Jahr bestimmt."

Diese Legitimationsstrategie galt jedoch nicht bloß in der babylonischen Kultur, sondern findet sich strukturell in allen Kulturen des Alten Orients. Ein entscheidendes Detail dieser Struktur ist dabei die prinzipielle Differenz zwischen der einen Person des Königs und den vielen Menschen, die in seinem Einflussbereich leben. Eckart Otto ruft diesbezüglich den assyrischen Mythos über die Erschaffung des Menschen und des Königs aus der ersten Hälfte des 1. Jahr-

47 Maul, Schöpfungmythen, 46.
48 Maul, Schöpfungmythen, 48.
49 Maul, Schöpfungmythen, 48.
tausends v.Chr. in Erinnerung, also jener Zeit, in die auch der Beginn der Entfaltung der Mose- und Exodus-Erzählungen fällt. Dieser Mythos …

„[…] makes a distinction between the creation of human beings, who are supposed to relieve gods of the toil of cultivating the land, and the creation of the king as a „human being who by virtue of his superiority makes decision“. To the king is granted rule over people and the power to wage war following the gods’ instructions.”51

In einem solchen Weltbild wird es verständlich, dass der Einzelne nur dann ein erfülltes Leben leben kann, wenn er seinen Platz in dieser Herrschaftsordnung findet:

„In this system, a person could lead a successful life only by following Marduk, god of the empire, who conquered chaos and was represented on earth by the king of Babylon. For a fulfilled life, it was therefore necessary to obey the laws of the Babylonian state or, in the Assyrian version, to obey the laws of the Assyrian ruler, who represented the god of that empire, Assur.”52

Geordnete gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse und die Möglichkeit, ein gutes Leben zu führen, konnten somit nur von einer starken und mächtigen Herrschaft gesichert werden. Sie waren das Resultat der politischen, wirtschaftlichen und militärischen Erfolge des jeweiligen Königs, der im Sinne dieser Königs Ideologie seine Erfolge aber auch nur deshalb erfahren konnte, weil er stets im Sinn und im Namen des Reichsgottes gehandelt hatte.53 Im Falle einer Unterwerfung fremder Völker lag


52 Otto, Law and Ethics, 87.


„Thus, the good [–] as that which is just [–] is what has always been realized in human action, not an „ought“ or obligation, separated from what is, but rather the realized ethical substance of society since time immemorial. […] The values intended to guide moral action […] are correspondingly traditional. They demand […] the values of an average bourgeois morality in the modern sense.“


54 Otto, Law and Ethics, 86.
55 Vgl. Otto, Tora des Mose, aaO. [Anm. 10], 31: „Im Streit um die Überlieferungen werden der assyrischen Macht zentrale Texte ihrer Legitimität genommen und zu Gentexten umfunktioniert.“
56 S. o. Anm. 13.
59 Vgl. dazu den neuassyrischen Krönungshymnus Assurbanipals (686–626 v.Chr.),


Vorstellungen zu überwinden, arbeiten sich – zumeist ohne sich dessen bewusst zu sein – daher immer noch an diesem altorientalischen Modell ab.\textsuperscript{62}

An eben diesem Punkt wird das biblische Exodus-Narrativ jedoch mit dem im Alten Orient scheinbar unhinterfragbaren Verständnis von Souveränität bzw. königlich-göttlicher Letztinstanz brechen und in der Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer neuassyrischen, neubabylonischen und persischen politischen Gestalt\textsuperscript{63} nicht bloß einen \textit{Auszug aus} der bestehenden politischen Ordnung vollziehen, sondern zugleich auch den \textit{Einzug in} eine andere Art des Denkens des Politischen. Auf diese Weise wird auch eine andere Art kollektiver Identität etabliert – einer „Identität“, die sich nicht aus der Dichotomie von Inklusion und Exklusion heraus entfaltet. Identität wird im Rahmen der sich nun etablierenden monotheistischen Struktur\textsuperscript{64} nicht von einem Gegenüber im Sinn einer identifizierba-

\textsuperscript{62} Simo Parpola hat die Modellhaftigkeit der neuassyrischen Königsideologie für die Antike herausgearbeitet: Simo PARPOLA, Neo-Assyrian Concepts of Kingship and Their Heritage in Mediterranean Antiquity, in: Giovanni B. LANFRANCHI / Robert ROLLINGER (Hg.), Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 35–44: „Contemporaries did not make a big distinction between the Assyrian Empire and its successors. In their eyes, the „monarchy“ or „universal hegemony“ first held by the Assyrians had simply passed to or been usurped by other nations. We know for certain that the Neo-Babylonian and Persian kings, and no doubt the Median ones as well, saw themselves as successors of the Assyrian kings. Nabonidus and Cyrus refer to them as their „royal predecessors“; while Greek and Jewish sources refer to several Neo-Babylonian, Persian and Seleucid kings as „kings of Assyria“. The Neo-Babylonian, Median and Persian kings not only considered themselves successors of the Assyrian kings; they also adopted the Assyrian kingship in essentially unchanged form. […] It is of course well known that the Achaemenid model of kingship and administrative methods were perpetuated virtually unchanged by the Macedonian rulers of Mesopotamia, and that the Macedonian system was in its turn taken over by imperial Rome.“ (ebd. 39 f)

\textsuperscript{63} Schmid, Literaturgeschichte, aaO. [Anm. 10], 88: „Vor allem aber zeigt der neuassyrische Überlieferungshintergrund die […] kritische, antiassyrische Ausrichtung der Mose-Exodus-Erzählung: An die Stelle des assyrischen Großkönigs tritt die nichtkönigliche Gestalt Mose als Objekt göttlicher Erwählung, die Israel von der imperialen Fron befreit.“


66 Schmid, Literaturgeschichte, aaO. [Anm. 10], 89. – Es wird stets leicht sein, diese Aussage angesichts der herrschenden Spannungen um den zeitgenössischen Staat Israel als anti-israelischen Gestus misszuverstehen. Doch wenn man sich in Erinnerung ruft, dass es – wie bereits ausgeführt – keinen Sinn macht, das Exodus-Narrativ auf eine historische Migrationsbewegung zurückzuführen, wird erkennbar, dass das biblische Motiv einer allochthonen Verortung der „Identität Israels“ in einem viel grundsätzlicheren Sinn politisch ist als die gegenwärtigen Debatten. Der politische Entwurf des biblischen Narrativs kreis unverkennbar um die Frage der Bestimmung kollektiver Identität durch die Beziehung zu demjenigen, was sich in keinem Identitätsverständnis unmittelbar oder mittelbar „präsentieren“ lässt.
5. Was genau wurde im Exodus-Narrativ „erfunden“?67

Für eine strukturelle Beschreibung der an dieser Stelle in seinen Grundzügen als bekannt vorausgesetzten Exoduserzählung sind im Kontext dieser Studie vor allem zwei zentrale Themen hervorzuheben: Zum einen die Frage, in welcher Form mit der in der altorientalischen Herrschaftslegitimation wirksamen Gestalt der königlichen Repräsentation einer (mythisch begründeten) souveränen Letztinstanz gebrochen wird; und zum anderen gilt es zu fragen, wodurch die offensichtliche Wirkmächtigkeit dieser königlichen Repräsentation ersetzt wird. Erst die Beantwortung dieser zweiten Frage lässt entscheiden, inwiefern das biblische Exodus-Narrativ tatsächlich einen seinerseits politisch und juridisch wirksamen Bruch mit der Vorstellung souveräner Repräsentation darstellt.

a) Die leere Stelle der Souveränität


   Dass es dabei auch nicht um die Präsentation einer Art Naturrecht gehen wird, ergibt sich zum einen schon aus dem prozessualen Gehalt des Narratifs, das offensichtlich einem innerweltlichen Geschehen nachempfunden ist (und so auch das oberflächliche Verständnis des Bezugs auf ein historisches Befreiungsge-

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Das Exodus-Narrativ verwirft damit allerdings keineswegs jeglichen Bezug auf eine legitimierende Souveränität. Doch Souveränität wird nun als Instanz verstanden, die als solche nicht unmittelbar identifiziert werden kann und daher weder präsentierbar noch re-präsentierbar ist. Dabei ist es allerdings entscheidend zu erkennen, inwiefern die monotheistische Struktur der biblischen Traditionen nicht bloß jegliche Form einer unmittelbaren Präsentation von Souveränität verwirft, sondern ebenso die Möglichkeit ihrer Re-präsentation, wenn mit der Identifizierung des Repräsentanten erneut die Vorstellung einer Art Sicherheit verknüpft wird, das Abwesende (das Repräsentierte) im Repräsentierenden selbst gewissermaßen „verortet“ zu haben. Eine so verstandene Funktion der

68 Zur differenzierten, gleichwohl unhintergehbaren Bezugsnahme der koranischen Botschaft auf die Exodus-Überlieferung siehe oben die Hinweise in Anm. 34.


70 S.o. Anm. 64.

71 Dies ist eines der großen Probleme der späteren Entfaltung christlicher Theologie insbesondere in der römisch-katholischen Tradition. Das dortige, sachlich berechtigte Hervorheben und Festhalten einer sakramentalen Präsenz und ihrer theologischen

Mit der biblisch-monotheistischen Betonung der Nicht-Identifizierbarkeit und Nicht-Darstellbarkeit eines keineswegs geleugneten oder verworfenen Bezugsauf Souveränität ist der symbolische Ort dieser Souveränität aber jedenfalls leer, zu einer leeren Stelle geworden. Das biblische und auch koranische Bilderverbot ist dafür ein durchaus angemessener symbolischer Ausdruck. Es meint allerdings im Kern nicht einfach die Kritik dessen, was man im Englischen als picture im Sinne der materiellen Gestalt eines Bildes bezeichnet, sondern vielmehr die Kritik der Identifizierung eines image, also jeglichen Versuchs einer imaginären Vorstellung.72 Die vorliegende Studie ist damit an jenem Punkt angelangt, der in


der Vorbemerkung bereits durch einen Hinweis Jacques Derridas aufgezeigt wurde, von ihm hier nochmals wiedergeben möchte:

„Die Grenze der Repräsentation zu denken heißt, das Nichtrepräsentierte oder das Nichtrepräsentierbare zu denken [… ] über die Repräsentation hinaus zu denken, um die Repräsentation von ihrer Grenze her zu denken [… ]. Ich nenne hier das riesige Problem des Verbots bezüglich der Darstellung (représentation), bezüglich dessen, was man von einer jüdischen oder islamischen Welt ausgehend mehr oder weniger legitim (ein anderes unerhörtes Problem) mit „représentation/Darstellung“ übersetzen könnte.“

Tatsächlich spielt das sog. „Bilderverbot“ im narrativen Konzept sowohl der Exodus-Erzählung als auch der Position, die die Figur des Mose in ihr einnimmt, eine zentrale Rolle.


75 Eckart Otto betont gerade dort, wo Moses als Lehrer des Gesetzes auftritt, das Paradox, dass eine „antikönigliche Gestalt mit königlicher Funktion versehen wird“ (Otto, Deuteronomium. Bd. 1, aaO. [Anm. 31], 554) und zeigt, wie dieses Paradox gerade mit einer „kulturhistorisch entscheidenden Weichenstellung, der Lösung des Rechts vom Staat, verbunden ist.“ (ebd.) Vor allem die Konsequenzen sind hier politisch entscheidend: „Das judäische Gerechtigkeitsverständnis […] kann mit der Emanzipation vom Staat auch seinen traditionellen Charakter im Sinne der Sicherung des Bestehenden verlieren und […] programmatisch dem Bestehenden im Dienste einer besseren Gesellschaft entgegentreten.“ (ebd.)


steht demnach darin, dass die Gesamterzählung zugleich ein Modell der Kommentierung der Exoduserzählung beinhaltet – ein Modell, das in weiterer Folge natürlich auch auf die Gesamterzählung selbst anwendbar wird.\textsuperscript{84}


84 Bereits am Beginn der deutonomischen Exodus-Erzählung, in dem Moment, an dem die Mosereden an seinem letzten Tag eingeführt werden, spricht die Rahmenerzählung davon, dass Mose „began die \textit{Tora auszulegen (verdeutlichen, erläutern, erklären)}“ (Dtn 1,5). Dass der Wortsinn des verwendeten Begriffs auch den damaligen LeserInnen bekannt war, lässt sich anhand von antiken Übersetzungen und jüdischen Targumim zeigen. Vgl. dazu ausführlich: Eckart Otto, Mose, der erste Schriftgelehrte. Deuteronomium 1,5 im Narrativ des Pentateuch (2005), in: \textit{Die Tora. Studien zum Pentateuch. Gesammelte Schriften} (BZAR 9; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 480–489. Da am Ende mit der Auslegung des Mose nunmehr zwei Formulierungen der Exodus-Ereignisse innerhalb derselben Gesamtkomposition vorliegen, stellt sich unweigerlich die Frage nach ihrem Verhältnis zueinander. „Alles kommt im Narrativ des Pentateuch darauf an, daß die von Mose [gegeben, \textit{sic!}] Toraauslegung (Dtn 1,5) identisch ist mit der von Gott gegebenen Tora. […] Ausgelegte, d.h. von Gott offenbarte, und auslegende, d.h. von Mose mitgeteilte Tora (Dtn 4,44 ff.) sind identisch. Das Volk aber hat die Tora nicht anders als in ausgelegter Gestalt. […] Nur in Gestalt der mosaischen Auslegung und der an sie anknüpfenden schriftgelehrten Auslegung ist die Tora in Israel. Die auslegende Tora ist die Tora Gottes als ausgelegte Tora.“ (ebd. 488 f)
talischen Schrifttraditionen als Aufzeichnung eines bereits bekannten Wissens bzw. als nachträgliche Ausgestaltung eines gemeinsam geteilten Weltbils lesbar. Wie nun künftig mit einer solchen Kommentierung umzugehen wäre, ist damit noch nicht bestimmt. Es ist lediglich die Unausweichlichkeit angezeigt, mit der Differenz zwischen Kommentar und Kommentiertem aktiv und produktiv umgehen zu müssen.


b) Die Textualisierung der Macht

Im Folgenden wird eine für die politischen Konsequenzen des Exodus-Narratifs zentrale Passage, nämlich der Erhalt bzw. die Einführung eines neuen Gesetzes in der literarischen Darstellung der Szene der Gottesbegegnung des Mose am Berg Sinai, in ihrer doppelten Bedeutung zu lesen versucht: zum einen im Kontext ihrer Stellung innerhalb des Narratifs selbst und zum anderen in ihrer politischen Bedeutung im Sinne der Etablierung eines nicht-souveränen Legitimationsdiskurses. Die am Beginn dieses Kapitels gestellte Frage ist an dieser Stelle ja noch immer offen: Wodurch genau wird die Wirksamkeit der altorientalischen Königsideosologie, deren Struktur die gesamte abendländische politische Tradition hindurch rezipiert wird\textsuperscript{86}, ersetzt?

Das zentrale und letztlich auch namengebende Thema der jüdischen Tora („Weisung“), in deren Mitte das Exodus-Narrativ steht, findet sich in der sorgfältig entwickelten Darstellung des Empfangs des Gesetzes JHWHs am Berg Sinai (Ex 19–34). JHWH, der nicht-darstellbare Gott Israels, dessen Name in der jüdischen Kultur nicht ausgesprochen wird und dessen Namensbedeutung keine inhaltliche Identifizierung zulässt, sondern den Charakter eines „schon jetzt wirksamen Versprechens“ besitzt – „Ich bin (schon jetzt erfahrbar als) der, der ich (letztlich) sein werde“ (Ex 3,14)\textsuperscript{87} –, hat in der Hebräischen Bibel, insbesondere

\textsuperscript{86} Siehe dazu nochmals die Hinweise von Simo Parpola in Anm. 62.

im Narrativ des Exodus, ganz offensichtlich die Position der letzten unhinterfragbaren Souveränität inne. Doch was wird hiermit genauerhin zum Ausdruck gebracht? Worin unterscheidet sich der biblische Diskurs vom JHWH-Souverän von den anderen offensichtlich mythischen Traditionen der Antike? An dieser Stelle kann es, wenn man die Frage eines für die Gegenwart auch außerhalb religiöser Überzeugungen relevanten politischen und juridischen Grundlegungsdiskurses nicht aus den Augen verlieren will, offensichtlich nicht darum gehen, theologische Formulierungen und Überzeugungen der späteren Rezeption der biblischen Tradition vorauszusetzen oder einfachhin zu übernehmen. Zugleich aber kann es auch nicht darum gehen, diese Rezeption außeracht zu lassen, zu negieren oder zu verwerfen. Es stellt sich vielmehr die bereits aus mehreren

Blickwinkeln heraus formulierte Rückfrage, worum genau es im Kontext der geschichtlichen Entstehung dieses Narrativs eigentlich geht. Es gilt daher, das Narrativ in eben jener Bedeutung in den Blick zu bekommen, die es zu einem Grundlegungsdiskurs nicht nur in seinem geschichtlichen Kontext werden ließ sondern auch – so die These dieser Studie – seine politische Relevanz bis heute begründet. Diese Bedeutung „offenbart“ sich in jener Episode am Berg Sinai, die innerhalb der Exoduserzählung zugleich performativ die Offenbarung thematisiert, mit der das Narrativ schließlich selbst identifiziert wird.88

Moses Gottesbegegnung am Berg Sinai erzählt von jenem Moment, an dem der unsichtbare Gott, dem kein Mensch direkt zu begegnen und auch kein Mensch ins Antlitz zu sehen vermag, dennoch mit Mose in der Abgeschiedenheit des Berges in Kontakt tritt (Ex 19,20–25; 24,12–18). Mose wird damit als Vermittler eingeführt zwischen der Position des unsichtbaren Souveräns und dem Volk, das Mose


89 Auch von Mose wird Gott nicht „gesehen“, sondern nur seine Stimme „gehört“. Vom Volk wird in einer paradoxen Formulierung gesagt: „Ihr habt selbst gesehen, dass ich [JHWH] vom Himmel her mit euch geredet habe.“ (Ex 20,22) Israel kann also „sehen“, dass Gott spricht, im Unterschied zu Mose aber nicht verstehen, was gesagt
im Auftrag JHWHs aus Ägypten geführt hat. Wie bereits erwähnt, wird diese Mittelstellung der Mose, der das Land, in das das Volk schließlich einziehen wird und von dem her es bis heute seine Identität bestimmt, niemals betreten hat, im Exodus-Narrativ keinen Nachfolger erhalten, der diese Mittlerfunktion übernimmt.\(^9\) Sowohl die Position JHWHs als auch die Mittlerposition des Mose bleiben demnach in der Exoduserzählung singulär. Dies ist erneut eine nicht zu unterschätzende Differenz zur Königsideologie des Alten Orients. Es wird im Kontext der hier begründeten neuen Ordnung nicht möglich sein, die Position des Mose je neu zu besetzen während es stets möglich war und ist, einen neuen Repräsentanten (König) im Rahmen des gegebenen politischen Weltbildes einzusetzen. Auch aus diesem Grund darf man die Positionen des altorientalischen Königs und des Mose im Exodus-Narrativ nicht aufeinander beziehen. Wer oder was tritt dort aber dann an die Stelle des Königs?


Siehe oben Anm. 76.\(^9\)


93 Zur sublimen Bedeutung von Medialität in der Sinai-Perikope und letztlich im gesamten Exodus-Narrativ, siehe nochmals: Schaper, Theologie des Schreibens, aaO. [Anm. 89].
terschiedslos identifiziert wird,94 sondern vielmehr – um diese Formulierung hier erneut zu verwenden – daraufhin gelesen werden muss, was in ihm zum Ausdruck gebracht worden ist.95 Genau dies ist hier aber der Fall. Der gegenüber dem Alten Orient neuartige Bundestext Israels, das Gesetz bzw. die Tora Gottes stellt in ihrer textuellen Gestalt gerade kein unmittelbares Wort Gottes dar, sondern wird vom Exodus-Narrativ als nachträgliche Aufzeichnung eines von der Person des Mose gehörten Gotteswortes eingeführt.

In der weiteren Darstellung von der Zeit der Wüstenwanderung fungiert Mose dann immer wieder als authentischer Interpret dieses Gottesbundes, der damit offensichtlich nicht als „selbsterklärend“ charakterisiert wird. In der Situation der Wüstenzeit, also noch vor dem Einzug in das Verheiße Land, besitzt die neue Gemeinschaft demnach nicht nur eine Aufzeichnung des Gesetztes Gottes, sondern auch die Möglichkeit über Mose als Schreiber dieses Textes, dem die niederschriebene Botschaft zunächst persönlich vermittelt worden war und der weiterhin als Mittler zwischen Gott und dem Volk fungierte, nähere Auskunft über dessen Bedeutung und seine Konsequenzen zu erhalten. In diesem Zusammenhang wird es nun für die Gesamtdarstellung dieses Narrativs in besonderer Weise relevant, dass die singuläre menschliche Figur des Mose nicht in das Verheiße Land mit einziehen wird. Dieser Gottesbund, der zur juridischen Grundlage eines politischen Gemeinwesens und einer sozialen Ordnung werden sollte, ist – im Unterschied zu den Herrschaftslegitimationen des Alten Orients – nicht nur durch keinen menschlichen Repräsentanten vermittelt, sondern im neuen Land wird es auch keine unmittelbare Begegnung mehr mit der Mittlergestalt des Mose als göttlich legitimiertem Kommentator und Interpreten geben. Das einzige, was Israel gemäß dem Narrativ des Exodus im Verheißenen Land dann noch in Händen halten wird, ist jener Text, der die nachträgliche Verschriftlichung des souveränen Wortes Gottes beinhaltet.96

Politisch interessant werden die Konsequenzen dieses Narrativs aus dem Blickwinkel derer, für die das Exodus-Narrativ bzw. der Tora-Diskurs schließlich eine Gründungserzählung darstellt. Dies sind zum einen zunächst diejenigen, in
deren ursprünglichem geschichtlichem Kontext das Exodus-Narrativ einen durchaus realpolitischen Gegenentwurf zur altorientalischen Königsliste darstellte, und zum anderen aber auch diejenigen, die in einer späteren Rezeption auf dem Boden dieses Narrativs und in ihrem jeweils eigenen geschichtlichen Kontext daraus politische oder religiöse Konsequenzen zu ziehen beabsichtigen. Zu dieser zweiten Gruppe gehören natürlich zunächst einmal die sich daraus entwickelnden monotheistischen religiösen Traditionen, deren Verständnis von Religion nun aber deutlich abweicht von jenem antiken Religionsverständnis, das letztlich der Aufrechterhaltung der herrschenden Ordnung verpflichtet ist und somit mit der altorientalischen Königsliste strukturell vereinbar war bzw. diese legitimiert hat. Letztlich würden aber auch all jene Bezugnahmen auf eine Exodus-Politik hier subsumiert werden können, die sich am Exodus-Motiv auch in der Gegenwart noch affirmativ oder kritisch arbeiten. Sie müssten nun allerdings daraufhin befragt werden, ob oder inwiefern sie dem biblischen Exodus-Narrativ, auf das sie sich beziehen, tatsächlich gerecht werden.

Was also bleibt am Ende vom biblischen Exodus-Narrativ und seiner politischen Relevanz nicht nur innerhalb des ursprünglichen geschichtlichen Kontextes sondern auch für seine Relevanz in den politischen Herausforderungen der Gegenwart? Auf der Ebene des literarischen Narrativs, also innerhalb der Exoduserzählung selbst, ist das, was am Ende bleibt, nur mehr ein Text, nämlich jenes Gesetz des Mose, von dem die Erzählung spricht und das zudem in der Erzählung...
selbst – in den Mosereden des Buches Deuteronomium – eine Kommentierung und Interpretation erfahren hatte. Auf der Ebene der politischen Realität, in die hinein das Exodus-Narrativ entworfen wurde, ist dieser allein verbliebene Text das Exodus-Narrativ selbst. Es wird nun der altorientalischen Königsideologie entgegengehalten und diese damit in ihrer mythischen, herrschaftslegitimierenden Struktur entlarvt und dekonstruiert. Eine grundsätzliche kritische Frage bleibt aber noch zu beantworten: Ist damit am Ende nun aber nicht doch eine mythische Erzählung durch eine andere, alternative, aber ebenso mythische oder mythenähnliche Erzählung ersetzt worden? Abgesehen davon, dass sich in einer bestehenden Kultur ein mythisches Narrativ nicht einfach willentlich durch ein ganz anders gelagertes ersetzen lässt, wird durch das Exodus-Narrativ aber gerade auf der Ebene seiner politischen Relevanz die Struktur des Mythos unwiederholbar unterlaufen.99 Sowohl seine Funktion der Legitimation und Aufrechterhaltung des Bestehenden wie auch die damit verbundene Legitimation einer Institution, in der die letztinstanzliche Souveränität autoritativ repräsentiert und verkörpert ist, sind damit dekonstruierbar geworden.100


100 Vielleicht ist eben das die heute politisch durchaus positiv einzuschätzende Bedeutung der „Krise der Repräsentation“.
Position eines Textes bzw. der politischen Wahrnehmung der Bedeutung von Textualität. Doch was kann man hier im gegebenen Kontext unter dem Begriff Text verstehen ohne dazu lediglich auf etymologische Erklärungen oder auf voraussetzungsreiche Schriftverständnisse zu verweisen, durch die letztlich für die Fragestellung dieser Studie nichts geklärt würde? Und schließlich: Welche politischen Konsequenzen ergeben sich aus all dem?


101 Siehe dazu ausführlicher: Zeillinger, Dekonstruktive Bibellektüre, aaO. [Anm. 64], 143–164; Zeillinger, Geschichtliche Erinnerung und textuelle Autorität, aaO. [Anm. 64], 149–173.
nicht identifiziert oder mit einer identifizierbaren Repräsentation verbunden wird sondern stattdessen mit der symbolischen Repräsentation einer leerer Stelle; dass (2.) die Notwendigkeit sichtbar wird, die konkrete Textgestalt auf die unsichtbare Souveränität hin zu interpretieren; und dass (3.) die notwendige Interpretation die Aufgabe hat, anhand des Textes jene Autorität zu entfalten und zu konkretisieren, deren symbolische Repräsentation der Text auf performative Weise ist. Der Text nötigt also aus sich selbst heraus zu einer politischen Konkretisierung dessen, was er nur in der literarischen Gestalt einer symbolischen Leere als abwesende und daher nicht unmittelbar wirksame souveräne Instanz zu repräsentieren vermag.

Diese drei Punkte sind letztlich nichts anderes als eine strukturelle Beschreibung dessen, was das Exodus-Narrativ (neben vielen anderen Aspekten) der altorientalischen Königsseiteologie politisch entgegenhält und sich dadurch als Grundlegungsdiskurs im strukturell „monotheistischen“ Sinn empfiehlt:

1. Das Exodus-Narrativ entwirft nirgends eine unmittelbare Repräsentation der abwesenden Souveränität: Der biblische Gott JHWH ist nicht darstellbar, nicht repräsentierbar, sein Name wird nicht ausgesprochen und seine Benennung stellt keine Identifizierung dar, sondern besitzt eher den Charakter eines Versprechens. Auch Mose ist nicht das Pendant zum altorientalischen König und seine Mittler-Position ist singulär. Nicht erst die rabbinische Tradition, sondern bereits der Text selbst sind hier sehr deutlich (Num 12,6–8; Dtn 34,10,12). Seine Stellung kann von niemandem nach ihm im selben Sinn eingenommen werden. Zudem ist Mose im Moment der Rezeption – also in der Situation der Rezipienten „im Land“ –, selbst bereits abwesend. Damit bleibt die Position des Souveräns im Sinn des bisherigen Verständnisses von Repräsentation, insofern es die altorientalische Königsseiteologie und ihre

102 S.o. Anm. 97.
103 Siehe dazu oben Anm. 97.
weitere Geschichte bis in die Gegenwart prägt, *un-repräsentiert* und *unrepräsentierbar*. Die kulturellen Praktiken der Aufrichtung symbolischer Repräsentationen in der biblischen Tradition tragen vielmehr alle den Charakter einer *Leerstelle* (Bilderverbot, Nicht-Aussprechen des Namens Gottes, leeres Allerheiligstes im Tempel, leeres Grab, etc.).

2. Das Exodus-Narrative entwirft eine Vorstellung eines autoritativen Textes (als der es sich letztlich selbst erweist), der allerdings kein Autograph ist und der für seine Aktualisierung stets eines interpretierenden Kommentars bedarf. Das Narrativ entwirft sich trotz des Bezugs auf eine textuelle Autorität letztlich selbst nur als *nachträgliches Ergebnis* aber zugleich auch als *Vollzug* eines solchen Kommentars.

3. Die Funktion der Interpretation bzw. des Kommentars wird mit der Figur des Mose so eingeführt, dass der Interpret im Namen jener Instanz zu sprechen hat, die er mit dem Text verbindet. Der Kommentar muss sich auf das Narrativ einlassen, er kann nicht über es hinweg kommentieren. Damit ist ein Kriterium gegeben, das nicht nur Willkür in der Kommentierung sondern auch willkürlich liche Kritik als inadäquat zu entlarven vermag. Auf diese Weise wird die singuläre Figur des Mose zum Modell für alle späteren Kommentatoren und Interpreten im Sinn der biblischen *Schriftgelehrten*, also jener mit der Schrift vertrauten *Schreiber*, die den Text von diesem selbst her, das heißt von dem, woraufhin er performativ zielt, und nicht von einer an ihn herangetragenen Intention her zu interpretieren versuchen.

c) Die Repräsentation der Zukunft

Es ist gerade der zuletzt genannte Aspekt, der über eine Dekonstruktion und Delegitimation des Modells der souveränen Repräsentation hinausgeht und die Struktur eines politisch wirkmächtigen Gegenmodells zur altorientalischen Königsideologie bzw. überhaupt zur Repräsentation souveräner Macht erkennen lässt. Während das mythische Weltbild alle politischen und ethischen Entscheidungen am Rückgriff auf ein bereits (Vor-)Gegebenes orientiert und damit

105 Es ist auffällig, dass sowohl die abendländische metaphysische Tradition als auch der klassische phänomenologische Ansatz trotz der Einführung des neuzeitlichen Subjektverständnisses diese Orientierung am (Vor-)Gegebenen erkennen lassen und damit in struktureller Hinsicht mit dem mythischen Denken kompatibel sind bzw. in ihrem Denken mit der Struktur des Mythos, dessen Grundüberzeugung die einer trotz aller Spannungen einheitlichen Ordnung ist, in die der Mensch gestellt ist, offensichtlich nicht gebrochen haben. Erst jene sogenannten „nachmetaphysischen“, post-strukturalistischen und postphänomenologischen Denkrichtungen, in denen nicht nur die Unmöglichkeit, einen letzten identifizierbaren Grund zu benennen, konstatiert wird, sondern in denen diese Unmöglichkeit darüber hinaus auch als *Unterbrechung* der eigenen Dis-
strukturell an der Temporalität der Vergangenheit oder ihrer Repräsentation in der Gegenwart,\textsuperscript{106} ist das biblische Modell der Auslegung und des Kommentars an einer anderen temporalen Struktur orientiert, in der der Blick auf die Zukunft kulturgeschichtlich erstmals eine positive gegenwartsverändernde Bedeutung erhält. Diese Zukunftssorientierung lässt sich strukturell am besten mit der Zeitform des Futur II zum Ausdruck bringen. Israel wird auf das Leben im Gelobten Land nicht als einem zukünftigen Ereignis „vertröstet“, sondern an dieser – Vergangenheit und Gegenwart transformierenden – Zukunft ist das gesamte Geschehen \textit{schon jetzt} (d. h. schon vom Auszug aus der alten Ordnung an) ausgerichtet. Eine aufmerksame Lektüre aber zeigt, dass die befreite Gegenwart auch tatsächlich bereits von der Ordnung der Zukunft geprägt sein muss (auch wenn ihre „Vollendung“ noch aussteht), um die Wüstenwanderung zu beenden und den Einzug ins Gelobte Land zu vollziehen. – Doch was hat die Form des interpretierenden Kommentars bzw. der Auslegung mit dieser \textit{Zukunft-schon-jetzt} zu tun?

Das im Exodus-Narrativ repräsentierte Modell der Auslegung und Fortschreibung eines Textes unterscheidet sich grundlegend von der ungefähr zeitgleich eigenständig entstehenden Praxis der Kommentierung und Interpretation in der griechisch-römischen Kultur. Dort war die Kommentarkultur vor allem durch die Einführung der Kulturtechnik der Schrift sowie der Eigenart der Alphabetschrift angestoßen worden.\textsuperscript{107} Am Beginn dieser Entwicklung stand vor allem die Intention der Klärung von Widersprüchen sowie von nicht mehr verstandenen Begriffen und Zusammenhängen im Zentrum, nicht aber der Gestus eines konkretisierenden Umgangs mit dem Nichtdarstellbaren. Dagegen kommentiert bzw. interpretiert die Figur des Mose im Exodus-Narrativ nicht um Widersprüche aufzulösen, sondern um – anhand eines in der Erzählung eigentlich bereits vorliegenden (Gesetzes-)Textes – eine zukunftseröffnende Lektüre zu präsentieren, auf welche Weise das, was in diesem Text nicht einfach konstatiert sondern auf eine zu deutende Weise repräsentiert wird, zu verstehen sei, um damit die verheißene künftige Ordnung \textit{bereits hier-und-jetzt} in der jeweils aktuellen Situation sichtbar zu machen. Das Modell der Auslegung, das das Exodus-Narrativ entwirft, stellt also eine Aktualisierung und Konkretisierung dar, die über die gegebene Ordnung und das aus ihr Deduzierbare hinausweist auf eine \textit{durch und in dem Text verheißene} geschichtliche Zukunft. Die Einleitung und Fortführung der Deuteronomiumsform des Dekalogs, der im Bild der Exoduserzählung mit den beiden Tafeln, die Mose erhalten hat, identifiziert wird, aber
zugleich auch das gesamte *Gesetz vom Sinai* und damit die *Tora* repräsentiert, lässt diese Struktur einer zukunftseröffnenden Auslegung in kaum zu überbietender Klarheit erkennen.

„5 Und Mose rief ganz Israel zusammen und sprach zu ihnen: Höre Israel die Gebote und Gesetze, die ich euch heute zu Gehör bringe: ihr aber sollt sie lernen und achten, sie zu befolgen. 6 JHWH, unser Gott, hat mit uns einen Bund am Horeb geschlossen. 7 Nicht mit unsern Vätern hat JHWH diesen Bund geschlossen, sondern mit uns, die wir hier heute alle am Leben sind. 8 Von Angesicht zu Angesicht sprach JHWH mit euch auf dem Berg mitten aus dem Feuer. 9 Ich aber stand zu jener Zeit zwischen JHWH und euch, um euch die Worte JHWHS kundzutun. […]


Das Exodus-Narrativ liefert mehrere performative Hinweise darauf, dass es auf diese Weise nicht einfach eine mythische oder poetische Erzählung als Gesetzentwurf, sondern vielmehr als narrative Einführung einer notwendigen, an

108 „Die Tafeln konnten als so bestimmtes und geprägtes Symbol für die Offenbarung am Sinai nicht nur ins Zentrum aller möglichen bildlichen Darstellungen des Sinaiereignisses gerückt werden, sondern sogar zum Inbegriff der Tora und so letztlich auch zu dem bedeutendsten Symbol für das Judentum werden.“ (Dohmen, Exodus 19–40, aaO. [Anm. 72], 214.)


110 Einen deutlichen Hinweis auf den Anspruch der Realisierbarkeit der neu etablierten Ordnung gibt Mose in der Erzählung selbst, wenn er die „Nähe“ des Gesetzes
der Zukunft orientierten Haltung anzusehen ist. Diese Haltung würde demnach
darin bestehen, je neu eine interpretierende Konkretisierung (Auslegung) dessen
to formulieren, was sich künftig als ein Leben im Gelobten Land herausgestellt
haben soll, und die je gegenwärtige soziale und politische Ordnung daran auszu-
richten. Es handelt sich also um keine Zukunftsvorstellung, sondern um eine
schon jetzt wirksame und praktizierte Veränderung. Das entscheidende Kriteri-
um, das bei all dem im Zentrum steht, wäre – so die Spitze der gesamten Er-
zählung –, einer Souveränität konkreten Ausdruck zu verleihen, die als solche
nicht präsentierbar und auch nicht repräsentierbar ist. Das Narrativ stellt sich
schließlich selbst als eine solche aktualisierende Konkretisierung dar, wie an der
doppelten und miteinander verknüpften Einführung des Gesetzes vom Sinai er-
kenntbar wird. Dass es sich bei der „zweiten“ Darstellung der Ereignisse im
Zwischenbereich der Wüste111 – zwischen alter Herrschaft und neuer Ordnung –,
der zugleich als Ort einer neuen, zukunftsorientierten Art der Gesetzgebung
inszeniert wird, um eine solche aktualisierende Auslegung handelt, wird schon
dadurch erkennbar, dass Mose auf der Ebene der literarischen Erzählung etwas
zusammenfasst, das den späteren LeserInnen des kanonisierten Pentateuch aus
der Sinai-Theophanie (Ex 19–34) bereits bekannt ist, die bereits geschilderten
Ereignisse aber nun leicht verändert präsentiert werden. Dass diese Darstellung
aber auch in der realen Rezeptionsgeschichte zu einer aktualisierenden Ausle-
gung nötigt, erschließt sich – wie wir gesehen haben112 – aus der Tatsache, dass die
Brücke zwischen Mose Zusammenfassung und der früheren Darstellung der
Ereignisse von den biblischen Redaktoren durchaus bewusst und nicht aus
Mangel an Überblick oder konzeptioneller Kraft stehengelassen wurden und von
einer aufmerksamen Lektüre in ihrem Anspruch an die jeweilige Gegenwart
erhellt werden können. Letztlich ist es genau diese Gestalt des Narrativs – in der
die Brücke, Wiederholungen und temporalen Spannungen eine konzeptionelle
Rolle spielen113 –, die die Aufgabe der Grundlegung einer zukunftseröffnenden
Ordnung erfüllt und damit – im Bild des Narrativs – den Einzug in das „Verhei-
ßene Land“ ermöglicht.

Die am Exodus-Narrativ sichtbar werdende spezifische Temporalität ist nicht
einfach die der Vorblicke auf eine Zukunft im Sinne einer vorwegnehmenden

zum Menschen und damit seine Verstehbarkeit für jeden betont. Dieser Hinweis wäre
wohl als selbstkritisches Kriterium für jede Form der Rezeption und Konkretisierung des
Exodus-Motivs ernstzunehmen: „3011 Fürwahr, diese Satzung, auf die ich dich heute
verpflichte, ist nicht zu wundersam für dich und zu fern. 12 Nicht im Himmel ist sie, sodass
man sagen müsste, wer kann uns für uns zum Himmel hinaufsteigen sie zu uns holen
und sie für uns hörbar machen, sodass wir sie erfüllen können?“ (Übers. nach Otto, Deute-
ronium. Bd. 4, aaO. [Anm. 31], 2033, zur Deutung siehe ebd. 2071–2073.)
111 Otto, Deuteronomium. Bd. 4, aaO. [Anm. 31], 2050.
112 Siehe oben Anm. 74 und Anm. 83.
113 Siehe oben Anm. 30 und Anm. 31.
Antizipation (die sich der herrschenden Ordnung einfügen lässt), sondern lässt sich als Verzahnung von Zukunft und Gegenwart verstehen (und damit als Störung, Unterbrechung und Öffnung der Gegenwart) – im Unterschied zur Verzahnung von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit in den Modellen einer identifizierbaren Repräsentation von Souveränität. Die Funktion dieser Temporalität besteht dabei darin, der prinzipiell nicht-darstellbaren Souveränität einen gleichwohl vermittelbaren Ausdruck zu verleihen und damit nicht nur eine neue Ordnung zu etablieren, sondern die damit angezeigten Veränderungen bereits in der Gegenwart wirksam werden zu lassen. Diese Form politikrelevanter Temporalität entspricht jenem Zeitverständnis, das in zahlreichen zeitgenössischen philosophischen Diskursen gerade dort, wo die Etablierung einer politischen Orientierung ohne Möglichkeit des Rückgriffs auf ein letztes Fundament thematisiert wird, als Modus des futur antérieur bezeichnet wird. Damit ist stets der Gestus verbunden, bereits in der Gegenwart hier-und-jetzt eine Zukunft zu antizipieren, deren Veränderungen die herrschende Ordnung schon jetzt stören. Ein solcher Gestus lässt sich – trotz mancher möglicher Missverständnisse – in der grammatischen Form des Futur II durchaus angemessen zum Ausdruck bringen. Diese Temporalität des futur antérieur, die sich ausdrücklich reflektiert zumindest in den Arbeiten von Jean-François Lyotard\textsuperscript{114}, Jacques Derrida\textsuperscript{115}, Emmanuel Levinas,\textsuperscript{116} Alain Badiou\textsuperscript{117}, Jean-Luc Nancy,\textsuperscript{118} Judith Butler\textsuperscript{119} und Giorgio Ag-
amben\textsuperscript{120} findet und dort zumeist auch den Kern ihrer politischen Entwürfe prägt, wird zudem mit dem Begriff des \textit{Ereignisses} in Verbindung gebracht, das sich strukturell und temporal mit jenem Verständnis von Offenbarung deckt, das in den monotheistischen Text-Traditionen entfaltet wird.\textsuperscript{121} Um an dieser Stelle zumindest einen Ausblick auf diese Parallele zu geben, sei hier eine zusammenfassende Umschreibung des Ereignisverständnisses von Alain Badiou\textsuperscript{122} zitiert:

„An event is something that can be said to exist (or rather, to have existed) only insofar as it somehow inspires subjects to wager on its existence.“\textsuperscript{123}

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\textsuperscript{121} Vgl. dazu ausführlich Zeillinger, Offenbarung als Ereignis, aaO. [Anm. 13].
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„Since the event has no present and leaves no durable trace, the temporality of the event as such is necessarily confined to the time of a future anterior: thanks to a subsequent subjective intervention, the event „will have been presented“.“

Das Ereigniswahre, das sich in der herrschenden Ordnung weder unmittelbar präsentieren noch mit den Mitteln der gegebenen Ordnung repräsentieren lässt und dennoch als nicht-einordenbare Störung (Spur) diese bereits in Frage stellt, kann nur dadurch vermittelt werden und eine zukünftige Ordnung schon jetzt repräsentieren, dass das Wagnis eingegangen wird, dieser Zukunft schon jetzt einen bekenntnishaften, an der spürhaften Erfahrung der Störung zu messenden Ausdruck zu verleihen. Wird dieses Wagnis nicht eingegangen oder wieder mit einer präsentischen Repräsentation identifiziert, so findet diese Öffnung de facto nicht statt, sondern es wird neuerlich ein klassisches Herrschaftsregime – welcher Art auch immer – etabliert.


6. Auszug ins Reale: Die Struktur der Exoduserzählung und die zeitgenössische Politische Philosophie


124 Hallward, Badiou, 115 (Kursiv v. Verf.), mit Verweis auf Badiou, Das Sein und das Ereignis, 224.
125 „Ein Ereignis ist aber eine Störung der Ordnung der Welt […]“ (Alain BADIOU, Zweites Manifest für die Philosophie (Wien-Berlin: Turia+Kant, 2010 [fr. 2009]), hier: 85.)
Drei grundlegende Aspekte müsste jede künftige Politische Theorie, die das biblische Exodus-Motiv entweder affirmativ oder auch kritisch aufgreift, berücksichtigen, um das Niveau der biblischen Erzählung nicht zu unterbieten:

1. Der Exodus hat historisch nicht stattgefunden im Sinne eines Migrationseignisses in ferner Vergangenheit.
2. Das Exodus-Narrativ kann nicht auf eine mythische Erzählung, ein poetisches Motiv oder ein kollektives Wunschdenken reduziert werden.

Dieser letzte Aspekt ist der Grund dafür, dass ich das biblische Exodus-Motiv als höchst relevant angesichts der gegenwärtigen politischen Herausforderungen hervorhebe. Es wäre an dieser Stelle nun reizvoll, diese Studie in eine ausführliche Lektüre der zentralen Aussagen und der Performativität der monotheistischen Traditionen überzuführen und zu fragen, inwiefern den traditionellen Lektüren dieser Überlieferungen inner- und außerhalb der sich geschichtlich entfaltenden monotheistischen Religionen ein zusätzlicher Blickwinkel zur Seite gestellt werden könnte und wie daraus ein gegenwärtiger Ansatz politischer Theorie zu gewinnen wäre. Da ein solches Projekt an dieser Stelle jedoch nicht geleistet werden kann, muss ich mich auf die Hervorhebung der gewonnenen Kriteriologie, deren Grundzüge in den Titeln der Unterkapitel des vorigen Abschnitts formuliert sind, beschränken: (1.) Das Kriterium des Aufzeigens der leerer Stelle der

126 Das „Ohne“ in dieser Formulierung bezieht sich nicht auf eine simple Negation von Souveränität, sondern auf die Notwendigkeit, einen Diskurs ohne Rückgriff auf eine fassbare Souveränität führen zu müssen. Siehe dazu auch oben Anm. 21.
127 Zum Verständnis von Textualität im biblischen Kontext vgl. nochmals Zeillinger, Dekonstruktive Bibellektüre, aaO. [Anm. 64], sowie Zeillinger, Geschichtliche Erinnerung und textuelle Autorität, aaO. [Anm. 64].
Souveränität, (2.) das Verständnis der unhintergehbaren Textualisierung der Macht und der damit notwendigen Haltung der aktualisierenden Auslegung, und schließlich (3.) die Repräsentation der Zukunft, die weder in Gestalt eines Aufschubs oder einer Vertröstung noch in Gestalt einer eindeutigen Identifizierung gelingen kann, sondern stets dem Modus des futur antérieur verpflichtet bleibt, der auf das zweite Kriterium einer notwendigen „aktualisierenden Auslegung und Konkretisierung“ rückverweist.


Das Konzept der Leere, das die Position der souveränen Macht markiert, die nicht präsentiert und nicht repräsentiert, sondern nur bezeugt (Zeugnis, Bekennnis, Wagnis) werden kann, findet sich in zahlreichen sogenannten poststrukturalistischen, postphänomenologischen oder dekonstruktiven Zugängen zum Politischen. Eine Schwierigkeit der gegenwärtigen Rezeption besteht darin, den gerade im deutschsprachigen Raum durch zum Teil haarstrümmende Misslektüren verstellten Zugang zu diesen immer wieder in einer zu berücksichtigenden Performativität formulierten Texten wiederzugewinnen. Insbesondere in den Arbeiten von Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Giorgio Agamben oder Jean-Luc Nancy finden sich affirmative Bezüge auf das Unbenennbare und das Unrepräsentierbare, die nichtsdestotrotz in die Fähigkeit münden, einen ethischen oder politischen Diskurs grundzulegen.

– Alain Badiou Paulus-Lektüren128 und seine Ethik des Realen129, die auf seinem ausdrücklich politisch orientierten Ereignisverständnis beruhen, folgen in vielerlei Hinsicht jenem Zugang zum Politischen, den ich aus der Begegnung mit dem Exodus-Narrativ herauszuarbeiten versucht habe.

Ein politisches Subjekt bei Badiou entsteht dadurch,130 dass es einem „Ereignis“, das nur als Störung der gegebenen Ordnung bezeichnet werden kann, in einem nachträglichen interventionistischen Akt eine Benennung (d. h. eine konkretisi-

rende Interpretation, eine intervention interprétante\(^{131}\) gibt, die ihrerseits die herrschende Ordnung stört, in sie aber einen neuen Diskurs (eine „neue Wahrheit“) einbringt, der aus der Interpretation des Ereignisses politische Konsequenzen ableitet. Das Subjekt darf sich seiner Sache dabei aber nicht unhinterfragbar sicher sein, sondern muss seine „Treu zur Wahrheit“ im laufenden Diskurs bewahren.\(^{132}\)

– Giorgio Agambens Bezug auf die messianische Temporalität des futur antérieur hat ebenfalls in einer Paulus-Lektüre einen prominenten biblischen Bezugspunkt.\(^{133}\)

So lässt etwa Paulus' Verwendung der Formulierung hos mé, „als ob nicht“, in 1 Kor 7 („Die Frauen-habenden sollen sein als ob nicht Frauen-habende, die Weinenden als ob nicht Weinende, …“) im Kontext einer – in der theologischen Tradition oft im Sinne einer „kurzen Dauer“ missverstandenen – christlichen „Naherwartung“ erkennen, dass es ihm nicht darum geht, die gegebene Situation in irgendeiner Form physisch zu verlassen, sondern die Bedeutung allen Lebens und Handelns im Hier-und-Jetzt, von einer Zukunft her zu bestimmen, der ChristInnen aus ihrem Bezug auf das Auferstehungseignis, die Treue halten und auf diese Weise die Situation zu verändern.

– Emmanuel Levinas' Verständnis radikaler Alterität und ihrer Wahrnehmbarkeit im Phänomen der Spur als „dérangement der herrschenden Ordnung“ wie sie nach mehreren scheiternden Anläufen in seinem berühmten Artikel Rätsel und Phänomen (1965)\(^{134}\) entwickelt wurde und damit sein Spätwerk Jenseits des...
terschied zum altorientalischen Verständnis von Schrift als Aufzeichnung – identifizieren lässt.\textsuperscript{145}

Auf eine, all den hier genannten Diskursen gemeinsame und sie mit dem Exodus-Motiv verbindende Struktur sei zum Schluss noch verwiesen: auf die titelgebende Struktur des „Auszugs ins Reale“. Mit dem Begriff des Realen wird hier auf das Verständnis in der Lacan’schen Psychoanalyse verwiesen, in der das Reale niemals \textit{als solches} angesprochen werden kann, sondern allein dadurch, dass es sich der Ordnung der Vorstellung und des Diskurses, also dem Imagинаrem und dem Symbolischen entzieht. Das Reale kann demnach nicht eigenständig erfahren werden, sondern nur indirekt. Es ist nur \textit{innerhalb} des Imagинаren und des Symbolischen erfahrbar, aber dort als das, was \textit{nicht} darin aufgeht und damit die Ordnung stört.\textsuperscript{146} Nimmt man die Struktur eines solchen Diskurses ernst, so bezeichnet die Formulierung „Auszug ins Reale“ genau das, was auch das Exodus-Narrativ der altorientalischen Königsideologie und den daran anschließenden Traditionen entgegenhält: einen \textit{Exodus hinein in die Wahrnehmung und Anerkennung des Nicht-Fassbaren und Nicht-Repräsentierbaren}.


\textsuperscript{145} Vgl. zum Verständnis dieser Besonderheit von Textualität in Abhebung vom altorientalischen Verständnis von Schriftlichkeit auch Derridas Rekurs auf jüdische \textit{textuelle Performances}: Peter Zeillinger, “\textit{“(52) Leerstellen, die gelesen werden müssen, in: Matthias Schmidt (Hg.), Rücksendungen zu Jacques Derridas „Die Postkarte“. Ein essayistisches Glossar} (Wien-Berlin: Turia+Kant, 2015), 13–38.


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(Bekenntnisses, Zeugnisses) an eine Zukunft bindet, deren neue Ordnung es bereits hier-und-jetzt sichtbar werden lassen soll. Vielleicht ist dies auch die Motivation, die Levinas in einer Radioansprache die Formulierung aufgreifen lässt: *Die Tora mehr zu lieben als Gott.*

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The Task of Becoming Minor: On the Politics of Representation

Gerald Posselt

One of the key issues addressed by political theories on the Left is the question of how those who are excluded from the realm of political representation may speak out and make themselves heard. Referring to Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* – a text that illustrates particularly well the workings of representation – and to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literatures” – a term coined by Kafka – the article demonstrates that one way of coping with the difficulties of representation is to make a minor use of language. Contrary to the claim that politics is fundamentally about becoming major, I argue that the task of becoming minor is not only an essential element of emancipatory politics but also provides us with a criterion for differentiating between progressive, emancipatory forms of speaking out and their reactionary counterparts.

Kafka; Deleuze; Foucault; Politics; Representation; Populism


Introduction

The question of representation plays a prominent role not only in recent discussions focusing on the possibilities of political agency but also in the more general debates on the future of liberal democracy as such. In view of ever more trans- and supranational cooperations and parastatal entities that are neither democratically legitimized nor to be held accountable by traditional political procedures, representation as a fundamental principle of liberal democracies appears to lose its significance. Indeed, we seem to experience a severe crisis of representation. From the slogan of the Occupy movement “They don’t represent
us!” to the demand of right-wing populist parties to let the people speak for themselves via direct-democratic procedures such as plebiscites, the principle of representation as a fundamental element of democratic opinion-forming and participation is increasingly being questioned. More often than not, representation is either depicted as a distorting, patronizing, or manipulating instrument in favor of the ruling classes and the political establishment or rejected entirely. According to this line of reasoning, instead of clinging to the idea of representation, politics should be giving more weight to the views of the people and make sure that they are heard.

However, there seems to be a considerable difference between left-wing and right-wing political projects in this regard. While progressive, emancipatory approaches (such as labor movements, anti-colonial struggles, black liberation movements, women, gay and lesbian rights movements, or queer activism) focus on how to give a voice to those who are excluded from the realm of political representation and find themselves especially vulnerable to violence, poverty, exploitation, and discrimination (such as women, people of color, subaltern subjects, prisoners, “illegal” migrants, or refugees), right-wing populist and extremist actors try to short-circuit the representational process by claiming that they alone represent the “real people,” usually defined as a righteous and morally pure entity. In doing so, they increasingly appropriate traditionally leftist political strategies, appealing to the ideas of critique and emancipation, and presenting themselves as the “real victims” of the liberal regime of “political correctness” and of a “false tolerance” toward migrants and refugees. Former minorities, they claim, are now well on their way to becoming the majority, thus threatening the cultural identity of the autochthonous population. Examples of this kind of self-presentation as the “real victim” of liberal, humanitarian politics are rife. Think of white Americans maintaining that they are being turned into a minority in their “own” country, the “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident” (PEGIDA) in Germany, or the alt-right conspiracy theory about the “Great Replacement” – that is, the alleged plot of an organized exchange of the European population for Muslims by means of immigration and significantly higher birth rates. Such claims are regularly accompanied not only by the assertion of an ethnically and culturally homogenous people but also by the call for authoritarian leaders and law-and-order politics. To put it in a nutshell: Right-wing populist and extremist parties are quite successful in portraying themselves as socially and politically silenced, while in fact dominating the public discourse with their political agendas.

1 See Jan-Werner Müller, What is Populism? (Philadelphia, 2016).
In the light of the above, I will try to establish a normative criterion allowing us to distinguish between forms of speaking out and making oneself heard that we ought to support, and those we must reject. Against the widespread consensus that politics is above all about obtaining majorities, I will argue that when it comes to imagining emancipatory politics, we must also consider a particular kind of becoming minor. To do so, I will, first, discuss Deleuze and Foucault’s critique of representation and its shortcomings. I will then make a detour to Kafka’s intriguing as well as disturbing story *In the Penal Colony*. This text is relevant for my approach on several grounds: Even though it is *prima facie* a story about guilt, punishment, and redemption, it is, on closer examination, also a text on the complex workings of representation and the inevitability of speaking for and in the place of others. This becomes particularly clear in the ambivalent position of the European traveler who acts, in Kafka’s text, as a representative of a liberal, humanitarian worldview, while turning away with unease from the ordinary people whose language he does not understand and whose desire for authoritarian rule he rejects. Furthermore, written around the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the story describes a fragile situation of crisis and transition that shows certain similarities to our current globalized world in which the transnational exchange of information, goods, languages, and people goes hand in hand with the strengthening of national, religious, cultural, and ethnic fundamentalisms. In their study on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari speak of a crisis that “accentuates everywhere movements of deterritorialization, and invites all sorts of complex reterritorialization – archaic, mythic, or symbolist.” Today, this twofold movement of de- and reterritorialization is most evident in the triumph of right-wing populist parties and far-right groups in Europe and the United States, with, on the one hand, their claim to cultural identity and racial, linguistic, and religious purity and, on the other hand, their emphasis on strict border controls, anti-immigration laws, and national superiority. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literatures” – a term coined by Kafka – I will finally argue that the task of becoming minor is not only an essential element of any emancipatory politics but also enables us to differentiate between progressive and emancipatory forms of speaking out and their reactionary counterparts.

**The Role of the Intellectuals**

The intellectual’s ambivalent relation to power is the focus of a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze in March 1972. Under the title “Intellectuals and Power,” Foucault and Deleuze discuss the role of the intellectual in political struggles in the aftermath of the May 1968 events in France. Referring to the

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Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons, Foucault argues that the task of the intellectual is no longer to speak “the truth to those who have yet to see it” or “in the name of those” who are unable to express it; rather, the challenge is “to create conditions that permit the prisoners themselves to speak.”

What the events following 1968 and the subsequent formation of new political groups have shown is “that the masses no longer need him [the intellectual] to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he, and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves” (IP, p. 207). If things seem different, then this is because “there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network” (IP, p. 207).

In other words, the masses are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves and in their own name; therefore, intellectuals need to suppress the urge to function as representatives: “In my opinion,” Deleuze tells Foucault, “you were the first to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others” (IP, p. 209). Here, Deleuze not only points to the violent and oppressive character of speaking for others but exposes what, in his view, is the fundamental failure of the liberal model of representation. What is at stake is nothing less than a radical critique of every form of representation – be it at the linguistic, the epistemological, or the political level: “Representation no longer exists; there’s only action – theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays, and form networks” (IP, pp. 206 f.).

To put it briefly, Deleuze demands that we draw the practical and political conclusions from the epistemological insight into the end of representation as the central system of knowledge and classification: “We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this ‘theoretical’ conversion – to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf” (IP, p. 209). What follows from this is a radical shift in our conception of political change and transformation. While modest forms of political change merely modify the existing system of representation, the revolutionary practice breaks entirely with representation. “[W]hen people begin to speak and act on their own behalf, they do not oppose their representation … to another; they do not oppose a new representativity to the false representativity of power” (IP, p. 211); rather, they put an end to representation as such – as a theoretical and practical, and as an epistemological and political paradigm.

However, Deleuze’s rejection of representation and his juxtaposition of representation and revolution are by no means unproblematic. On the one hand, his
anti-representational stance presupposes that it is always possible to speak for oneself, without any form of mediation or representation; on the other hand, such a position assumes the unmediated self-presence of a popular will just awaiting its articulation. Note also that Deleuze’s dismissal of representation is not as clear as it may seem. When he rejects representation by arguing that “it is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts,” and that “all of us are groups [groupuscules]” (IP, p. 206), one might argue that representation has not completely disappeared, but rather has been transformed and modified: from an external relation between pre-established entities – such as the relation between a group and its spokesperson – to an ongoing process at the level of subject formation, which also plays a crucial role in the formation of political identities.\(^5\)

If this is the case, the problem is not so much representation as such as an all-too-simple notion of representation that negates and represses the constitutive role of representation in every act of speaking. Thus, according to Bernhard Waldenfels, the issue is not so much that we speak for or in the place of others as that we never really speak in the place of the other but always from our own place. For if every speech is addressed to someone and answers to a mode of being addressed, then it follows that in addressing and responding we necessarily assume the place of those we address and who address us. “Thus, Eurocentrism – like every other kind of ethnocentrism – turns out to be a repressed form of representation.”\(^6\)

There is a need to take a closer look at the complex workings of representation. This is all the more important as “the first step in the reversal of power and the initiation of new struggles against existing forms of power” is the struggle of naming and speaking out, as Foucault makes clear: “to speak on this subject, to force the institutionalized networks of information to listen, to produce names, to point the finger of accusation, to find targets” (IP, p. 214). This assertion, however, takes us back to the question of how this naming and speaking out might be possible for those who are systematically excluded from the realm of language and representation. How can those whose words are inaudible for us, or resemble more the speech of a madman than that of a human being, make themselves heard

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5 In this sense, Hardt and Negri are wrong when they, following Deleuze and Guattari, imagine a politics that simply leaves behind, or goes beyond, representation; they are right, however, to claim that we cannot go back to the traditional liberal model of representation. See Michael Hardt / Antonio Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (New York, 2004), p. 255.

– like the defiant answer of the condemned man in Kafka’s In the Penal Colony: “Throw your whip away, or I’ll eat you up?”

The Impossibility and Inevitability of Representation

Kafka’s In the Penal Colony can be read as a “post-colonial” and “post-representational” text in various ways. It not only features a penal colony marked by moral decline and the deterioration of its legal and juridical system; written in October 1914, only a few weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, and published in 1919, it also points to the ultimate failure of the imperial and colonial ambitions of the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. Right at the beginning of the story, Kafka describes a typical colonial scenario. A European traveler who visits a penal colony located in the tropics is invited “to attend the execution of a soldier who had been condemned for disobedience and insulting behavior towards his superior” (PC, p. 75). He is accompanied by an officer who meticulously explains to him the mechanism of “a remarkable apparatus” designed by the deceased old commandant for the purpose of execution. The condemned man himself, who is guarded by a soldier, appears to fulfill all the ambivalent stereotypes of the colonized subject. He is both resistant and submissively devoted, both childishly naïve and perfidiously tricky: “a dull-witted, wide-mouthed being with unkempt hair and a wild expression,” “a stranger,” not “a fellow-countryman and certainly not a person to arouse one’s compassion,” who “looked so submissive and dog-like that it seemed as if one could let him run free on the hillsides, and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to come” (PC, p. 75).8

7 Franz Kafka, “In the Penal Colony”, in: The Metamorphosis and Other Stories (Oxford, 2009), p. 80; hereafter abbreviated as PC.
8 This image of the condemned man is thwarted by his apparent will to knowledge, which follows an ostensive logic of gazes and gestures. Given the indifference of the soldier and the condemned man to the explanations of the officer – “for the officer spoke French, and certainly neither the soldier nor the condemned man understood French” – it is all the more striking “that nevertheless the condemned man made every effort to follow the officer’s explanations” (PC, p. 77), thereby imitating and parodying the movements and gestures of the traveler. “With a kind of somnolent persistence he kept turning his gaze wherever the officer happened to be pointing, and now, as the officer was interrupted by a question from the traveller, like him, he too looked at the traveller” (PC, p. 77). On parody and mimesis as colonial strategies of resistance, see Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’”, in: Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, ed. Stuart Hall (London, 1997). On a comprehensive “postcolonial” reading of Kafka see John Zilcosky, Kafka’s Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing (New York, 2004).
At the same time, Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* impressively unfolds the complex workings of representation, delegation, and speaking for others. Not only is the officer the “sole representative [Vertreter]” of the long-established execution procedure and “at the same time the sole representative of the old Commandant’s legacy” (*PC*, p. 86), for which he tries to win the traveler as an advocate and intercessor; he also stands and speaks for an apparently both archaic and modern version of punishment, speech, and writing that seems to anticipate not only the technological possibilities of memory, archive, and reproduction but also the technological machineries of the extermination camps of the 20th century. The troubles of representation and speaking for others are also reflected in the person of the traveler. Although “travelling simply as an observer and not with the smallest intention of changing the legal constitution of a foreign country” (*PC*, p. 86), he seemingly never speaks for himself. He acts not only as a representative and envoy of Europe and the project of enlightenment but also – whether he likes it or not – as a representative, delegate, and intercessor of the condemned man, the soldier, the officer, and the commandant.

In short, the traveler embodies, as it were, the scandal of representation, of speaking and acting for others, which is just as impossible as it is inevitable. For him, there is no neutral position; his speaking is always already – be it in the most banal remark: “yes, I observed the execution”, or “yes, I heard all the explanations” (*PC*, p. 91) – a performative act of judgment. Without actually speaking, he speaks for the condemned man; he judges and condemns (the officer) without being appointed as a judge; and yet at the same time he evades his responsibility by finally fleeing the island.

The main focus of interest in Kafka’s story is “a remarkable apparatus” (*ein eigentümlicher Apparat*). What makes this apparatus remarkable is the fact that it does not simply kill the convict, who does not know the sentence that has been imposed on him, but rather inscribes the sentence with fine needles upon his body in a twelve-hour procedure until death occurs. Thus, the act of inscription is at once the announcement and the execution of the judgment. This also means, however, that the act of inscription is a genuine act of communication; and as in every act of communication, “malfunctions do occur,” as the officer has to concede. However, these malfunctions can – in contrast to the many pitfalls of everyday communication – be “put right straight away” (*PC*, p. 76). In short, what makes the apparatus so remarkable (*eigentümlich*), peculiar, and worthy of being noticed and remembered, is its ability to fabricate a script and to create a memory. Here, it is important that we bear in mind the ambivalent meanings of the German *eigentümlich*. For *eigentümlich* (deriving from *Eigentum*, “property”) signifies not only “belonging exclusively (to),” “proper (to),” “characteristic (of),” “inherent (to),” and “specific (to)” but also “peculiar,” “singular,” “strange,” “queer,”...
“odd,” thus comprising both what is one’s own and its apparent opposite. Accordingly, the German eigen tümlich evades the opposition between the own and the foreign, the known and the unknown, the proper and the improper. Indeed, it seems to dwell in the very undecidability of these oppositions.

Thus, to be “in the penal colony” – either as a soldier, officer, or traveler – means above all to be exiled from home, from that which exclusively belongs to us and seems typical of us, from our own native language, so that, strangely enough, the all-too-heavy uniforms in Kafka’s story come to represent that which we do not want to lose contact with: “Surely these uniforms are too heavy for the tropics [Tropen],” said the traveller, instead of enquiring after the apparatus as the officer had expected. ‘Indeed,’ said the officer, washing hands dirty from oil and grease in a waiting bucket of water, ‘but they mean home; we don’t want to lose contact with our home country.’” (PC, p. 75) What becomes apparent here is not only the alienating and proliferating power of the tropics the colonizer feels entitled to control and dominate but also the disseminative force of rhetorical tropes. It is certainly no coincidence that the German Tropen means both “tropes” and “tropics.” In this sense, the penal colony is not only a tropical island but also an “island of tropes,” a place where no proper, literal language seems to exist, and where the persuasive power of rhetoric undermines any clear and distinct meaning and usurps every act of communication.

Indeed, all terms, figures, and personae seem to be inscribed into Kafka’s text in a twofold sense. At first sight, the officer and the traveler belong to two different epistemic systems and regimes, thus representing two conflicting worldviews: One is “the liberal, humanitarian outlook of the European traveler;” the other is “the officer’s fanatical, quasi-religious dedication to the torture-machine.”11 Put differently, we are confronted with the opposition between Occident and Orient, between reason and barbarism, or, as Foucault puts it, between, on the one hand, the “universal communication of knowledge and the infinite free exchange of discourses in Europe” and, on the other hand, “the monopolised and secret knowledge of Oriental tyranny.”12

At a second glance, however, it becomes obvious that the traveler and the officer share at least a common language. It is their discourse alone, the “vehicular, urban, governmental language” of the colonizer,13 that becomes loud and

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13 On the distinction between a “vernacular, maternal, or territorial language, used in rural communities” and “a vehicular, urban, governmental language” of the colonizer, that becomes loud and
audible; and only the two of them are able to switch between the different codes, languages, and systems. Thus, we learn that the language in which they communicate is French, although it is probably neither the officer’s nor the traveler’s native language. It is, rather, the dominant governmental language they mutually come to accept as lingua franca, which in turn is understood neither by the soldier nor by the condemned man (see PC, p. 77). Note also that their conversation encompasses the whole range of linguistic modes of expression, from eloquent silence to whispering to shouting, while the vernacular, territorial, regional language of the soldier and the condemned man remains an indeterminate muttering or soundless giggling, interrupted only once by the two men’s loud laughter, which immediately turns into a “silent laughter” (PC, p. 96). In other words, although the soldier and the condemned man are constantly speaking with each other, none of their words are audible for us or become effective. Within the hegemonic system of representation, their words are “considered null and void,” as Foucault puts it with regard to the division of reason and madness, “having neither truth nor importance, worthless as evidence in law, inadmissible in the authentification of deeds or contracts.”

**Insurrectionary Speech Acts**

Against this background, those rare moments in which the condemned man and the soldier dare to speak out become even more important. At first, this happens as a an absurd-comical and brutish act of resistance by the condemned man towards his superior: “Throw your whip away, or I’ll eat you up [Wirf die Peitsche weg, oder ich fresse dich)” (PC, p. 80); and then it happens again when the soldier, after the acquittal of the condemned man and the self-execution of the officer, addresses the traveler in an explanatory manner concerning the grave of the old commandant: “Here’s the teahouse. … The Old Man is buried here” (PC, p. 98).

Without doubt, it is the “impossible” insurrectionary speech act of the condemned man that is of particular interest here. When the officer states the principle of all his judicial sentences and decisions – “Guilt is always beyond doubt [Die Schuld ist immer zweifellos]” (PC, p. 80) – he expresses the ultimately unrealizable desire that there should never be any doubt – neither in the act of speaking nor in language itself. Speech is presented here as a quasi-divine performative act of a single voice that produces what it designates. “Other courts are unable to follow this principle,” the officer declares, “for they are made up of many persons” and are therefore ambivalent and “also subject to courts higher than themselves” (PC, p. 80). However, since no worldly court and no language – language of businesses, commercial exchange, bureaucratic transmission,” see Deleuze / Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, p. 23.

14 Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”, p. 53.
juridical or other – can ever fulfill this condition, speech and guilt are, from the start, intrinsically linked to each other. In other words, we are guilty as soon as we speak. Thus, the violation of duty of which the condemned man is guilty is less that he failed to do his service by falling asleep in front of the door of his superior than that he speaks, that he uses language in a way he is neither legitimized nor authorized to: “Instead of getting up and begging forgiveness, the man seized his master round the legs, shook him, and shouted: ‘Throw your whip away, or I’ll eat you up’” (PC, p. 80).

This speech act is disturbing in a twofold sense: Instead of begging for forgiveness, which would have been the adequate and appropriate reaction, the act encompasses a rebellious imperative (“Throw your whip away”) as well as an impossible threat (“I’ll eat you up”). On the one hand, the speech act of the condemned man is an act of resistance, suspending the logic and force of the military order at least for a short moment; on the other hand, it can be understood as an affirmative act of self-appropriation through which the condemned man assumes and resignifies the doglike position that is assigned to him by his superior. Thus, his impossible or catachrestic speech act undermines not only the relations of authority and power but also the limits between the serious and the non-serious as well as the human and the non-human.

What is unacceptable for the officer is not so much the disobedience of the soldier as the ambiguity and uncontrollability of discourse, the constant sliding of the chain of signifiers and the withdrawal of meaning in an open-ended process of substitutions. Without doubt, the language of the penal colony is a language of tropes, falsehood, delusion, and masquerade, but the real problem is not so much the possibility of falsehood as its interminability: the substitution of one lie for another, and so on indefinitely: “Only confusion would arise,” the officer justifies his course of action, “if I had summoned the man and interrogated him first. He would have lied, and if I had succeeded in refuting his lies, he would have replaced them with fresh lies, and so on. But now I’ve got him, and I shan’t let him go. – Does that explain everything?” (PC, p. 80) Of course it does not. But this is a rhetorical question, and the officer is not looking for an answer. For according to his deadly logic, the aim and end of punishment, as it were, is to put an end to language and speech itself, establishing an absolute and unconditional discourse that does not allow for any answer, contradiction, or talking back. Such a discourse would no longer be speech but writing – a form of writing that directly inscribes itself upon the body, without any mediation of the ear or the voice of the other. Therefore, according to the officer, it would be pointless and useless if not unlawful, to tell the condemned man his judgment, instead of hearing or reading it, “[h]e will feel it in his own flesh” (PC, p. 79).

However, and quite surprisingly, the very script in which the sentence “Honour thy superior!” is inscribed upon the body of the condemned man is not easy to decipher: “‘Read it,’ said the officer. ‘I can’t,’ said the traveller. ‘But it’s perfectly clear,’ said the officer. ‘It’s very elaborate,’ said the traveller evasively, ‘but I can’t
decipher it. ‘Yes,’ said the officer with a laugh, putting the case back into his pocket, ‘it’s not a script for schoolchildren’s copy-books. One has to read it over a long period. You would certainly be able to make it out for yourself in the end.’” (PC, pp. 82 f.) The reason for the illegibility of the script is that it has been decorated and embellished beyond recognition in order to prolong the execution. While the “real,” “actual,” or “proper” script (eigentliche Schrift) would kill the convict immediately, its excessive rhetorical embellishment makes possible a deciphering with closed eyes: “Of course it shouldn’t be a simple script; after all, it’s not supposed to kill immediately, but only within a space of twelve hours on average; the turning-point has been calculated to come at the sixth hour. So the actual script [eigentliche Schrift] has to be surrounded by many, many flourishes; the real script [wirkliche Schrift] encircles the body only in a narrow girdle; the rest of the body is intended for decoration.” (PC, p. 83)

In other words, because of the many rhetorical flourishes, the procedure is prolonged to such an extent that the sentence inscribes itself not only upon the body but also upon the mind of the condemned man, with its tropic-tropological turning point occurring around the sixth hour. According to this paradoxical logic, it is precisely the temporal deferral caused by the rhetoricity of the script that is the condition of possibility for deciphering its actual, proper meaning and, thus, for gaining knowledge and salvation without any mediation. “Indeed, nothing further happens; the man simply begins to decipher the script; he purses his lips as if he were listening. You have seen it is not easy to decipher the script with one’s eyes; but our man deciphers them with his wounds. Admittedly, it is hard work. He needs six hours to accomplish it.” (PC, p. 84)

Thus, the ultimate promise of the remarkable apparatus is that it might be possible to communicate directly through the materiality of the script and the body. This bodily script would not be a derived, secondary, or perverted form of human speech; rather, as a “sign language of the stronger,” it would be its most fundamental form.\footnote{Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden, 2nd ed. (München et al., 1988), vol. 10, p. 298. On a more detailed account on Kafka and Nietzsche, see Gerald Posselt, “Die Gewalt der Tropen. Sprache, Schrift und Einschreibung bei Kafka und Nietzsche”, in: Leib und Sprache. Zur Reflexivität verkörpeter Ausdrucksformen, ed. Emmanuel Alloa / Miriam Fischer (Weilerswist, 2013).}

Not surprisingly, Kafka’s writing apparatus recalls Nietzsche’s cruel mnemotechnics, which is necessary to create a memory for the human animal and to breed an animal with the right to make promises. Just as the sentence inscribes itself upon the body of the convict, until he recognizes and misrecognizes it as his own, “[m]an could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself.”\footnote{Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (New York, 1989), p. 61.} But while in Nietzsche this cruel and violent process ends with the sovereign individual, “the man who has his own independent protracted will and the right to make promises,”
“whose trust is a mark of distinction, who give[s] [his] word as something that can be relied on,”\(^{17}\) in Kafka we are confronted with a threefold speechlessness: the dullness of the “poor, downtrodden people” awaiting the resurrection of the old commandant and his authoritarian regime; the submissiveness of the soldier and the condemned man running behind the traveler “in silence, for they dared not shout out” (\textit{PC}, p. 99); and the apathy of the traveler who evades any kind of involvement by fleeing the island.

If we now return to the distinction between reformist and revolutionary politics as suggested by Foucault and Deleuze, the condemned man can be construed, \textit{prima facie}, as the man of action and revolution, while the soldier seems to arrange himself mimetically with the dominant regime of representation. But neither the soldier’s mimesis nor the condemned man’s catachresis are ultimately successful.\(^{18}\) While the condemned remains silent despite his verdict of acquittal, the speech of the soldier lacks force and power: he reports and describes, but he cannot produce or transform a situation. In the end, both are left behind in silence on the tropic-tropological island, without a language of their own. The only language they understand is, so it seems, a violent sign language of injuries. It therefore makes perfect sense that the traveler’s silent threat with a “heavily knotted rope” suffices to prevent them from following him, even though they would “still have been able to leap into the boat” (\textit{PC}, p. 99). In other words, the soldier and the condemned man have to acknowledge not the physical superiority of the traveler, but that they do not have a “proper” language to show the “signs of equality.”\(^{19}\)

This situation recalls Herodotus’ tale of the Scythian slave revolt as adopted by Jacques Rancière to illustrate the foundations of politics. After the Scythians fail to crush the uprising of their former slaves by force of arms, they lay their weapons aside and approach them equipped only with their horsewhips. Struck by this sea change, the slaves throw their arms away and flee without fight. Thus, all that is necessary for the Scythians to defeat their slaves is to “show the signs of their difference in nature;” for, what the slaves “cannot do is transform equality in war

\(^{17}\) Nietzsche, \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}, pp. 59 f.


The same holds true for the soldier and the condemned man. Of course, they speak in their vernacular, territorial, regional language, but their words remain either unheard or without effect. Neither in the repressive system of the penal colony nor in the liberal, humanitarian system of the European traveler can their interests and rights be asserted; and a new system is currently not in sight. We could even go a step further and say that it is solidarity as such that cannot be expressed, since there is no language in which it can be audibly articulated, an aspect that is also reflected in the helplessness and apathy of the traveler.

This seemingly aporetic situation also appears in the unsatisfying ending of Kafka’s story. Or as Kafka puts it: “Two or three of the final pages are botched, and their presence points to some deeper flaw [Mangel]; there is a worm somewhere which hollows out the story, dense as it is.” However, this flaw or insufficiency is perhaps not so much a flaw as an essential element of Kafka’s text in particular and of language in general. For it can be argued that without this insufficiency every meaning would be already fixed, every interpretation determined in advance, and every act of speaking up made impossible from the start. Thus, as outlined above, there would be no speech at all, but only the mere exchange of commands and injuries. In the final analysis, this means that Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* is a text not only about the impossibility and inevitability of representation and speaking for others but also about the impossibility of an “own,” “proper” language that could be fully controlled and mastered by us.

From Literature to Politics

One way to deal with this aporetic situation is to think of Kafka’s text as a paradigmatic example of a “minor literature,” a concept he outlines in a diary entry from 25 December 1911, and which is idiosyncratically adopted by Deleuze and Guattari in their study *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975). According
to Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature – or rather “minor literatures” (Kafka deliberately uses the word in the plural, “kleine Literaturen”) – is not simply the literature of a linguistic minority but the literature “which a minority constructs within a major language.”24 An example of such a minor language was the German spoken by the Jews of Prague in the Austrian empire, while Czech itself was a minor language in relation to German; “and Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew writing in German, submits German to creative treatment as a minor language.”25 This also means that the opposition between minority and majority is not just a question of numbers,26 as well as that there is no minor language as such: A minor language always only exists in relation to a major language that itself can become a minor language.


24 Deleuze / Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 16; hereafter abbreviated as K.

25 Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, 1987), p. 104. This double diaspora made the writing of the Prague Jews impossible in all respects. Kafka himself even speaks of three “linguistic impossibilities” that afflicted the writing of the Prague Jews: “The impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing German, the impossibility of writing differently” (Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, Letter to Max Brod, June 1921). Or in the words of Deleuze and Guattari: First, “the impossibility of not writing because national consciousness … necessarily exists by means of literature;” second, “the impossibility of writing in German,” insofar as their German was a minority language detached from its homeland (even though it was the language of a dominant minority, “an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a ‘paper language’ or an artificial language”); and finally, the impossibility of writing otherwise, “writing other than in German,” because they felt “an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality” (*K*, p. 16). In this context, Casanova underlines the significance of Kafka’s discovery of “Yiddishkeit” at the end of 1911 through the Polish theater actor Yitzchak Lowy (Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, pp. 269–273).

26 See Deleuze / Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 105: “Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language. … It is obvious that ‘man’ holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc.”
Subsequently, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate three main characteristics of minor literatures: First, in minor literatures language is *deterritorialized*, which is to say that language is detached from its supposed home country and subjected to a series of displacements and relocations; second, “everything in them is political,” because in minor literature “its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics;” and third, in minor literatures “everything takes on a collective value,” insofar as “what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren’t in agreement” (K, p. 17, my emphasis). Accordingly, minor literatures are literatures that deterritorialize language, that connect the individual directly to the political, and that – without assuming the self-presence of a speaking subject – produce “collective assemblages of enunciation” and “an active solidarity in spite of skepticism” (K, pp. 17 f.). Understood in this way, the adjective “minor,” as Deleuze and Guattari argue, no longer qualifies “specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (K, p. 18). Consequently, the task of writing, as understood by Kafka, is precisely the task of “becoming-minor;” it is to “make use of the polylingualism of one’s own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it” (K, pp. 27 f.).

This brings me back to my initial question concerning the problem of representation and the ambivalent role of the intellectual within political struggles. For it can be argued that the task of becoming minor applies not only to literature but also, more generally, to the realm of the political. As we have seen, however, Foucault and Deleuze denounce any kind of speaking for others as patronizing and degrading. Since the people can speak perfectly well for themselves, as they claim, it is rather a matter of creating the necessary conditions for this speaking by fighting the “system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge” (IP, p. 207). In the final analysis, this means, according to Deleuze, that we have to abandon representation as such and, instead, favor a concept of theoretical and practical action.

As has been shown, this account turns out to be highly problematic for several reasons: First, it presupposes the existence of a popular will that can be directly articulated; second, the people or the masses are imagined as a homogeneous, unified entity without ruptures and faults; and third, immediacy is viewed as a value in its own right, to the effect that what is directly articulated is considered

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27 See also Kafka’s phrase that “literature is less a concern of literary history than of the people” (Kafka, *The Diaries: 1910–1923*, December 25, 1911), which, of course, does not mean that it represents the people.

28 Consequently, the “intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself ‘somewhat ahead and to the side’ in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘discourse’” (IP, pp. 207 f.).
legitimate per se. Such a conception comes dangerously close to current emerging right-wing populist movements in Europe and the United States, which declare liberal intellectuals, the political establishment, and the censorship by the liberal regime of “political correctness” their enemies.

In contrast, I have argued that we cannot escape the process of representation. We always already represent others – whether we like it or not. Thus, the problem is not representation as such but rather its repression – either by rejecting the inevitability of representation and the concomitant responsibility it imposes on us (this is what the traveler does in Kafka’s In the Penal Colony by fleeing the island) or by assuming a discourse or a knowledge that appears as soon as it is freed from the oppressive power of censorship (this is what Deleuze and Foucault suggest). If, however, it is true that we always already speak on behalf and in the place of others and that we do not have at our disposal a neutral, quasi-universal language that would allow us to switch between different codes, idiolects, and languages without patronizing or silencing others, then it becomes crucial to make a minor or polylingual use of our language, even if or precisely because “it is a major language or has been.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, this means that we must strive “to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape.” In other words, what is at stake is the “possibility of making of [one’s] own language … a minor utilization” and to become “a sort of stranger within [one’s] own language” (K, pp. 26 f.), while at the same time resisting the phantasmagoric desire for reterritorialization (archaic, symbolic, religious, etc.) – as exemplified by the messianic prophecy at the end of Kafka’s story that promises its faithful followers the resurrection of the old commandant and the recapture of the colony.

**Toward a Becoming-Minor**

Against this background it now becomes clear that the concept of becoming-minor is not only directed against essentialist ideas of cultural identity and purity but also provides us with a normatively significant criterion for differentiating between emancipatory forms of speaking out and making oneself heard and their reactionary and reterritorializing counterparts. Progressive, emancipatory approaches seek to extend the realm of the visible and hearable for those who are

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29 Note that Benjamin – quoting Pannwitz – argues in his famous essay “The Task of the Translator” that the “basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. … He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language” (Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”, in: Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926 (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), p. 262).
especially vulnerable to violence and discrimination – not by simply expanding the scope of language, but by making a minor use of language, thereby exposing a strangeness and vulnerability inherent not only in each individual language but in language itself. In contrast to this, right-wing populist, alt-right, and far-right groups – despite their differences and occasional disagreements – ultimately share the same objective: “to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language” (K, p. 27). This attempt to assume at all costs a major function in language is nothing more than the self-destructive desire for a language in which every meaning is unequivocal and every statement instantaneously becomes law, without any mediation or representation – like the judgment In the Penal Colony, which is experienced even with closed eyes, because all know: “now Justice is being done” (PC, p. 87).

The disturbing ending of Kafka’s story makes strikingly clear where such a desire ultimately leads to – namely, to the self-destruction of the remarkable apparatus and its “sole representative,” the officer. The well-known statement “America First,” which undermines its claim to superiority as soon as it is asserted (otherwise, there would be no need to state it at all), is just one prominent variation of this desire. It is a desire that is usually accompanied by the aspiration to become invulnerable, which, because it can never be realized, in turn leads to an excessive heightening of the vulnerability of others. Bearing this in mind, we can see that the notorious claim of right-wing populists and extremists to freedom of speech and the “courage of the truth,” along with the claim that they alone are the mouthpiece of the “real people,” is not meant to give a voice to the people, let alone to those who are especially exposed to violence, disenfranchisement, and discrimination, but rather to totalize speech and language itself by short-circuiting the work of representation and translation.

Contrary to this desire for putting an end to representation as such and for assuming a major function in language, emancipatory politics must stress the task of becoming-minor. Here, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “becoming-minor” does not mean that we should seek to become a minority or join an already existing minority in a given society – for example, women, black people, Jews, etc. What is at stake is, rather, a becoming-minor that also affects the so-called “majority:” a becoming-woman that also affects non-women, a becoming-black that also affects people who are not black, etc. The same applies to minor languages: they are not simply sublanguages, idiolects, or dialects but the becoming-effective of a minor use of a major language that in turn affects the entire language. In fact, to dwell in a language that is not one’s own is not just a problem of

31 See Deleuze / Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p. 106, and Gilles Deleuze, “Philos-
minorities, especially immigrants and their children, “but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path?” (K, p. 19).

Surprisingly, however, Deleuze and Guattari locate the political potential of such a becoming-minor not so much in insurrectionary or political speech acts as in the literary works of authors “termed ‘minor,’ who are in fact the greatest, the only greats.”32 Thus, if we do not want to lose the political significance of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-minor, we also have to think of those forms of speaking up and making oneself heard that explicitly take place in the domain of the political. Possible examples of such a minor use of political language and speech are the public intonation of the American national anthem in Spanish by “illegal” immigrants in the United States or the use of the “human microphone” during the Occupy protests.33 In the first case, illegal immigrants, who do not have a politically audible voice, make a minor use of the dominant language not only by intoning the American national anthem in Spanish but also by problematizing the “We” of the nation as a plurality that needs to be renegotiated.34 In the second case, the task of becoming minor manifests itself in the productive performative contradiction that the joint practice of the “human microphone” both performs and names when the “I” of the speaker is echoed and amplified by the multitude of the crowd.35 What becomes apparent here – besides the split between the subject...
of enunciation and the subject of the statement – are not only the bodily and material conditions of speech that constitute every speech act as a bodily act but also the fact that my speech is only my speech insofar as it is always already the speech of everybody else. Thus, the echo of the multitude exposes, as it were, the split of the subject. Or to put this point in Lacanian terms: “language comes from the Other, and the idea that ‘I’ am master of my discourse is only an illusion.”

These examples also highlight that the task of becoming minor does not necessarily entail a micro-politics that is limited to particularistic power struggles. According to Oliver Marchart, such a micro-politics would be no politics at all, for “in order to be reasonably describable as political, a particular project has to possess the tendency [to] becoming-major, even if it will never be able to achieve the status of full universality … . An agent who aims for the opposite, meaning a particularistic project of self-minorisation, and eventually of self-ghettoisation, would effect a standstill in the movement towards universality and thereby induce the project’s resignation from politics.”

Even though I largely concur with this description, it is not an objection to the task of becoming minor. In fact, I want to argue that becoming minor, far from being a minority politics or a “particularistic project of self-minorisation,” is an essential element of any emancipatory project of political subjectivation, coalition building, and collective political agency. For it is only by making a minor use of one’s language that a claim to universality can be articulated without patronizing and colonizing others. In other words, the tendency of becoming major as a necessary moment of politics must, at the same time, be supplemented by the task of becoming minor, and vice versa. This also resonates with Judith Butler’s notion of cultural translation, as proposed in her exchange with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek. According to Butler, cultural translation does not mean the transfer of a specific concept of universality between different cultures, as this

Journal of Ontology, History and Critics 7(1-2) (2016): 1–13. The human microphone is a practice adopted by the Occupy movement after the New York City Council prohibited the use of microphones and sound systems in Zuccotti Park. Each sentence of the speaker is repeated and echoed by the whole group, while the participants of the assembly accompany the speech with bodily gestures to express and articulate consent, dissent, their wish to speak, etc.

37 Oliver Marchart, Thinking Antagonism: Political Ontology After Laclau (Edinburgh, 2018, p. 136); see also Oliver Marchart, Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben (Berlin, 2010), pp. 301 f.
38 In a similar vein, Žižek argues that “each particular position, in order to articulate itself, involves the (implicit or explicit) assertion of its own mode of universality,” while, in turn, universality is always already contaminated by the particular and constituted by implicit exclusions. See Judith Butler / Ernesto Laclau / Slavoj Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (London, 2000), p. 315.
would amount to the “use of the doctrine of universality in the service of colonialism and imperialism.”

Rather, cultural translation ought to be understood as the continuous “labour of transaction and translation which belongs to no single site, but is the movement between languages, and has its final destination in this movement itself.”

However, and in addition to, Butler’s account of cultural translation, the task of becoming minor, as proposed here, is not simply a movement between languages that has its final end in the movement itself. Rather, it is a movement or becoming that affects all languages involved. Furthermore, it is important to understand that no language, however minor, is immune to the tendency to become major, which, of course, does not relieve us from the necessity to counter this tendency. Various kinds of deterritorializations, as we experience them in the current era of globalization, tend to engender new forms of ethnic, religious, nationalist, or cultural reterritorializations. This is apparent in the sweeping electoral success of populist movements in Europe and the United States, the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, or the re-emergence of nationalism and independence efforts within the European Union. Consequently, the task of becoming minor, of making a minor use of language, is neither an achievable goal nor an end in itself, but rather a continuous reworking of language such that solidarity can be articulated.

As a result, we have to differentiate between, first, particularistic projects of self-minorization that cannot reasonably be called “political”; second, the tendency of becoming major by putting an end to language and speech – and, thus, to politics – itself; and, third, the task of becoming minor by making a minor use of language, even if – or precisely because – it is a major language or has been. This distinction is important. For if the only condition of politics were the tendency of becoming major, then there would be no way to differentiate between, on the one hand, progressive, emancipatory political projects and, on the other hand, nationalistic, racist, and xenophobic ambitions. If, however, we accept the proposition that becoming minor is a necessary prerequisite for any emancipatory political project, we might gain a criterion for evaluating different forms of speaking up and making oneself heard – even though the task of becoming minor cannot, by

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39 Butler / Laclau / Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 15.
40 Butler / Laclau / Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, p. 179.
41 Right-wing groups, presenting themselves as the sole advocates of free speech, usually reject, inter alia, guidelines for a gender-neutral language with the argument that such guidelines would impose a liberal regime of “political correctness.” This argument deliberately ignores that the spoken dominant or “official” language systematically silences large parts of the population; think, for example, of the use of the generic masculine in German or the term “man” in English, which signifies both the species in general and a male person. In this sense, guidelines for a gender-neutral language are, to a certain extent, an attempt to “institutionalize” a becoming-minor that, at the same time, must resist the tendency to become major by permanently reflecting on its own workings.
definition, assume the form of a political program or agenda. Thus, what is needed for a renewed political Left are not only new political alliances, strategies, and agendas – though they are, of course, essential to any reasonable political project – but also a political language – of both political theory and political action – that makes a minor use of itself.42

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Section V.

Rethinking Parrhesia. Theological-Political Considerations on the Present Crisis of Religious Representation

Isabella Guanzini

In the Old Testament, the figure of prophecy represents the protest against the political and sacerdotal power through a person who is external or excluded from the system. In Israel, sacredness and sovereignty separated themselves, not only allowing resistance against abuses of power but also giving the chance of another word of justice and truth. The first part of this contribution aims to show the role this eccentric word played in the first development of democratic ideals, as well as to emphasize firstly the institutionalization process and secondly the progressive exclusion of the prophetic function in the course of the history of Christianity. The second part of this article focuses on the meaning of utopian thought in Modern times, which does not correspond only to the secularization of prophecy (from prophecy to utopia) but also to its radicalization and its transfusion into a new political discourse, also beyond the Jewish-Christian tradition. The third part of the contribution deals with the political-economical monopoly of the present that radically transforms and pulverizes the meaning of both prophecy and utopia. With regard to this, however, the present condition does not seem to correspond exclusively to the mere exhaustion of them but also to their transformation into something new. The political-theological project of Pope Francis seeks to disclose a new prophetic horizon within the present crisis of representation, both of the Church and of politics. His pastoral vision aims to generate a new archipelago, both in Christian experience and in the global network, becoming a paradoxical symbol of democratic life in late-capitalist times.

Prophecy; Parrhesia; Utopia; Pope Francis; Futurity

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Introduction

The present crisis of representation can be fruitfully analyzed through a look at the Biblical awareness of the power of the word, as well as at the modern utopia and its tension towards future. Both of them are an expression of a particular form of representation, which has been progressively experiencing a deep crisis in the past decades, undermining the possibility to shape a sustainable socio-political development and to imagine a possible alternative horizon for democratic societies. In this regard, the crisis of representation seems to primarily deal with the increasing difficulty to critically discern and develop the inner potentialities of the present condition and to disclose new possibilities for living and acting meaningful human experiences. With regard to this, the main thesis of this contribution is that Pope Francis’ attitude in face of this demise of futurity and of the urgent challenges of our time of crisis seems, in a certain way, to renew and transform the ancient prophetic and utopian tradition, in order to prefigure new democratic alternatives and a new kind of representation.

Firstly, I briefly illustrate the historical and theoretical meaning of Israel’s prophetic tradition, in order to highlight the original and, in a certain sense, precursory democratic character of this Biblical experience. Secondly, I try to analyze the transformation process of Israel’s prophecy by comparing it to the category of utopia, which has mostly influenced the vision and construction of future in modern times. Finally, I aim to show how the pastoral vision of Pope Francis is trying to renew some characters of both categories, deeply transforming the figure of representation in the present time.

1. Prophecy

In the Old or First Testament, the figure of the prophecy represents the protest against the political and sacerdotal power through a person that is external to, or excluded from, the system. In the different phases of the construction of the nation, Israel’s prophecy constituted a very new element compared to the theological-political vision of ancient Egypt and of the Middle Eastern reigns, where divinity was identified with (political) power. “For the first time, in Israel, the justice, or the ‘law’, was subtracted from the power and placed in the sphere of transcendence: together with the idea of the covenant, of the alliance, Yahweh
becomes directly the guarantor of the social and political justice”.¹ This means that in Israel, because of the Lord’s covenant (berith) with His people, sacredness and sovereignty were separated: This separation between religious and political power (in all its expressions) corresponds to a crucial stage in the construction of our civilization, namely to the desacralization of the political power. Whilst the pharaoh incorporated sovereignty and sacredness into his own person, in Israel sacredness and sovereignty separated, allowing not only for resistance against the abuse and perversion of power, but also opening up the opportunity for a different word on justice and truth to arise. In light of this, the power of the prophetic word is not the result of an institutional-bureaucratic authorization that is the expression of the socio-political system, but the charismatic emergence of another representative and authoritative force.

This terrain for a different word corresponds to the scene and to the discourse of the prophet. The prophet is able to read the signs of the times from a new perspective beyond consolidated interests and represents the voice of God expressing the condemnation of injustice and the proclamation of a path of peace and redemption. Against this background, the difference between crime (against the institutional power) and sin (against God and His word of justice) begins to emerge. Consequently, there is another place or a different symbolic order, which judges human actions and confers them their true consistence. The figure of Antigone could be considered here as a significant paradigm of this separation as well. The institutional political and priestly power does not correspond to the only and ultimate representative word for the people anymore, because the word of the prophet expresses a new path of freedom and truth among the people.

“The word pronounced by a God, who has no name (the God of the Old Testament), does not identify itself with the dominant collective identity and with the positive law of the rulers, but it expresses itself potentially through all the members of the group, even if they do not reside in the palaces and temples.”²

A crucial text in the Old Testament Book of Numbers expresses this “different discourse” with special evidence and is of unusual significance. God provided Moses with a group of seventy elders with a special spiritual authority necessary to aid him in leading the people. But these elders of Israel, who have received charismatic power from above, lose the capacity of prophesying progressively, since the institution prevails. Eldad and Medad (Num 11:25–29), who are outside of the palace and of the temple – of the power – begun to prophesy among common people. The institutional power tries to suppress their voice, but Moses refuses it:

² Prodi 2016, 17.
“And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in
the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men,
answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou
for my sake? Would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, and that the LORD
would put his spirit upon them! And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of
Israel’’ (Num 11:28–30).

Eldad and Medad are not part of the institution, they live outside the realms of
power: but Moses does not interrupt their word, because of its prophetical force.
The “discourse of the prophet” – paraphrasing a Lacanian expression – is there-
fore a protest against any rigid closure and exclusion, since the Spirit of God
exceeds any institutional role or conferred assignment. The narration suggests the
promise and the hope that everybody may be true witness and bearer of the Word
of God.

At the same time, the prophetic word aims to contrast any violence, injustice
and betrayal of the pact between God and His people, and remains a bastion
against the anti-word:

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy
with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of
God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing
adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood” (Hos 4:1).

Here I want to emphasize the element of parrhesia this discourse possesses, as the
right/duty to tell the truth, at all costs. The word “parrhesia”, which is ordinarily
translated into English as “free speech”, appears for the first time in Greek liter-
ature in Euripides, and occurs throughout the ancient Greek world in its clas-
sical texts. Etymologically, the Greek verb “parrhesiazesthai” means “to say ev-
erything” and suggests the attitude of frankness and free speech. As Foucault
maintains, in ancient Greece there was no democracy without parrhesia:3 all
citizens had the same right to take part in the public assemblies (isonomia) and to
speak their mind (isegoria) with reference to reason and telling the truth (par-
rhesia). Euripides, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle considered the relationship be-
tween parrhesia and politeia to be an essential element in the Athenian con-
stitution as well as the characteristic ethical attitude of a good citizen. As a con-
sequence, parrhesia corresponds to a “politics of truth”, in which the structures
and rules of governance (politeia) and of moral activity (ethos) are deeply inter-
connected with the forms of truth-telling (aletheia).4 Furthermore, in his “ge-

3 Cf. Foucault 2011.
4 Foucault writes: “’parrhesiazesthai’ means ‘to tell the truth’. But does the par-
rhesiastes say what he thinks is true, or does he say what is really true? To my mind, the
parrhesiastes says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true
because it is really true. The parrhesiastes is not only sincere and says what is his opinion,
nealogy of the critical attitude.” Michel Foucault maintains that *parrhesia* is a form of discourse by “one who speaks the truth to power”, risking his own life. “Par-
rhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the ‘game’ of life or death”.

*Parrhesia* preserves, therefore, a special relationship to criticism, freedom and truth, which can be observed in the prophetical discourse as well. As a consequence, the contrast between Athens and Jerusalem, as Leo Strauss outlines it, seems more dialectic and differentiated, since it has had to take into account the figure of the prophet. The prophet is a Parrhesiastes in his/her telling the truth as a duty and a vocation, criticizing the dominant power and tradition as well as the perverse betrayal of the covenant with God.

In this respect, it is possible to argue that the prophetical word as a word of protest and criticism against the dominant dispositive of power *arose before de-
mocracy* and was akin to its first seed. Freedom of expression (*parrhesia*, that is the possibility to speak frankly and clearly) took place not only in the Greek *polis* in front of the *demos* but also in the word of God pronounced by a prophet, a word that did not identify with the dominant collectivity or the realms of power. As Paolo Prodi sustains, “this is the root of democracy in its actual positive expression, even if the way to technical solutions until the invention of the parlia-
mentary elective representation has still been lengthy and hard in the last two millennia”.

The development of prophecy is therefore closely intertwined with the possibility of contesting the system of power – as can be seen in Isaiah as well as in the figure of David, a simple shepherd outside the establishment, who contrasts the consolidated authority and becomes king of Israel and Juda. David represents here a particular figure, because he is an outsider with respect to the dominant institutions, who will then become the representative of royal power (showing at the same time the destiny of prophecy, as will be seen below).

Moreover, it could be possible to summarize the dialogue between God and His people through the voice of the prophets. A specific prophetic word dominates the dialogue between God and His people, namely “Why?”: “You, Israel, Why?”, or: “You, Lord, Why?”. God’s covenant with Israel represents “a surprising institution”, as Paul Beauchamp maintains: “It was made for the stability, it rests on movement. It reveals that the event and the institution are not op-

but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he knows to be true […] The ‘parrhesiastic game’ presupposes that the parrhesiastes is someone who has the moral qualities which are required, first, to know the truth, and secondly, to convey such truth to others. If there is a kind of “proof” of the sincerity of the parrhesiastes, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a parrhesiastes” (Foucault 1999).

5 Foucault 1999.
6 Prodi 2016, 17.
posable as two faces of the same sheet”. In this sense, there is no covenant without a historical event and its corresponding narration, there is no law without a history. The covenant can endure because God has given His word and the people answered with its faith (amen), but this alliance was often broken by unfaith and injustice. The tragedy of the prophet is that of a word that does not resound and does not open any new possibility for the future anymore. It is the tragedy of the profanation and evacuation of the Name (of God), which vanishes because of the voracity (“Bring, and let us drink”, Am 4:1), the avid search for money (“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail”, Am 8:4) and the silence of the people. But the force of prophecy vanishes when it enters the realms of power, corrupting and losing itself as the alternative word of truth. “Take with you words, and turn to the LORD” (Hos 14:2), says the prophet Hosea. These new words were able to recall the history of salvation and God’s gifts and thus to reactivate the covenant with Him. This history persists thanks to the reproach, the outcry and the protest of the prophets, so that, once they cease, the covenant will cease to exist.

The development of prophecy is strongly intertwined with the history of the Christian Church. The institutionalization of prophecy corresponds actually to the birth of the Church, where the word of the prophet becomes a collective discourse proclaiming the gospel of the Reign of God. In Christianity “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This incarnation of the word expresses not only the relationship between God and mankind, but also the effectiveness of the word and its generative and critical power. Jesus dreamed about a Church that had to be “institutionalized prophecy”, which had to generate a permanent dialectics between the religious sphere and the dominant system of power. Also referring to the synoptic recurrence “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mc 12:17; Mt 22:21; Lk 20:25), prophecy becomes a cultural and social structure keeping its distance from the political power and maintaining the dualism the ancient prophets introduced in Israel. This produces a progressive desacralization of political power and the beginning of a history of dialectics and conflicts between State and Church throughout the centuries. However, this word is not the word of a single person or authority, but the word of the whole community of believers, as the Apostle Paul maintains:

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would

7 Beauchamp 1985, 96.
that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying (1Cor14:1–5).”

Accordingly, prophecy becomes an assignment and a vocation for the whole ekklesia, which does not confuse itself with the secular power of the law but has to remain a critical instance for its drifts and abuses.

The institutionalization of prophecy – following in a certain way Ivan Illich’s approach – together with the progressive growth of the power of the Church has, however, profoundly transformed its traditional function, which produced a historical rivalry between prophetic word and hierarchic law (Mendicant Orders, Joachim of Flore, Girolamo Savonarola, etc.). Prophecy was gradually marginalized and tended to seek refuge in eremitical monasticism or to transform itself into a heretical opposition, beyond the institutionalized Church. At the same time, the prophetic function was degraded to the practice of interpretation or production of predictions because of its fundamental refusal to obey the institution. Moreover, we can interpret the present digitalization and virtualization processes as further signs of the evaporation of the flesh into an imaginary territory without bodies, along a series of avoided incarnations with neither prophecy nor future.

As a consequence, the prophecy-parrhesia was expelled from the ecclesiastic discipline and was radically transformed within the religious experience as well.9 The prophet was progressively considered as a fanatic and was marginalized, imprisoned or excluded from religious and public life. Together with the multiplication of seminaries and religious orders, a new insuperable barrier appeared between those who could speak in assemblies and those who could not. The reality and the force of “a word that was made flesh” has progressively turned (and perverted) into the reality of a flesh that was made word – that is a flesh that dissolves into thin air and progressively vanishes.10 The virtualization process of the present represents the fulfillment of this evaporation of the flesh and of the expansion of a word that is deprived of its substance and effectiveness.

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9 We can think about the birth of moral theology as an autonomous discipline, the growing development of religious orders and communities and their practice of obedience, the elaboration of models of perfect life, or the expansion of the spiritual jurisdiction of consciousness in the XVII century.

2. Utopia

Within this horizon, the utopia of the new political religions – until the ideologies of the 20th Century – assimilates the sacral element of the prophetic tradition in order to shape a new social and political program for the future of the masses. Under the gradual dissolution of Medieval Christianity, the prophetic tradition was progressively replaced by a new utopian thought which has a clear political intention. Utopia arose in Modern times as the possibility of projecting an alternative society to the dominant one. This transformation process was closely connected to the possibility of instigating a revolution, a revolt, or a coup in order to institute a new symbolic order and to found a new society. Here utopia does not only correspond to the secularization of prophecy (from prophecy to utopia), but also to its radicalization and its transfusion into a new political discourse, even beyond the Jewish-Christian tradition. In this sense, the Utopia of Thomas More (1517) divides two epochs not only with regards to the contents, but also with regards to its abandonment of any millennialism or messianic intention in the name of an ideal new mankind. More’s utopia develops within a cultural and political innovative constellation, while with Columbus, Machiavelli, Luther and Ariosto, i.a., the birth of modern consciousness and of the public sphere were opening up a new symbolic era.

Even if More’s Utopia follows the humanistic tradition of Christian universalism (à la Erasmus of Rotterdam), it differs radically from the ancient prophecy-parrhesia, since it crosses the confines of religious confessions to join the ascent of the public opinion and the press. The utopian function is a specific result of Modernity and differs both philosophically and theologically from the prophetic one, even if it is not possible to exclude a certain confusion between prophecy and utopia at specific times and under particular conditions.

Thomas More or Francis Bacon did not actually aim at founding Utopia or New Atlantis, but at elaborating regulative principles and ideas as well as at establishing new paradigms and possible horizons for concrete historical processes. Because of its effectiveness, utopia is an open-eyed daydream on the present situation of the epoch. Modern utopia deals with a rational as well as ironic construction, which critically investigates the contradictions of historical circumstances and does not presume a divine intervention in history interrupting the course of events. Utopia corresponds to the idea of a progressive historical development towards a certain future, analyzing forces and potentialities at work in the present in order to overcome the folly of wars and conflicts (Erasmus!) and to reach immanent purposes for the future. Prophets are not progressive pedagogical figures of an alternative sovereignty, but voices immediate a Deo, God’s words for the present. In this sense, utopia could be interpreted – following Carl Schmitt’s perspective – as the secularization of a theological category for (democratic)

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thought and action in modern Europe. “Utopia is secularized eschatology”, as Massimo Cacciari maintains, and it revolves around the relationship between politics and intellectual/scientific powers. It eludes the “economic” dimension of the instruments, of the dispositive, but does not contradict them, showing their ultimate potentialities and horizons for action.

On the one hand, according to Thomas More and Francis Bacon, Utopia seems to be a very concrete utopia, as a part of the world; in this sense, it seeks to identify and to realize hidden potentialities of the present, to fulfill them, prefiguring a new futurity. Ernst Bloch postulates a utopian impulse that governs and shapes everything that is oriented towards the future in life and culture: here utopia represents the imaginary place of human desires, dreams of a better life and imaginary impulse in unsuspected occasions. Against this background, a utopian aura seems to surround everyday life with its encounters, objects and gestures, which preserve traces and memories of happiness in a decayed present – as Proust and Freud show and practice in their method of free associations. In this regard, utopian aura corresponds to a “standing reserve” of personal and political energy between the individual and the community, unconscious desire and the conscious project of social transformation.

On the other hand, utopia contains elements of conflict and criticism of the current dispositive of power, under the perspective of a radical novelty. Considering this, the spirit of utopia has not a pastoral or idyllic character, but a negative one of demystification that aims at removing or weakening sources of exploitation and suffering in the present condition. In this sense, as Fredric Jameson sustains, “the fundamental dynamic of every utopian politics (or of every political utopianism) will therefore lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference, to the degree to which such a politics aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different from this one”. 

Is it still possible to speak about utopia here? Or would it be better to call it a prophetical intention? What does utopia mean? Does it represent another world, an alter mundus? In this sense, every project could be a utopian one, since it seeks to generate something new and does not simply aim to repeat or re-form the given situation.

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11 Cacciari 2016, 71.
13 Marcuse 1962, 18.
3. Today

The political-economic monopolization of the present is radically transforming and pulverizing the meaning of both prophecy and utopia. The scientific utopia, according to which science is supposed to lead to progressive harmony between men and nature, has failed: technology and industry have taken its place thus emptying its central meaning. Moreover, utopia as prefiguration or image of a possible synthesis between knowledge and politics seems to be destined to end. The “industrial system” has no need to imagine a future, but rather to plan and organize indefinable progress. With the emergence of Thatcherism, the crisis of socialism and the expansion of global late capitalism, the traditional utopian production seems to be exhausted.

Furthermore, the dialectics of the institutional dualism between sacral and political order, which has constituted the prophetic experience in the Jewish-Christian tradition, cannot be represented by the relationship between State and Church anymore. The deep crisis of legitimation and sovereignty, which has affected both the State and the Church over the last decades, has also exhausted any effective countervailing “parrhesiastic” power that should contrast or criticize them. The exemplary gesture of Benedict XVI, who in 2013 resigned from office, could be interpreted not only as a problem concerning internal ecclesiastical politics, but as a question of legitimacy and self-legitimation, which expresses the profound crisis of representation affecting not only the contemporary Catholic Church but all modern institutions. As Giorgio Agamben maintains, the pope’s meditated abdication is extremely relevant not only with respect to the present and the future of the Church but also to the “political situation of the democracies in which we live”, Agamben suggests that the resignation aimed to emphasize the importance of the crucial distinction between spiritual power (legitimacy) and temporal power (legality). The dialectics between natural law and positive law, legitimacy and legality and spiritual and temporal power – which has characterized many representations of power across the century – is being increasingly eroded. The present absolutization of legality in democratic societies, which reduces the principle of legitimation to legal, positive and procedural rules cannot adequately resolve (but, on the contrary, contributes to) our socio-political crisis that is above all a crisis of legitimation of our institutions.

However, within the Catholic world, the new Pontificate of Pope Francis, prepared by the extraordinary resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 2013, seems to have opened a new dimension of prophecy in non-prophetic times. He is not only a Pope from the periphery but also from the bowels, from the inner reality of the Church.

16 Agamben 2017, 1.
The main thesis of this contribution is that the prophetic character of his function primarily consists of his renewed interpretation of the relationship between prophecy and institution, which has taken shape in these last years and is defining a new dimension of the Church. For example, we can consider his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) that represents the disclosure of a new sociopolitical horizon within Christianity: This horizon is outlined, on the one hand, by the proposal of a religious ideal able “to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today’s world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel” (EG 88). On the other hand, the new symbolic order of this Pontificate results in a form of dissidence against the marks of dominion and colonization, produced by the Western political rationalization, by the financial dogma of the market, by the ideology of consumption, as well as by the nihilistic exploitation of being in all its expressions. Those are typical issues of the utopian discourse.

Pope Francis seems to embody a new prophetical voice within the system. In this sense, a new figure and a new discourse seem to be emerging. If utopia represents the secularization of prophecy, I propose to consider this new discourse to be a sacralization of utopia as a new form of prophecy.

What does this mean?

This Pontificate represents a new form of utopia in direct contact with the masses and their desires. In the Pope’s words and gestures, the social bond and the construction of a new humankind (of a new people, also beyond the Christian community, according to the Latin America theological tradition) acquire a religious character and assume a real utopian dimension. This utopian element does not correspond, however, to the essential intentions of the modern experience of utopia, since it does not emerge from the scientific/philosophical project of perfect harmony between human beings and nature, but from the form of popular devotion and popular religion. In any event, this new discourse recalls and re-activates the force of the prophetic parrhesiastic tradition with its perpetual invocation of absolute mercy, perfect forgiveness, radical care for creation, profound sensitivity for the fragility of life and fraternity without compromise. These prophetical elements of his pastoral vision, however, are not translated into the eschatological discourse of the city of God, but in the everyday experience of popular religiosity.

In this way, Pope Francis aims to rehabilitate the legitimacy of the “discourse of the Church”, namely the evangelium, in a new perspective. He is transforming and converting the theological eschatological tradition as well as the utopian function, since he inserts them in the constellation of the common experience, in order to imagine and realize a new poetics and aesthetics of human relations for the

present and for the future. Through this prophetic gesture, he released and regained the vis utopica in a rediscovered popular religiosity. He discusses the same crucial questions of utopian tradition (ecology, technology, economy, mankind) but he declines them in a radically new way, following and intensifying the proclamation of the prophet Joel in the First Testament:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).

In the awareness of the failure of the great ideologies and utopias of the past, this discourse opens up the vision of a “utopian fermentation” of religion: this does not correspond to a strictly prophetic tension, but to a popular one. Everyone could be a prophet – sons and daughters shall prophesy, old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions – in their own thought and practice of a new form of neighborhood, in the tender perception of the fragility of lives and in the everyday democratic construction of the common. The utopian discourse – within at least the European political-philosophical tradition – is mostly a discourse of the elites and of the avant-gardist intellectual leadership, who have, however, indulged in utopian dreams, sometimes justifying atrocities in human history. Pope Francis transfers the utopian potential to the demos and, at the same time, he embodies the spirit of prophecy. This prophetic spirit appears not to be the duty or the function of an outsider anymore but becomes the work and the impulse of an insider, of the leader.

Moreover, in a post-traditional and secular context, also a prophetic word requires further investigation as well as a critical and hermeneutical approach. The word of the insider has to be deciphered and interpreted, not only immediately assumed and practiced. Within our present socio-political constellation, the dialectics between institution and demos assumes a special meaning, since it risks being sucked into the enthusiasm of the masses at any moment. The spirit of prophecy shall not amount to an impulsive drive of the spirit that follows the prophetic words of the leader. This means that the realization of prophetic discourse needs to be accompanied by a continuous hermeneutic practice by the demos, as much as the spirit of the demos needs a Third, an instance, a word from outside, in order to shape its own tension. The force of the demos and the form of the prophetic word have to meet in order to open up new horizons of history. Pope Francis invites the whole Church and all cardinals and bishops to listen to and to enhance the humanistic potential of popular religion. In this sense, the (religious) authority abandons the logic of the sacral function outside the demos – or, paternally, for the demos (or even against the demos). At the same time,
however, it does not merely release or gratify the immediate tensions and drives of the *demos* that are always risking idolatry, fanaticism and mystification.

In this view, it is necessary to imagine a future on the threshold between the vision of the prophet Joel – your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions – and the risk of fanaticism and populism. The spirit of utopia and the dynamic of the alliance shall not separate like in the ancient prophetic tradition. This process has something in common with the democratic rule: without the *force* of the demos (with its contradictions, despairs, aspirations and desires), the *form* of democracy loses itself in the abstractness of procedures, arrangements and projects aloof from reality (opening the way to populist drifts). The democratic form without the force of the demos is empty (as well as irritating and exhausting); the force of the demos without the democratic form is blind (as well as irrational and even violent).

Within the present crisis of representation, in which either the mere form of procedural and positive rules disconnected from real civil life, or the demagogical and immediate ideal of a new (unpolitical) community unsuccessfully try to govern the societal uncertainty and global disorder, this Pontificate seems at least to perceive and to understand the forces and to give them a form, which means a future. He aims to recover the legitimacy of the Gospel (“*Evangelii gaudium*”) through a prophetic word that comes from the periphery, through a word of shepherds living with “the smell of the sheep”.18

“The Word of Christ is intended to reach out to everyone, in particular those who live in the peripheries of existence, so that they might find in Him the center of their life and the source of hope. And we, who have had the race of receiving this Word of Life, are called upon to go, to leave our confines and with zeal bring forth all the mercy, the tenderness, the friendship of God. Go and welcome: in this way the heart of the mother Church and all of her children is able to beat. When hearts open up to the Gospel, the world starts to change and humanity is resurrected.”19

In a post-traditional and post-patriarchal society, the institutional figure of the Pope as prophetic voice of the time could represent a possible answer to the lack of futurity and hope of the present only if it is able to intercept and support the unexpressed desires and expressed aspirations of the present time. As a consequence, in the time of the evaporation of authority, representation and legitimacy, the prophetic or the utopian function has to be thought and critically assumed together with initiatives and experiences of the *demos*, where citizenship, rights and alternative horizons could be imagined thanks to a new form of *parrhesia*. In times of particular fragility of the public space, of transformation of the

18 Pope Francis’ address to the world’s priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013.
nation state and of post-truth (or post-factual) politics, it seems necessary to rethink and support any alternative experience of participation and of protest, which expresses a special *parresiastic intention*.

The present Pontificate aims to give a voice to these new forms of *parresia*, which deal above all with a new encounter with the world and with the others, which seeks to involve all believers and even non-believers (EG 113) in the construction of the people of God. Following *Evangelii Gaudium*, it is possible to argue that the construction of the demos implies a fundamental change of perspective that is able to privilege the periods of process instead of the spaces of power.

“One of the faults which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. […] What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity” (EG 223).

The main problem does not consist of the vital spirit of the demos, which often assumes the shape of a parresiastic mediation, since it does not always want to be overwhelmed by the sum of its own passions. The problem lies rather in the possibility to convert the representatives of the governmental apparatus (such as cardinals and bishops, as well as parties and leaders), which tend to “crystallize processes” and “spaces of power” and to preserve a formal ecclesiastic identity without history and recognition of the concrete human experience. Such a rigid and defensive religious ideal corresponds to a “monocultural and monotonous” (EG 117) Christianity and to “a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures” (EG 49). The act of mediation does not seem to be accepted and executed by the system itself. The well-intentioned leaders, who aim to understand the dialectics between form and force, do not seem to have the consent of the skeptical (and cynical) ruling class, whose main problem, in this case, is not corruption, but rather a hidden but intrinsic suspicion toward the spirit of prophecy, which underestimates the vital (but also wild) potentialities of the demos. This is precisely one of the main factors of the deep crisis of representation the Catholic Church is faced with today.

In this respect, it is clear that the ruling class has not incorporated any interest for the future. When there is a lack of imagination with regards to the future, there is no space for the construction and the elaboration of the historical horizon and for the common good. Democracy becomes an intellectualistic design and the
vital spirit of the *demos* turns into an unleashing of archaic drives (that is the endemic risk of the new populist movements). In this sense, the main responsibility of the elites is to avoid extinguishing prophecy as well as confusing democracy with demagogy.

**Conclusion**

Considering this, the prophetic function corresponds to the preservation of a “time open to the future”, to the *unrest of futurity* – Habermas would speak about “die Zukunft als eine *Quelle* der Beunruhigung” (the future as a source of disquiet) for the present. This unsettling dimension aims to interrupt the foreseen and colonized future, that is only an extension of our capitalistic present and to overcome suspicion and cynicism. This represents a revolutionary process, which reopens a collective dimension that has been stuck in a repetition or checked by state oppression. The political field can therefore be understood as the *liberation of possibilities* of life that was blocked and made impossible by a determined situation. “Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people” (EG 270).

Even if our present society has convinced us that the true dis-alienation can happen only within private and individual’s territories, there is increasing evidence that individualization without any sort of representation has no possibility to transform personal and collective lives and to give a non-alienating form to the expansion of force. This conviction deals with a form of parrhesia that has to shape a new theological and anthropological vision for the future, both of the Church and of every human community:

> “Sometimes I wonder if there are people in today’s world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness. History will perhaps judge the latter with the criterion set forth by Romano Guardini: ‘The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age’ (EG 224).”

Only in the dynamic tenacity of this perspective, which aims to generate processes and not to occupy places, as well as to increase one’s own power, could it be possible to imagine new horizons in history where young people are not prevented from dreaming, and the old people may still have visions.

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20 Habermas 1986, 22.  
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This crisis of representation is a manifold phenomenon, with a very complex genealogy that affects almost every sphere of human life and coexistence in our post-modern society. The paper tries to sketch out a few aspects concerning the topic and cast some light on the deep changes brought about by the crisis of representation; changes and transformations that can be easily detected in the public sphere as well as in people’s everyday lives. Through the analysis of the historic genesis of European modernity, it is possible to understand the secular as a void of representation: the force that enables the dualistic play of political and religious power. Drawing on that, the paper suggests a performative understanding of religion as a practice of everyday life that outlines a possible framework for a post-representational order in time of the crisis of representation.

Representation; Religion; Public Square; Performance; Aesthetic

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Introduction

For a long time representation was a well-oiled mechanism of distinction and separation. As a force of separation, it required some sort of (institutional) mediation among the split elements of the whole. This is the tricky way in which representation self-legitimizes as a (necessary) power of cohesion, able to keep the whole in order. Through representation, every part is set in a due order, and this makes the coexistence of the many possible while allocating them to their proper space and time within the whole. Now, it is becoming clearer and clearer that representation, understood in this way, is experiencing an irreversible crisis, and with it the whole order that depends on representational tools.

This crisis of representation is a manifold phenomenon, with a very complex genealogy that is affecting almost every sphere of human life and coexistence in our post-modern societies (Raschke 2015; 2016). In this paper I would like to sketch out a few aspects concerning the topic and cast some light on the deep
changes brought about by the crisis of representation; changes and transformations that can be easily detected in the public square as well as in people’s everyday lives.

1. Representation and its Paradox

Let’s call it a sort of small phenomenology of the strange vacuum created by the end of representational order, while representation is still the structure for organizing and governing what is left of modern-liberal democracy. Such a void is the result of a synchronic asymmetry between the actual fading away of representation and the permanence of a representational structure as a bare scheme for holding things and people together. In this sense, representation still rules in (its very) absence. But is that not what representation is all about? Absence that just seems to be like a presence? Pure simulation, void filled with void so that it gives the impression of being something full and real? Representational order is the product of that dark matter which is imagination in its pure state. It makes believing that one is in a given place, where there isn’t anything or anybody but representation as nothingness. Representational order is like a belief system in which pure absence (representation in itself) turns into the confession of absence of any absence (simulation of presence that doesn’t exist at all, if not as imaged).

Representation works through a subtle mechanism of substitution held together by imaged comparison: it is as if it would be me; or: it is as if I would be. The belief in imagination conceals the way in which representation works, it makes the “as if” disappear: it is me; or: I am. But this elision of the “as if” is nothing more than an imaged one. Believed to be absent, the “as if” goes on doing its work, namely it represents as absence, something that is not here. It is for this reason that the fading away of representation is in fact a paradox. It seems that representation is still standing and shaping its own order, although this order is on the wane. In its crisis, representation is just doubling itself as the simulation of simulation.

In this sense, is it still possible to speak of a crisis? And, if yes, which is its underlying reason? Let’s be hypothetical for a moment. If representation is a belief system, if it requires some faith in the “it is as if it would be”, the crisis of representation is then, so to speak, mainly a religious/theological one. In western societies representation is crumbling under the force of its main by-product, namely secularization. With (religious) faith being marginalized in the realm of the public sphere, representation as an organizing form of the whole order of human life loses its driving force for shaping and holding together this space. Throughout modernity, the representational order has been constantly sawing the very branch it was sitting on. Without the force of faith backing up the representational order, representative democracy becomes just procedural and completely detached from the everyday life of the citizens. People do not believe anymore that it is as if they would be and as if it would be about them.
The exclusion of faith from the public realm also marks the end of the constitutional process that gave shape to the foundational institutions of European modernity. Institutions are, at their core, representative bodies; they funnel representational order as well as they subsist on representation. But the European constitutional process had something peculiar, a kind of counterbalance that kept the extension of representation to the whole of what we use to call the public square in check. In this sense, it could be helpful to follow the historic genesis of modernity as the Europeanization of the world. It would be an oversimplification of European historical developments and its constitutional process to say that modernity is merely a procedure of rationalization that leads to modernization overthrowing traditional systems of organizing and shaping societal life among many.

2. A Short Historic Genesis of European Modernity

This vision doesn’t adequately take into account the plurality of agencies and institutions that contributed to shaping European modernity, with its secular frame – which is that singularity I was referring to above. Paolo Prodi has convincingly shown that all fundamental traits of European modernity (birth of the individual, constitution of national states, confessionalization of modern citizenship and ecclesiastic belonging, development of a free market and economic system, and so on) are deeply rooted in a constitutive dualism of powers between the religious and the political (Prodi 2012). Such dualism characterizes the whole extension of European modernity – at an institutional as well as a socio-cultural level.

Brought about by the definitive crisis of the medieval synthesis, as a reaction to this crisis and as a way of dealing with the rise of new challenges and opportunities, the dualism of powers between the religious and the political was the innovative response to a human and social condition that wasn’t anymore just the simple reflex of a fixed and always already given cosmic order. Dis-ordering the cosmos meant at that time the appearance of the world as a fluid material that had to be shaped into an historic and changing reality beyond any bare givenness. Dis-ordering the cosmic status quo has also been possible, thanks to the theological systematization of the sacred into the sacramental order of the church. With this systematization, the sacred ceased to be an invisible and archaic force fluctuating everywhere (pre)determining the whole as frozen into an everlasting intangibility. The sacramental order bent the pervasive omnipresence of the sacred into a recognizable and manageable form. In this way, it detached the sacred from affecting the whole complex of human life, neutralizing the totalization of its power while limiting it within the boundaries of the sacraments.

Taming the sacred through the sacramental order has been a necessary premise for making an intangible cosmos into a moldable world. The sacramental con-
tainment of the sacred took away its absolute sovereignty over worldly space and time. From this moment on, the spatial and temporal configuration of the world was entrusted to the endeavors of human rationality and ability to shape a malleable and historic reality. The same theological force that set apart the sacred from affecting the whole of human worldly existence turned sovereignty into a question of contention between distinct institutions in a dialectical relation to each other. Throughout the modern age, the underlying reason for sovereignty as contention and search for legitimation had (and still has) a theological note.

3. European Spaces without Representation

This is the original frame of the dualism between the political and the religious, out of which European modernity and its foundational institutions have been made. It is this dualism of powers in its constitutional dialectic that made it possible to avoid a structural totalization (or a monopoly) of power. A simple distinction of powers within the political, without the underlying dualisms of powers between it and the religious, is not yet enough to avoid the perennial temptation tied with sovereignty: namely, to totalize the whole human order of life, subjugating it to the absolute empire of one, and only one agency of power. As an institutional dialectic, the European dualism of powers generated a space between the religious (church) and the political (national state) in which the individual, always to be understood within a network of social relations, could progressively pursue its goals and realize its freedom – a space that we could call civil society. Since the characteristic of this space is to be between institutional dualism and its expressions of power, it doesn’t share with them their representational logic. At its core, civil society can’t be represented: as such, it exists only as lived space inhabited by people interacting among themselves. In fact, when power tends to any form of totalization, its first move is usually to institutionalize the whole reality over which it exercises its sovereignty.

But there is another non-representational level of interaction within this European dualism of powers, beside civil society. It is about the force that each pole of the institutional dialectic has towards the other one, inside the whole order of human life. The force of the political and the force of the religious do not coincide with the institutions exercising them. As forces, they circumscribe a field that exceeds the institutional one. This field encompasses both institutions as well as civil society. It is a void space, fluctuating and indeterminable, in which the religious and the political as forces circulate at the same time – touching each other, colliding with each other, grazing each other. As pure dynamic of forces, neither the religious nor the political can leave a mark of ownership over this space: which consists only in the void of their passing-through. Under the point of view of an historical genesis of Europe, I would dare to call this space the secular: where the
force of the political and the force of the religious do not leave anything of themselves, but the impalpable trace of their pure passing-through.

Arising from the dualism of powers between the political and the religious, nestled at the level of a dialectic of forces, the secular enables politics to be (just) political and religion to be (just) religious. While the secular is the third force that prevents any exchange of place between religious and political power, it works as a force of limitation of the claim of sovereignty made on both sides. It is the limiting force of the secular that has enhanced the possibility to avoid a structural totalization of power and sovereignty throughout European modernity – eventually giving birth to liberal democracy. The secular, in this sense, doesn’t represent anything, neither the political nor the religious: it is the frail space of the void of any representation, the force of which enables the dualistic play of the institutional representation of powers.

As a state of suspension of any claim for absoluteness, the secular is the vacuum in which the contingent alterity of the other can be recognized without being represented and without the need to represent itself. The European secular works as a force of recognition beyond any form of (institutional) representation. But when the force of the religious is marginalized, and consequently the dualism of powers as dynamic of the European constitutional process fades, the secular mutates itself into something completely different; namely, into what we used to call secularization. With this transformation, the institutional play of representation loses its underlying non-representational force, and the whole of human life and interaction becomes a bare representational showing off: nothing more than representation of representation. While doubling the representational “as if”, secularization erodes the belief system on which representation itself is grounded. The crisis of representation, with its theological note, started well before representative democracy became the political system for governing the coexistence among the many in Europe.

4. Is a Post-Representational Order Possible?

For many reasons the order of representation has become dysfunctional, but it remains the only one with which we are familiar. It gives some guarantees, although it doesn’t operate well anymore. Before asking if a post-representational order is possible, and what it would be like, let’s take a glimpse into the work of representation. As already argued at the beginning, representation is a mechanism of distinction and separation requiring (institutional) mediation among the split elements of the whole. Bringing about separation within the whole, with the consequence that institutional mediation is needed for keeping it together, representation self-legitimizes as a (necessary) power of cohesion. In this way, representation works as a (self) legitimized power through which every split part is put in a due order. This representational operation of power makes the coex-
istence of the many possible through their allocation to a proper space and time within the whole.

In the representational order it is not necessary to negotiate the division of spaces, times, and functions among the many directly, because the power of representation is already in itself negotiated mediation. In this sense, representation organizes the whole without requiring any direct contact among the separated differences. They do not really touch each other, but do only as if they would touch; and they know (believe) that. When differences get in contact by chance, they always do that as already separated, intangible parts: heterogenous elements kept together by the fictional unity of the whole brought about by representation.

When people no longer believe in the representational “as if”, it entails the implosion of this order of separation marked out by allocation without contact and by mediation without relation. What we are experiencing today as crisis of representation is the legitimate touching among heterogenous differences, in their singularity, without any available narrative to tell us why every part, every individuality, has a reason to dwell in the same space at the same time. Commonality of dwelling among the many who are no more just separated parts as if they were a whole, but an indivisible whole brought about by the touching among them without representational boundaries. With the marginalization of any belief system, faith in the representational “as if” crumbles and the simulation of representation becomes a concrete, hard reality.

It is not simply that it all happened so fast and that we are not yet ready for a completely different order. The fact is that we go on organizing a post-representational order with a representational frame of mind and with the tools of representative power. For this reason, we need, on the one hand, to still build boundaries of separation (ethical, religious, economical, and so on) and, on the other hand, we shrink the whole to the point of coincidence with the part we belong to – so that we can feel whole again. It looks as if we are unprepared and unwilling for a post-representational order, even if the faith in representation abandoned us a long time ago. The simultaneity of representational interruption and continuity is explosive, and it should be handled with great care. With the crumbling of representation, the world seems to be like an orgiastic and primordial chaos where everybody and no one is in charge.

For this reason, we feel the necessity of someone able to restore the lost order, without caring so much about what kind of order we are looking for. We hold onto the disappearance of the constrictions implied with the order of representation so dearly, that we are ready to accept any order that just doesn’t look like a representational one (immediately correspondent to the emotions of the people). “When images become real and reality appears to be nothing more than shifting images, more and more people become obsessed with finding a firm foundation they believe can provide certainty and security in a world that often seems to be drifting toward more chaos. But the quest for self-certainty and security quickly turns destructive” (Taylor 2007 XVII).
Today, we constantly live in a contradiction of terms: on the one hand, we try to exploit what remains of the representational order; on the other hand, we try to maximize the individualistic advantages of a post-representational order. In this way, we are eating away the history we come from and the history we live in. The consumeristic paradigm is not only in full swing, but we have also decided to be subjugated to its bewitching power. It is the rise of a new kind of absolute sovereignty that has absorbed the political completely, left orphan of that dualism of powers that was constitutive in shaping the singularity of the European order of human life (Prodi 2009, 353–383).

We are dealing today with a deep paradigm shift brought about by the dysfunctionality of the representational order. It is not just about rearranging the pieces of a broken order in some way and restoring a sort of cohesion within the whole. It is rather about the radical question, whether it is possible to shape a brotherly order among human beings after the age of representation: being a shared humanity and not just the quantitative, exploitable sum of interchangeable individuals. Which kind of resources do we need today for realizing a non-simulated coexistence of something completely shared among the many in the whole and something that (as a whole) is proper only to some of them? The order of representation provided a hierarchical priority to the common good, while allocating particularities to their proper spaces and times, warranting them a representative presence as if they would belong to the whole. In this sense, the order of representation was a system of structured inequality for the sake of a simulated good of the whole.

De-structuring this system, so to achieve not only real equality but also actual brotherhood among the many within the whole, is the path towards a democracy to come (beyond the representational – that is, divisive – boundaries of its former representative realization). This is the impossible possibility (J. Derrida) given to us by the crisis of representation. Facing that, the citizen discovers themselves to be naked – left alone without any representational protection. Intimacy becomes public, and constant exposure is the ambivalent condition of post-representational citizenship. We constantly swing between a voyeuristic pleasure of exposed intimacy and the fear of being exploited in our exposure. Fear, anger, and aggression are the emotions produced by this state of permanent transition after the paradoxical end of representation.

5. Post-Representational Aesthetic and Religion

Completely absorbed by the power of financial economy, the political doesn’t seem able to find a way out of the critical condition of representation. But politics is not the only resource we can count upon. If we would look at aesthetic and arts, we could see that the paradigm of representation has been brought into question at least between the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century (Fischer-
Lichte 2004). This shows that arts and aesthetical reason often have a finer historic sensitivity than politics and mainstream philosophical thought. To analyze the overcoming of representation in aesthetics and arts would be very helpful to finding a way to a post-representational order of human life. This would require a length of work that is not possible for a simple paper. What I can do here is to sum up the underlying frame of the aesthetical overturn of representation in a few words. This aesthetical transformation of order is somehow at work in our post-representational condition of living together.

The key concept, that isn’t a concept at all but an actual act, is art as performance: eventuality void of any contents, an event that happens without or beyond any script. Performance requires the ability of an ongoing negotiation among the many without pre-given rules and external mediation: performing is the immediacy of negotiated mediation as event, that can’t be repeated as if there were a script foreseeing where we are headed for. Performing the immediacy of negotiation among the many shapes a common space, a community, where commonality doesn’t depend on elective affinities but only on the eventuality of being where the event happens (and it can happen everywhere). The performed community doesn’t have any legitimation but being involved in its performative eventuality. This kind of legitimation suspends the hierarchical allocation of space and time on which representation grounds as a power of division. Art as performance creates the condition for a shared equality among the many, whereas exclusion happens as free choice and it is never a predetermined structure: choosing to be elsewhere than in the event which happens, it belongs to the eventuality of the event itself. One is not obliged to take part in the event, and yet this is what allows its contingent eventuality from the very beginning.

Some key figures of this aesthetical overturn of representation migrated from arts into the very fabric of our contemporary western societies. The naked citizen of post-representational order is a life-long being on the scene, and it is up to them to perform their own citizenship (without any representational guideline). This is the human condition when the citizen is no longer a mere subject of state’s political power in form of representative democracy. It is a costly and demanding state, and the temptation to slip back into the easier condition of being subjugated to the power of representation always knocks alluring at the door.

How does religion fit into the synchronic asymmetry of representational persistence, despite its crisis, and the rise of a post-representational order? At first sight like a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. Religion as a system of belief, as doctrine to be held as true, remains caught in the logic of representation that also led to its marginalization on the fringes of the public square, until religion slipped into an inward realm outside the public. But this is not the only way to understand religion, singling it out of the whole of human life and social interaction. We could look at religion also as a performative force that shapes the practices of everyday life within a social and cultural situation: a peculiar practice among many others. As a performative force, religion would be more a concrete
style of life than a doctrinal assertion of belief as representation of the self and of the world (Theobald 2007). With regard to shaping a post-representational order, it would be interesting to think of religion as the performance of faith (which is something different from a confession of faith), as faith’s performative force realized in everyday practices of life. In this way, religion “describes not solely or primarily what happens in specially designated and consecrated spaces, under the authority of religious elites, but in streets and alleys, in the souvenir stalls outside shrines, and in bedrooms and kitchens; ‘everyday religion’ does not happen at times determined by sacred calendars or official celestial computations, but by the circumstances and exigences of peoples lives. The everyday religious is not performed by rote or in accordance with authority; it is improvised and situational” (Orsi 2012, 150–153).

If we consider this performance of faith practiced in everyday life as a complex, dynamic, and adaptive force, we could then say that religion is the most advanced field of our societies for dealing with the paradigm shift embedded in the crisis of representation. Of course, faith’s performance shares in the diffuse ambivalence of the post-representational order; but this commonality is an unavoidable eventuality. It is what makes the performance of faith an event that happens (in the sense of the post-representational aesthetic sketched above). According to M. Taylor “religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other hand, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure” (Taylor 2007, 12). In this sense, religion as a performative force of faith seems to be the most suitable way for managing the uncertainty released by the crisis of representation and for answering the questions rising from the novelty of a post-representational order of human life.

The performance of faith is a force able to shape meaningful human existence and, at the same time, to oppose any form of its coalescence into a given (representational) structure. As a performative force molded into practices of everyday life, faith is not at all representable. This malleability of religion allows not only to “modify itself in relation to changing circumstances” (Taylor 2007, 13), but also to figure out forms of meaning that can be “deployed to anticipate surrounding activities in a way that guides responsive action” (Taylor 2007, 13). As an adaptive and anticipative force of performance, religion could be critical for shaping a post-representational condition of human coexistence. If we look at religion without (representational) bias, we could find in it the hidden force we are looking for in order to figure out proper ways of dealing with the consequences brought about by the crisis of representation. A crisis we are all stuck in.
Post-Representational Order and Naked Citizenship

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Becoming Real in an Age of Shameless Lies

Sandra Lehmann

This article first examines the relationship between the postmodern deconstruction of representation and recent post-truth politics. It discusses to what extent the “hyper-reality of simulacra” (Baudrillard) has become an instrument of power in recent autocratic policies. In return, it explores an alternative way of thinking of “the real.” The basic thesis is that the real has its own force. Therefore, it is able to represent itself, that is, to reject certain signs as well as to demand them. However, the concept of representation proposed here does not fall back on the separation of subject and object typical for classical representation theory. Accordingly, the real is not to be understood as an objective counterpart to which we direct ourselves. Rather, it is a continuous founding process, more precisely, a surplus movement that lets us and all beings be. By genetically flowing through all things, it allows them to show themselves from themselves, thus counteracting the distortions tied to their appearing like a bad but unavoidable counterweight.

Postmodernism; Poststructuralism; Derrida; Foucault; Post-Truth Politics; Reality; Realization; New Continental Realism; Dynamical Metaphysics


1. Modernism and Postmodernity

As Pericles Lewis suggests in his Cambridge Introduction to Modernism, the crisis of representation is in the first place an aesthetic problem. Since Romanticism at the latest, words and images have stopped simply depicting reality. Since Romanticism at the latest, words and images have stopped simply depicting reality. Instead, they

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become increasingly self-referential by reflecting their depicting function. That is, the meaning of words and images is no longer generated by an “external” reference, but rather by the fact that they refer to each other, and they in turn represent this relationship. Georg Lukács already diagnosed the problems associated with this in his *Theory of the Novel* of 1920: “We have invented the creation of forms: and that is why everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must always be incomplete.”

Poststructuralist theory – from Saussure to Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, to name only the most prominent names – took up this specificity of modern literature and art most profoundly and continued it by transferring it to theoretical thinking. In this essay I will refer mainly to Foucault and Derrida. In *The Order of Things*, for example, Foucault explicitly places his archaeology in the line of Mallarmé’s poetry. Along this line he advances to the actual core topic of his study, namely how language, in the course of the Classical age and up to the 19th century, is no longer linked to signification, but rather to representation and discursivity; while in the 20th century it also loses its connection to representation and becomes fragmented.

Derrida, for his part, also maintains a strong relationship with literary modernism. Besides Mallarmé, his reference authors include Artaud, Blanchot, Celan, Char, and Kafka. Under the auspices of *différance*, he establishes that “signs represent the present in its absence; they take the place of the present;” in such a way that signs continually and persistently refer to more signs, while these signs again refer to yet other signs, and so on. Thus, what lies outside of signs, appears only as something withdrawn within signs referring to each other.

Within postmodern theory, the notion of the crisis of representation becomes even more complex because it offers both a comprehensive category of interpretation as well as serving as a critical instrument. As a *category of interpretation*, the “crisis of representation” not only transforms the problem of modern aesthetics into a formal problem that has to do with the theory of signs or discourse theory. Rather, it applies the aesthetic and formal theoretical problem to the modern way of life in general. From this perspective, the modern order of life is fundamentally characterized by a crisis of representation that extends from the individual relationship with the world to the political system of government. Baudrillard perhaps addressed this most consistently when speaking of a com-

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2 First beginnings can already be found in the Spanish Classical period. Cervantes and Velázquez are well-known examples.
prehensive “substitution of the real with signs of the real” or of a “hyper-reality of simulacra.”

By contrast, the “crisis of representation” serves as a critical instrument where it is used to question or even delegitimize modern subjectivity. One can think here of Derrida’s criticism of “Western logocentrism” and “the metaphysics of presence.” In return, he emphasizes language as a continuous process of shifts of meaning. Or one can think again of Foucault, who analyzes subjectivity as a specific game of signs organized by power. Subjectivity, once the promoter of the proud Enlightenment project, turns out to be a mere ensemble of knowledge, norms and self-practices that in itself lacks any substantiality. The historical a priori of discourse replaces the transcendental-subjective a priori, valid from Kant to Husserl.

2. Ugly Grimaces

It can hardly be denied that the “crisis of representation” was successful as a critical instrument, especially when it comes to processes of decolonization and the dismantling of gender hierarchies. Yet at present it may seem that this has come to an end, more precisely as if the critical forces of the crisis of representation have just exhausted themselves. Here I deliberately do not address the current situation of postcolonial studies or gender discourse, for this would require a differentiated discussion of its own. Instead, let us stick to the sphere of simple and relatively unmediated power, that is, the sphere of political power. In his 1995 essay Theorie des Ideologischen (Theory of the Ideological) Wolfgang Fritz Haug, who, from a Marxist position, remained critical of postmodern discourse throughout, speaks of the “age of digital processing” as the “Berlusconi age […], in which the media power is finally preparing to diminish the reality of the referent into a connotation of the imaginary.” In Haug’s sense, one could say that with Berlusconi the crisis of representation comes true completely, for it has now seized power over the political and social status quo. The reason for this is that those who have the unconditional “will to power” have appropriated the crisis of representation and turned it into a strategy for their own benefit. They have learned that the only thing that matters is to impose signs – words and

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images, and their spectacular mélange – against other signs. There is no outside of signs, for the opposition between the signified and the signifier has long since been deconstructed. What may lie beyond signification is strangely reminiscent of the medieval concept of prime matter. Having no features of its own, neither impetus nor effect, it can be relentlessly deployed for power-strategic purposes. Following Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* project, we can say: this is the “mere life” of us all, this is our *zoe*.

Twenty years after Haug’s essay, Berlusconism has reached the heights of world politics. In line with his politics of “alternative facts,” US President Trump has ceased to follow the imperative of credibility, respectability, and decency, which used to be binding for the heads of representative democracies. Other autocrats such as Putin or the boards of the major sports associations IOC and FIFA have never cared about democratic procedures anyway. However, their audacity has also reached a new level. Just think of how the IOC and the Russian state power under Putin dealt with the Russian doping problem during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi; not to mention other cases of ubiquitous corruption. What is disturbing is that the lies of these actors are well documented in the media and yet they continue to act as if nothing had ever been documented. In continuation of another motive from Agamben, this time from his commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, one can speak here of a suspension or depositioning (*Entsetzung*), namely of a depositioning of lie (*Entsetzung der Lüge*): Trump and Putin and others lie *as if* they were *not* lying; only that this depositioning has nothing to do with a messianic crisis of power. On the contrary, it serves as an unreserved exhibition of entirely mundane power with all its presumptuousness and ruthlessness. Therefore, linguist Ruth Wodak is right when she states that our age is less a “post-factual age” than an “age of shamelessness”: “Shameless lies are brought into the world […] without negative sanctions, even without apologies.”

In other words, we are in a situation where truth claims are simply ignored, because apparently, they can be simply ignored.

It would undoubtedly be too simplistic to assume (as some do or have already done) that poststructuralism is the ideology of neoliberal capitalism, which in theory dismantles all obligations in order to unleash the unrestricted play of powers and forces in practice. Nevertheless, it seems that poststructuralist discourse has contributed to the age of shamelessness by rejecting, like the current autocrats, all claims to truth in favor of a practice of depositioning. I am thinking here once again of Derrida’s early “affirmation of the play of the world […], the affirmation of signs without fault, without truth”\(^\text{10}\), as well as his later, often repeated proclamation of the abysmal separation from truth, according to which every presumed truth is at best a deceptive surface phenomenon. One can also

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think of Foucault’s replacement of truth by “games of truth”, which are not about “the discovery of true things but the rules according to which what a subject can say about certain things depends on the question of true and false.”\footnote{Foucault, Michel, “Foucault”, in: Foucault, Michel, \textit{Essential Works}, Vol. II, New York, The New Press 1998, 460.} But what about those subjects who consciously prefer the false to the true? From Foucault’s perspective, there is nothing to prevent the answer: they’re not lying, they’re just changing the rules of the game on their own accord. In a remarkable way they resemble the subject of Foucault’s later philosophy, a subject that transforms itself in such a way that “it cannot find itself again in a form that can be described as the effect of an external power.”\footnote{Saar, Martin, “Die Form des Lebens. Künste und Techniken des Selbst beim späten Foucault”, in: Foucault, Michel, \textit{Die Ästhetik der Existenz. Schriften zur Lebenskunst}, Berlin, Suhrkamp 2007, 321–343, here: 336. Own translation.} Don’t we meet here exactly the contemporary autocrats who, after many personal transformations, are finally independent of any external power? One might think of the winding lives of a Putin or Trump. There is much to suggest that characters like these two have every right to feel like the sovereign masters of an “aesthetic of existence;” hardly according to the intention of postmodern theory, but still according to the result.

Faced with these masters of the world and their shameless lies, I believe it is time to reinvigorate a discourse of truth. Truth here is primarily not to be understood as a formal-semantic problem, or a matter of truth-apt statements, but as something that concerns the core of human life. In other words, from the perspective suggested here, truth is only in a secondary sense an epistemological category but basically an ethical one.

This is actually not so far removed from Foucault’s “parrhesia.” However, I would like to add a material element, while Foucault’s approach remains merely formal. Since truth has to do with what is really the case, a discourse of truth is inevitably linked to a discourse of reality. Indeed, one can say that truth can only be thought of under the condition of a strong notion of reality. Reality is to be understood accordingly as that which exceeds all relativizations.

In the following I would like to outline elements of such a discourse that progressively binds truth and reality together. In contrast to poststructuralism, the basic thesis is that the real cannot be substituted by signs. Rather, according to this approach, the real has its own force; because it has its own force, it is able to represent itself, i.e. to reject certain signs as well as to demand them. The ethical dimension of truth relates to this claim for appropriate signs. There is an imperative of the real. The real demands us to be true; true in a threefold sense: in the sense of fidelity, precision, and sincerity.

Note that from this perspective, the representation – “true signs” – that the real demands of us lies before the separation of subject and object, which applies to classical representation theory. Accordingly, the real is not to be understood as an
objective counterpart to whom we direct ourselves. Rather, we should conceive of it as a movement that lets us be, just like all things, by leading us beyond what we are at present in a dynamic vertical sense. In fact, the real is so little at our disposal that in the final analysis, it could be said that false signs make us perish in the flow of the real, while true signs will save us.

3. The Emperor’s New Clothes

Let us start with an exemplary case, namely Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale The Emperor’s New Clothes, which is actually a parable. There’s an emperor who loves beautiful clothes. One day two fraudsters come to the city and promise him clothes of exquisite quality. However, they say whoever is stupid or unfit for their office cannot see the clothes. The emperor orders the clothes immediately, not least to test his highest officials. The fraudsters begin to weave the supposed clothes, but they take the silk provided for this purpose themselves and weave with nothing. Since the clothes consist of nothing, neither the officials, who are to supervise the progress of the work, nor the emperor himself can see the clothes. But since neither of them wants to be considered stupid or incapable, they don’t admit this. Rather, they pretend to be enthusiastic about the beauty of the clothes. To break the spell of deception, which is supported by everyone, it finally takes a little child; “the voice of the innocent [den uskyldiges røst],” as Andersen writes. During the public presentation of the emperor’s new clothes, the child exclaims: “But he has nothing on at all [men han har jo ikke noget på]!” Andersen’s fairy tale ends with a literal and very democratic uncovering of the logic of power: “‘But he has nothing on at all!’ cried the whole people at last. That made a deep impression upon the emperor, for it seemed to him that they were right; but he thought to himself, ‘Now I must bear up to the end.’ And the chamberlains walked with still greater dignity, as if they carried the train which did not exist.”

Andersen’s fairy tale very clearly refutes Foucault’s assumption that it is games of truth that decide what is true or false and what exists or does not exist accordingly. Of course, the fraudsters who weave with nothing and pass off the result of their weaving art as something are playing a game of truth. They create a situation of speech – of “veridiction”, as Foucault calls it – in which the emperor, his officials and at first also the people declare existent what does not exist. Yet this truth game, which is actually about deception and self-deception, cannot be persevered. However, the reason is not, as the late Foucault apparently assumes,

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13 In Andersen’s original text, it reads: “‘Han har jo ikke noget på!’ råbte til sidst hele folket. Og det krobb i kejseren, thi han syntes, de havde ret, men han tænkte som så: ‘nu må jeg holde processen ud’. Og så holdt han sig endnu stoltere, og kammerherrerne gik og bar på slæbet, som der slet ikke var.” Andersen, Hans-Christian: The Emperor’s New Suit.
that individual members of society change in such a way that the rules of the game of truth also change. Rather, the situation changes abruptly in Andersen’s fairy tale and through an intervention from the outermost edge of society, where other games, not truth games, are played. From the perspective of the child, the socially constituted meanings are irrelevant. They collapse in on themselves and the truth emerges: the emperor is naked. There are no new clothes.

There can be no doubt that the case from Andersen’s fairy tale is a very simple case, and there are undoubtedly cases that are not so easy to resolve. The question of what gender designations really refer to is a good example. It is therefore advisable to distinguish exactly from case to case. Nevertheless, there seems to be an excessive remainder, an overflowing surplus of the real, even in cases that are overdetermined by a game of truth, so to speak, and where meanings seem to result solely from discursive construction. For instance, and to stick to the example, when people cannot bear their gender role, when they suffer from it, and at least know “I’m not a woman/I’m not a man.”

Let me pursue this thought. In fact, the question of the real seems to be exactly about this surplus. It is something that evades signs and meanings; yet it aims at the sign, *the true sign*, to show that it itself, the real, is there. The next section will focus on three aspects of a phenomenology of the real to support this notion.

4. A Short Phenomenology of the Real

I speak of a phenomenology of the real because, following Heidegger’s early fundamental ontology, or hermeneutic phenomenology, I assume that what we are dealing with, the “things” or phenomena, is “that which shows itself in itself”\(^{14}\) and accordingly “shows itself *from* itself.”\(^{15}\) It is another matter that phenomenological thinking, including Heidegger, has not adequately addressed the self-giving of phenomena for a long time. Jean-Luc Marion’s writings have seminal significance not least against this background.

Three aspects then. *First aspect*: As noted, under the wrong discursive conditions, the real appears as an excessive remainder, an overflowing surplus. A primary indicator of this is that the real appears as resistance against what misses the real itself, be it the wrong discourse or the wrong interpretation or the wrong sign. It follows from this resistance that the wrong is always connected with an effort. The wrong must constantly assert itself against the resistance of the real, and this constant coercion to ignore what is real is eating away at the wrong or at those who support it. One could certainly show this, albeit in a more detailed discussion, for the wrong that arises from lack of wit or inattentiveness. The simplest and clearest example, however, is exactly what interests us, namely lies.

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\(^{15}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58; my emphasis.
In this case we can even refer to Nietzsche, who wrote about the lie in *Human, All Too Human*: “Why do people almost always tell the truth in everyday life? – Certainly not because a god has forbidden lying. But [...] because it is easier; for lies inquire inventiveness, dissimulation, and memory [...] anyone who tells a lie seldom notices the heavy burden that he has taken on; in order to maintain a lie, he must invent twenty others.”  

The force of the real extends to the point where lies make people sick. People suffer psychophysically from lies, especially if they support the lies against their own will. Or, to name another case, political tyranny with its dishonesty and compulsion to conceal destroys entire societies.

The resistance of the real is important not least because it contradicts the poststructuralist reductionism of all that concerns us into the signifier. The resistance of the real against the lie shows: something is pervading our lives, which is not constituted by signs. Rather, it works independently in the signs, also in such a way that it works against the signs when they distort it. The trace is not, as Derrida suggests, “the origin of the origin” of what was actually never there. Rather, it indeed points to something; something one can even call the “thing itself.”

However, – the second aspect – how should we understand the “thing itself”? In fact, I agree with Derrida and others that a simple metaphysics of presence is misleading. This refers both to the notion that our ideas are based on fixed things or substances as well as that the real is what is fully indicated by concepts. I will expand on the relationship of the real to concepts in the last section. Let us note at this juncture that the resistance of the real nevertheless points to the fact that what appears to us – the phenomenal, the phenomena – has a “self”. On the one hand, the self stands for the fact that what is given to us – or rather, what has given itself to us – is not arbitrary or interchangeable. An example ex negativo: Only a bad language, the language of cliché, describes one phenomenon in such a way that it cannot be distinguished from the other. On the other hand, the resistance of the real indicates that hermeneutics is limited. One phenomenon cannot be all that an interpretation requires of it. Rather, there is a limit to what a phenomenon can be; even if “we do not even know what a body can do” or what the limit of the phenomenon is. The limit is determined by the phenomenon itself. To refer once again to Andersen’s parable: what is woven of nothing will never be a dress; even if there may be ways – ways of seeking one’s own advantage, rather than artistically showing the invisible – to stage it as a dress.

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One can conclude from this that the self of phenomena is characterized by its own insistence. In other words, phenomena insist on themselves, while giving themselves. They can never be completely appropriated. This insistence also implies that phenomena can hold out, that they cannot be destroyed by false truth games. Rather, they can only be repressed, covered up, or suppressed.

Accordingly, one could say that phenomena in the wake of insistence also have a certain consistency and continuity. Thus, even if it is not true that phenomena are based on or refer to fixed substances, one can speak of them as specific somethings in the sense that phenomena appear to us as manifestations of the history of a consistent movement.

If it was said above that the real is a movement that points us, or rather, beings in general beyond themselves in a vertical sense, this can be specified here. The reality of something is the movement of its realization – in constant struggle with the distortions that are part of the process of appearing. The future of this movement is open to us, yet it is not arbitrary. That is, it is the future of this appearing thing, of this very phenomenon. However, the impulse for how the phenomenon appears lies with the phenomenon itself. It is the impulse of its realization beyond itself. Therefore, we can never dispose of a phenomenon.

This implies that a phenomenon may suddenly turn out to be different, even in a radical sense. The real brings about an abundance of consistent yet changing, even eventful phenomenal effects that neither we nor, for that matter, anonymous systems of signification can ever fully exploit. While for us this is an indication of the surplus character of the real, every event, even unforeseen transformation, is consistent within the framework of the history of realization of the real.

The third aspect is related to this. It would not be enough to understand the insistence, consistency and continuity of phenomena purely negatively as something that shows itself in resistance against false truth games. Rather, phenomena have their own impetus. Even on the level of immediate aisthesis, which is poor in interpretation, it can be seen that phenomena are guiding action on their own initiative. Their form and material imply a project (Entwurf) that can considerably expand our possibilities for action. Yet it also specifies what these possibilities look like. Note in passing that Heidegger’s famous Zeuganalyse of Being and Time significantly ignores this point because it places too much emphasis on human practical circumspection (Umsicht); a point to which neo-realist authors such as Markus Gabriel or Graham Harman have also referred. However, if we can reasonably assume that phenomena have their own impetus and project, and that they demand certain actions, it is obvious that they also demand certain signs; signs that do justice to them. It is because of this demanding impetus of phe-

nomenat hat words can have liberating or even redemptive power. In the follow-
ing I will speak of the solving (lösende) quality of words, which echoes both their liberating and redemptive power.

5. The Solving Word and the Dynamics of the Real

Again, we can think back to Andersen. The cry of the child “he has nothing on at all” abruptly ends both deceit and self-deception. However hard the chamberlains try to keep up the lie – no matter how much dignity they show while carrying the non-existent train – the real has found the solving word (das lösende Wort). Importantly, the searching for and finding of the solving word originates from the real itself. Andersen shows this in an exemplary way. The child pronouncing the solving word has not been looking for it. Precisely because it is innocent, as Andersen writes, it reveals the real without claiming anything, let alone the truth of truth games. Accordingly, one could say that the child is not a subject of speech. Rather, it is the medium of the searching of the real for the solving word. This is essential to distinguish it from Foucault’s veridiction.

My reservations concerning the traditional metaphysics of presence can also be specified by recourse to the solving word. The crucial point seems to be that it is not a concept. Concepts resemble signs in that they treat phenomena as substitutable. Concepts, for their part, apply a general form to phenomena that turns them into cases among others. By contrast, the solving word refers to phenomena as individuals that cannot be substituted. Consequently, the solving word is not supratemporal as concepts pretend to be. Rather, it is related to the real, insofar as the real is coming to be in time. The solving word gives presence to the phenomena in the sense that they can show themselves from themselves. Thus, it releases them from those games of truth that distort them. However, this is still related to temporality. The solving word indicates that phenomena can be transient and yet truthful. Phenomena are truthful in that, in finite situations, they can find the signs that allow them to show themselves from themselves.

This relationship of signs, phenomena and time also has consequences for the relationship between the solving word and games of truth. The solving word never completely leaves the truth games behind. It takes place among them and thus it remains revisable; not because it becomes untrue, but because it itself creates a new truth game. To put it more simply: The solving word opens a different view of the world, it creates a new situation. Yet in this new situation there will be other distorted realities searching for the true sign or solving word. There is no complete transparency under the finite circumstances in which we live. However, this is not to relativize reality and truth. It simply means that there is no total, all-encompassing representation of the real.

Reality is a surplus movement (Überschussbewegung), thanks to which single phenomena can show themselves from themselves as undistorted; that is, against
the distortions that are the rule in a world without complete transparency. This also implies a demand on us that we can speak. The real calls for the transformation of ourselves in such a way that we move into the position of the medium; that we take on passage-like agency, creating space for phenomena to show themselves from themselves. We are called to devotion to phenomena, to accuracy and precision, while we are dealing with them. The point is to enter into the dynamics of the real under conditions that tend to be dominated by the fascination of that which is woven of nothing, of empty signs, in a word, the unreal. We must begin creating processes of the real.

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The term “Crisis of Representation” rose to fame through Michel Foucault. The crisis, in the context of this issue, has not only a political and economic dimension, but a cultural, aesthetic and religious one as well. Thus, a serious inquiry into this complex and multidimensional phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary approach. The issue targets the phenomena at hand through 15 contributions—all with unique and innovative approaches to the topic. One common aim that holds the issue together is the analysis of the nature of the crisis, which helps to find suitable theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, the term itself functions as a tool that enables the analysis of specific societal developments. Contributing authors brought with them expertise from their respective fields including philosophy, political sciences, theology, Islamic studies and religious studies. This allowed for a cross-disciplinary approach on the phenomenon with special foci on politics, religions, societies and finance, as well as theoretical developments on current philosophical and post-colonial discourses.