Ratzinger and Habermas on Faith, Reason, and Truth.

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The question about truth acquires, in the relationship between faith and reason in the public sphere, an importance only surpassed by its complexity. The Christian tradition claims to be rational, one in which God reveals himself as the communicative "logos" (Jn 1:1). On the other side, secular rationality maintains that postmetaphysical societies achieve consensus only on the base of reasonable arguments. The concept of "rationality," which both traditions claim to support themselves, is thus in need of clarification. In this article, I retrieve the views of Joseph Ratzinger, theologian and late pope of the Catholic Church (2005-2013), about the place of Christianity in the contemporary world and the relationship between faith and reason; on the other hand, I review the thought of Jürgen Habermas, one of the most influential contemporary philosophers, about discursive theory, democratic procedure as a moral ground of legitimation, and the need for "translating" religious claims into secular rationality prior to their entrance into the public sphere. The object of this article is descriptive and aims at better understanding the complex question regarding truth and rationality in our contemporary world in crisis. Therefore, I make no original claim in this very preliminary work.

1. Joseph Ratzinger and the quest for truth.

The left-wing periodical MicroMega described Joseph Ratzinger as "the quintessence of Catholic orthodoxy." His life seems to have, in fact, prepared him, so to speak, to become the "guardian" of a faith that not only has survived two millennia, but has shaped the Western self-understanding to the extent that one cannot be understood without the other. In 1981, the theologian Joseph Ratzinger was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (today Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) by then-pope John Paul II. He was a prolific writer about almost every topic surrounding Catholicism, from the liturgy and the sacramental life to hermeneutics and the Bible, from Christology and Mariology to the crisis of truth and faith in postmodern, secular societies.

In this chapter I analyze three of his ideas: (1) the Catholic justification for a claim of truth, that is, whether it has the right to proclaim to be the true and only bearer of God's revelation; (2) the modern crisis of both religion and reason, understood as the crisis of the concept of freedom; (3) and Ratzinger's idea of the correct relationship between faith and reason, as salutary checks preventing each other's pathologies.

(1) Christ defined himself as the "truth." Answering to Thomas, he firmly states: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) . This phrase, along with Jn 1:1, contains the foundation of the Catholic claim of truth. In it, morality, transcendence, and truth are interrelated to the point that we cannot understand one without the other. The "way" is the moral component of human life, the actions by which human beings must live; "life" everlasting (Jn 4:14) is the promise of a future where harm, suffering, and hunger will not exist; "truth" is a statement regarding what's real, the only one

capable of uniting earth and heaven, contingent life and eternal happiness (Lc 9:23). Jesus' idea of truth is universalistic: his disciples were commanded to "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15, my emphasis; cf. Eph 2:11-22).

But under which premises can this claim be accepted? How can a claim of this nature coexist with our ideas of tolerance and rational fallibility? Is it not the Church succumbing to an excessive pride that is pernicious to the contemporary world? Aware of these questions, Ratzinger acknowledges that "whoever poses the question of truth today… is necessarily directed to the problem of cultures and their mutual openness. Christianity's claim to universality, which is based on the universality of truth, is often inevitably in our day with the argument of the relativity of cultures". Cultural traditions seem, to a certain extent, incommensurable, because every judgment we make about a culture which is not ours is inevitably blurred by our own perspective, by the contextual place from which we attempt any understanding.

Two important alternatives have arisen against the Church's claim to universality. The first one, called the pluralist theology of religion, has in John Hick its most prominent exponent. According to this theory, we can never grasp ultimately truth in itself, but only its appearance in our way of perceiving through different "lenses". For Hick, religion must be subjected to dialogue, so that it is by the interchange of different "experiences" of religious opinions—incomplete and fragmentary—that a religious community can emerge. Given that all opinions have the same rank, religion loses its connection with truth: it is not a movement from the absolute Other to the human person (i.e., revealed truth) but a dialogue between human beings, an exchange of opinions, not the search for truth. Hick's idea of "lenses", that is to say, his religious pluralism, necessarily assumes an unbridgeable distance between God

and the person. God does not manifest at all, He is mute, and this lack of communication leaves the way open for humans to interpret the meager signals of his existence. If God, on the contrary, manifested himself to humanity, religious pluralism would become absurd: there could not be two contradictory but, at the same time, valid images of God.

The second alternative is defined as the difference between "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxis", the first referring to truth, the second to morality or practical activity. For orthopraxis, the question is not what is, but what it is for, what can I do with it. As Hick, Paul Knitter claims that the absolute is unknown. According to Ratzinger, the claim is that "Christianity must become an orthopraxy of common action toward a more human future, leaving orthodoxy behind as unfruitful or even harmful". The focus on praxis, on the correct actions, denies the relationship between truth and morality seen at the beginning of this section: for Christianity, the right actions correspond to the truth and are explained by it; without truth, every action loses its meaning and becomes "value-free," in the sense that no higher idea can justifying it.

Ratzinger's criticizes both Hick and Knitter's ideas. Both authors claim that exegesis has proven that the idea that Jesus was the Son of God was developed after he was dead. Ratzinger doubts that the methodology is free of a particular standpoint, a context, a philosophical root: "The historical-critical method is an excellent instrument for reading historical sources and interpreting texts. But it contains its own philosophy". This claim needs further explanation. It is clear for Ratzinger that the modern rational methodologies are not well suited to pursue the kind of goals religion pursues: "Immaterial things cannot be approached with methods appropriate to what is material". However, this does not mean that religion and reason are alien to each other. On the contrary, Christianity claims to be religion in accordance to reason: "Christian faith represents the choice in favor of the priority

of reason and of rationality". Ratzinger turns to the Gospel of John, which claims that "in the beginning it was the Word… and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). Word, here, comes from the Greek logos, "which means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason". The encounter of Greek rationality and the Christian world is not casual, but almost necessary:

The fact that they sought points of contact, not with the religions, but with philosophy is connected with the fact that they were not canonizing a culture but did find it possible to enter into it at those points where it had itself begun to move out of its own framework, had started to take the path toward the wide spaces of truth that is common to all, and had left behind its comfortable place in what belonged to it.

The localist remains of the God of Israel vanishes in Christ's universalistic message: God does not belong to any culture but to the whole humanity. This is why Christianity can be seen as part of the cultural roots of European rationalism: if Christianity had been an irrational religion, incapable of a rational dialogue, it had been impossible for it to survive as a constant interlocutor in the history of Western civilization.

(2) The second question Ratzinger poses concerns freedom: "The question 'What is freedom?' is in the end no less complicated than the question 'What is truth'?" There are, I believe, two ways of reading this claim. First of all, we may see that "truth", as well as "freedom", were in its Christian origin metaphysical ideas. It is as creatures of God that we are free, because of our divine lineage.

The second reading is much more relevant to our study. According to Ratzinger, criticisms against truth are criticisms against freedom as well. Enlightenment has lost its force and legitimacy. Relativism has also questioned a core value of Western societies, namely, the concept of freedom.

"There is no doubt that from the very outset freedom has been the defining theme of the epoch we call modern" . Enlightenment aimed to liberate humanity from superstition, ignorance, and prejudice by opening the doors to the light of reason. It was upon freedom that Western societies were built. However, nowadays the confidence about these roots is weakening: the relativistic mentality went beyond religion and reached reason; the relativity of cultural traditions has questioned the "universality" of Western rationality: "ethical certainties that had hitherto provided solid foundations have largely disintegrated" . Also, technology has diminished the moral disposition in our societies:

[M]oral strength has not grown together with the development of science; rather, it has diminished, because the technical mentality relegates morality to the subjective real, while we have need, precisely, of a public morality, a morality that can respond to the threats that weight on the existence of us all.

The problem of modern societies is, therefore, how to justify their laws, every fundamental claim about what is right. According to Ratzinger:

Freedom without law is anarchy and, hence, the destruction of freedom. Suspicion of the law, revolt against the law, will always arise when law itself appears to be, no longer the expression of a justice that is at the service of all, but rather the product of arbitrariness and legislative arrogance on the part of those who have the power for it.

Democracy has managed to solve this riddle by allowing everybody's opinion to count in the public arena, directly or through representatives that are assumed to mirror the general will. The democratic process is guaranteed precisely by this common participation in the legislative life of the community. However, Ratzinger asks, because unanimity is unattainable and majorities are the only possible solution, democracy seems far from solving the problem: "majorities, too, can be blind or unjust… the majority principle always leaves open the question of the ethical foundations of the law". We may ask: Does it matter if democracy considers majority rule as a lesser evil or if it sees in the formation of the majority's decision something fundamentally good? It certainly does not seem so because, in the end, the democratic procedure will always have to answer the same question: Why is this decision justified? Under which grounds can this or that decision be called just? For Ratzinger, if law loses its capacity to justify itself, freedom "is no longer seen positively as a striving for the good… but is defined rather as emancipation from all conditions that prevent each other from following his own reason."

But this freedom is a new slavery, it is a new hell. Ratzinger sees Sartre's man condemned to freedom, where every possible choice is worthless and meaningless. This condition can only be described as the contradiction of freedom: if I can do anything, but every path I choose lacks meaning; if progress is impossible because there is not a destination anymore, because every latitude is morally silent; if, finally, every of my actions has to start and finish in me, an independent but lonely, rootless person, who lacks a meaningful origin as well as a valuable future; then my freedom is locking me inside myself. In this freedom, finally, "there is no truth at all. Freedom has no direction and no measure."

There is, however, a genuine product of the enlightened rationality that has not lost its vigor, namely, human rights. The idea of human rights is revolutionary, first,

because "it opposes the absolutism of the state and the caprice of positive legislation", but is also a metaphysical idea, because "there is an ethical and legal claim in being itself… Nature contains spirit, ethos, and dignity, and in this way is a juridical claim to liberation, as well as its measure" . Human rights, however, must be complemented in order to properly order human lives: "we ought perhaps to amplify the doctrine of human rights with a doctrine of human obligations and of human limitations," because "there are injustices that will never turn into just things…, while, at the same time, there are just things that can never be unjust."

Notwithstanding the importance of human rights, Ratzinger is conscious that this idea is far from the universalism it claims for itself; as I mentioned elsewhere, both the Islamic world and China have questioned the legitimacy of the idea. For Ratzinger: "the two great cultures of the West, that is, the culture of the Christian faith and that of secular rationality… are de facto not universal." Both secular rationalism and Christianity are just a part of the complex, plural, and colorful cultural reality of humankind. The evident conclusion of this plurality is acknowledged by Ratzinger:

… the rational or ethical or religious formula that would embrace the whole world and unite all persons does not exist; or, at least, it is unattainable at the present moment. This is why the so-called "world-ethos" remains an abstraction.

This brings us back to the question of truth. If reason proves us that universality is impossible, why keep talking about the "universal truth"? Is Ratzinger's an already defeated quest? I believe here Ratzinger shows his most radical commitment with the idea of truth. For Ratzinger, truth is not about consensus, it is irrelevant how many people recognize it, live through it, and identify themselves with it; truth is, in some way, independent of man. I return to my example: if God actually is¬¬—if

he exists—is independent to the fact that human beings admit it or deny it. Truth is an attribute of reality, is correspondence with it:

When man is shut out from the truth, he can only be dominated by what is accidental and arbitrary. That is why it is, not "fundamentalism", but a duty of humanity to protect man from the dictatorship of what is accidental and to restore to him his dignity, which consists precisely in the fact that no human institution can ultimately dominate him, because he is open to the truth .

If truth is nothing but consensus among different cultures, then the project of truth in the midst of pluralism is impossible; only if truth is to some extent independent of man it can be pursued even despite pluralism. With these ideas in mind, Ratzinger can claim that "the farewell to truth can never be final."

(3) But there is still an unsolved question: Then what? Ratzinger has put himself in a difficult position: on the one hand, he acknowledges that a universal ethos is impossible; on the other hand, he reaffirms the need to seek and follow the truth. It is one thing for a religion to pursue the truth without entering in a dialogue with the world, and a completely different thing to enter the public arena and to make value claims inside of it. What is Ratzinger's proposal?

In the first place, we must understand what kind of freedom Ratzinger is talking about. We need to remember, first, that freedom and law are not contradictory, but complementary. It follows from this that freedom shall be understood in a tension: it is individual, in the first place, as in the form of human rights; but, at the same time, it is collective, and it cannot be understood without this systemic component. The element that binds together individuality and collectivity is, for him, responsibility: "increase in freedom must be an increase in responsibility, which

includes acceptance of the ever greater bonds, required both by the claims of humanity's shared existence and by conformity to man's essence."

Responsibility itself is not yet the content of freedom, according to Ratzinger, but only the framework inside which it operates. It is the content of freedom what must be discovered in a permanent dialogue, through "the search for the basic elements common to the ethical traditions of the various religions and cultures." Ratzinger claims that the shared ethical principles of the great religious traditions are a source of wisdom that neither philosophy nor politics can ignore. This is, in a few words, his project: the Church must enter into the public sphere to engage in a serious, rational debate about the content of freedom. To enter the public sphere, it is indispensable for the Church to acknowledge that she is only one among many religious traditions; and that this idea forces her to be respectful of other cultural traditions, and to force herself to provide rational arguments that justify her claims (moreover, "religion cannot be imposed by the state but can only be accepted in freedom").

Here arises the fundamental tension Ratzinger proposes: if it is true that "in the area of politics, [relativism] is considerably right. There is no one correct political opinion," it is also true that, as I have mentioned, there are certain things that will never be just and other that no matter what will never be unjust. Absolute relativism, as we have seen, leads to Sartrean freedom, to the absolute nihilism and meaninglessness in life. Only in truth can mankind genuinely progress.

To conclude, Ratzinger claims the need of cooperation between secular rationality and Christianity in order to discover the content, limits and extent of freedom: "reason and religion will have to come together again, without merging into each other." This means that "philosophy… should not enclose itself in total particularity or simply in the results of its own reflections. As philosophy must be attentive to

empirical discoveries… so, too, it should consider, as a source of knowledge, for its enrichment, the holy tradition of religions and, above all, the message of the Bible." Reason is incapable of providing humanity of the goods religion provides: "one cannot worship one's own intellectual concepts, one's own philosophical hypothesis."

I would like to close this chapter with three final quotes that, I believe, synthesize what has hitherto been said: at the level of the concept, the tension is about the truth and the confrontation between faith and reason; at the level of the community, the tension is between, again, the search of the validity of universal claims, and cultural pluralism.

There can be no doubt that the two main partners in this mutual relatedness [between faith and reason] are the Christian faith and Western secular rationality… but this does not mean that one could dismiss the other cultures as a kind of quantité négligeable .

There exist pathologies in religion that are extremely dangerous and that make it necessary to see the divine light of reason as a "controlling organ". Religion must continually allow itself to be purified and structured by reason.

There are also pathologies of reason, although mankind in general is not as conscious of this fact today. There is a hubris of reason that is no less dangerous… [R]eason, too, must be warned to keep within its proper limits, and it must learn a willingness to listen to the great religious traditions of mankind.

2. Jürgen Habermas and the procedural morality.

For Habermas, a physical condition was translated into a philosophical question. The difficulties he experienced as a child to communicate—due to his "nasal articulation and distorted pronunciation"—were the fertile soil on which his intellectual life germinated: "only when communication fails do we become aware of the medium of linguistic communication as a shared stratum without which individual existence would also be impossible". Habermas is not interested, as Ratzinger is, in finding a fixed, eternal truth justified in the absolute goodness of God; rather, he engages with his equals asking how language, the best tool through which human beings interact and construct "communities", can be enhanced in a postmetaphysical society in order to promote peaceful and reasonable societies. When communication fails, the entire community dissolves: "Only when communication fails do we become aware of the medium of linguistic communication as a shared stratum without which individual existence would also be impossible."

In this section I provide (1) a brief account of Habermas's core concepts and his idea of communication in the public sphere; (2) his defense of the secular state as self-justified; and (3) the role of religion in Habermas through the idea of "translation".

(1) The public sphere emerged from the bourgeois society: "the bourgeois were private persons; as such they did not 'rule'. Their power claims against the public authority were thus not directed against the concentration of powers of command that ought to be 'divided'; instead, they undercut the principle on which existing rule was based." The demand for a public sphere where public issues can be discussed by private men finds its philosophical origin in Kant's What is Enlightenment? For Kant, enlightenment means for men to abandon the childish attitudes of blind obedience ("I need not think, so long as I can pay; others will soon enough take the tiresome job over for me") and to take control of their own reason

to enlighten themselves so that the only rules, maxims and authority they obey is that of their own reason. Enlightenment, however, is more likely to arise as a public, in a permanent dialogue in which the public use of reason is the only one accepted: "that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public."

The question is, for Habermas, What kind of justifications can be accepted in a postmetaphysical society where the recourse to ideas like God, Nature or the Good are not available anymore? His answer focuses on the concept of democratic procedure: "according to this view, practical reason no longer resides in universal human rights, or in the ethical substance of a specific community, but in the rules of discourse and forms of argumentation that borrow their normative content from the validity basis of action oriented to reaching understanding." Since "Truth," as a metaphysical, robust, and universalistic concept, is incapable to form a rational consensus among a plurality of worldviews, and because of the empirical fact that clashes among unreasonable doctrines has proven dangerous for the future of human kind, the rationality Habermas is defending is, as we have seen, one which arguments can be accepted by every participant in the public sphere, even if not "for the same reasons."

Habermas's discourse theory is theoretically in between liberalism and republicanism: it is invested with "normative connotations stronger than those found in the liberal model but weaker than those found in the republican model." For discourse theory, the success of deliberation is due to institutional arrangements, not to an active, participating citizenry; in this sense, "rationalization means more than mere legitimation but less than the constitution of power."

This institutionalization of sovereignty—by means of the "subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of discursive opinion- and will-formation in

such a way that their fallible results enjoy the presumption of being reasonable" — takes two forms: first the weak public is the general, non-regulated public sphere, where the coexistence of the multifarious opinions and ideas serve to nurture the public deliberations that are to be debated in terms of legislative justification. In the second place, this institutionalized, restricted, and regulated arena of discussion cannot allow anything but secular arguments, so that the public justification of the collective claims can be accepted by everybody.

The procedural view of democracy rests on the grammatical universality of the terminology Habermas is presenting: "in all languages and in every language community, such concepts as truth, rationality, justification, and consensus, even if interpreted differently and applied according to different criteria, play the same grammatical role." It does not matter in which linguistic community we are, because the function and understanding of the core concepts of discourse theory perform the same role everywhere. From this we can understand how, on the one hand, Habermas goes beyond cultural differences, attempting to provide a procedure which is not concerned with the content of the culture, but with the form in which the debate of public affairs is granted.

(2) Secular rationality was supposed to send religious convictions to the private sphere; since the belief in God, the immortality of the soul, and the specific moral duties of the believer could not share the characteristics of enlightened reason, it was impossible to validate religion as the legislation of the whole. Moreover, the marriage between earthly power and transcendental revelation had proved oppressive for those not sharing hegemonic beliefs. For these reasons, tolerance and

freedom of religion imply the rejection of religious authority in the public sphere, towards a healthy coexistence of a plurality of incommensurable beliefs. The radicalization of this view, in some philosophical theories, demanded religion to be completely abolished, as a pre-modern idea incompatible with the kingdom of reason.

However, religion has survived: the influence of Christianity in the Western history still manifests and pervades in its morality and self-understanding. Religion has not disappeared in the postmetaphysical world. More strikingly, what Ratzinger calls the "pathology of religion" has appeared with all its strength in the confrontation between the Western democracies and the Islamic world. For Habermas, the complexity of this modern phenomenon is exemplified by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, where "the tension between secular society and religion exploded in an entirely different view". Despite this events were "motivated by religious beliefs," Habermas notes that "in spite of its religious language, fundamentalism is an exclusively modern phenomenon and, therefore, not only a problem of others." This means that there exist characteristically modern manifestations of the religious phenomenon, which implies that secular reason must deal with both classical religions (which Habermas narrow to the "world major religions," such as Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism) and with modern religious manifestations, such as Islamic fundamentalism.

In the first place it is important to understand Habermas's answer to "whether the pacified, secular state is reliant on normative presuppositions that it cannot itself guarantee." According to Habermas, "weak assumptions concerning the normative meaning of the communicative constitution of sociocultural forms of life provide a sufficient basis for defending a nondefeatist concept of reason against contextualism and a nondecisionistic concept of legal validity against legal positivism." In contrast

to the right-Hegelian understanding of the state, Habermas proposes the proceduralist and Kantian conception that insists on "an autonomous grounding of constitutional principles that claims to be rationally acceptable to all citizens". This means that, in contrast to those who are willing to admit that the so-called secular state is fed by religious terminology and moral justification (even if they are "secularized", as in Carl Schmitt insightful theory), the Kantian republicanism generates its justification from itself, that is, without having to appeal to other kind of resources. Democratic procedure has the normative force to justify itself as a rational understanding of the constitutional state.

Citizens in a constitutional state are expected to take part in public life, to take responsibility like voting and communicative participation in the public sphere. This may assume, Habermas acknowledges, that civil society—where the citizens learn the civic "virtues" needed to take their part in the state—is "nourished by spontaneous and, if you will, 'prepolitical' sources." However, this does not mean that this state is incapable of reproducing the needed motivations. For Habermas, democracy generates its own "political dynamism": "by fostering communicative freedoms, it also mobilizes citizen participation in public debates over matters that concern them all." Individuals recognize in themselves the duty/right to engage in the public arena using practical reason, i.e., by proposing reasonable justifications for issues that affects everyone.

(3) If religion does not serve the secular state as a source of legitimation, we may ask: What is, then, the place of religion in a constitutional democracy? Why is it important to imagine a place for religion even in the public sphere? In Habermas's article, An Awareness of What is Missing, we found a beautiful illustration of why

religion is not exhausted by the liberties, rights, and normative justifications of the secular state. Habermas remembers the memorial service of Max Frisch:

It began with Karin Pilliod, Frisch's partner, reading out a brief declaration written by the deceased. It stated, among other things: "We let our nearest speak, and without an 'amen'. I am grateful to the ministers of St. Peter's in Zürich… for their permission to place the coffin in the church during our memorial service. The ashes will be strewn somewhere" … Clearly, Max Frisch, an agnostic who rejected any profession of faith, had sensed the awkwardness of non-religious burial practices and, by his choice of place, publicly declared that the enlightened modern age has failed to find a suitable replacement for a religious way of coping with the final rîte de passage which brings life to a close.

The agnostic's religious burial is perhaps one of the most amazing images of the meaning of the phrase "An Awareness of What is Missing." According to Norbert Brieskorn, what Habermas has in mind when he states that something "is missing" is the kind of lack understood as privation—as a lack of what is proper to us, what is natural for us to have, just as the lack of eyesight¬—, rather than negatio, or a quality we are not supposed to have or that does not correspond to our nature, such as flying. In the second place, Brieskorn asks "whether reason has lost something and wants to recover it, indeed must recover it, or whether it is developing towards a completion which it has never known and into which it wants to mature." From his perspective, "Habermas's text reveals that in this case it is a question of the first rather than the second alternative." Modernity lost something while developing, but that missing element still exerts its influence and power over human beings: religion is, and it seems it will always be, a reminder of the "Otherness" we cannot fully know, an otherness in which we find the answer to many of the most ancient questions.

For Habermas, then, the question is not whether religion must stay in the private sphere and never leave because, as Walterstoff notes, "it belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our society that they ought to base their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions… Their religion is not, for them, about something other than their social and political existence." The demand to justify political positions independently of any religious belief can "only be made of politicians operating within state institutions who have a duty to remain neutral among competing worldviews, in other words, of all who hold a public office or are candidates for such." So, religious people must be allowed to enter the "weak public" and to make their claims using religious justification, but only insofar two prepositions are fulfilled: a) "the religious side must accept the authority of 'natural' reason as the fallible results of the institutionalized sciences and the basis principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality", religious people are thus obligated to "split up their identities… they are the ones who have to translate their religious beliefs into a secular language before their arguments have any chance of gaining majority support"; and b) "secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith, even though in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally, accessible, discourses."

Here are the two fundamental attitudes of Habermas towards religion: in the first place, we found that religious experiences have a place in the secular state, because they shape the believer's understanding of social life as well as the relation of the individual with the divine. But it is not only because of the dignity of believers as participants in the public sphere that Habermas accepts the entrance of religious arguments into the public sphere: "Philosophy also has good reasons to be open to learning from religions."

His critique of Kant's treatment of religion may help us illustrate the relation between philosophy and religion. Kantian practical reason needs nothing external to it in order to derive its necessity, in fact, any external source of legitimation would violate the principle of rational duty, the idea that moral obligation derives from the force of rational argument. However, when Kant says that "we ought to strive to promote the highest good", that "ought", for Habermas, disrupts the Kantian system, introducing an unnecessary question (at least, for practical reason) into his system: Why should we be moral at all? According to Habermas, the question should not even arise for Kant, because "we can convince ourselves of the binding character of the moral law without any prospect of effectively promoting a highest good and without assuming the corresponding postulates." Kant's insistence in the duty to promote the higher good ends up bringing into account the postulate of the existence of God: "the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also postulated." The connection between religion and philosophy is clear here: although Kant was unwilling to accept the necessity of religious grounds in order to justify some claims, in the end there were some questions that philosophy was incapable of solving. Reason and faith, in their distinctiveness and particularity, work notwithstanding with the human being; it is impossible to reject reason or faith completely, they both constitute what is "human" in our societies. On the part of religions, for example, "it could turn out that monotheistic traditions have at their disposal a language whose semantic potential is not yet exhausted, that shows itself to be superior in its power to disclose the world and to form identity, in its capability for renewal, its differentiation, and its range."

Habermas acknowledges a place for religion, while insisting in the procedural need of translation as the proper way to introduce religious arguments into the public arena: "The ambition of philosophy's 'translation program' is, if you like, to rescue the profane significance of interpersonal and existential experiences that have so far only been adequately articulated in religious language." Two elements are distinguished in this "translation program": in the first place, there is something in a religious argument that gets ineluctably lost in the process, a powerful claim that reason is unable to grasp or retain; the rational "distillation" obscures the heart of the religious argument, keeping only the consequence, the empirical data: "Religions… raise a strict claim to truth not only for their moral principles, but also for their theologically or cosmologically justified paths to salvation. They are not reducible to 'ethical' worldviews." Philosophy must rescue the "profane" significance of "experiences" that were articulated by religious language: translation does not mean a perfect procedure to transform a religious phrase into a secular one which holds exactly the same meaning; translation is better described as "distillation", as a process of filtering, of distinguishing the moral claim from the "myth" behind which morality founds justification.

In the second place, there is no doubt that Habermas is genuinely trying to found a relationship between faith and reason: if translation is not perfect, neither is it useless or hypocritical: it tries honestly to discover the reasonableness of religion, the moral substance this old institutions have zealously guarded. For Habermas, going to religion manifests the need of that which secular reason has been unable to discover:

As long as religious language bears with itself inspiring, indeed, unrelinquishable semantic contents which elude (for the moment?) the expressive power of a philosophical language and still await translation into a discourse that gives reasons

for its positions, philosophy, even in the postmetaphysical form, will neither be able to replace nor to repress religion .

Moreover, and when he focuses only in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Habermas seems forced to accept that human beings have not found a better description of the basic structure of community life:

Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of Justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it.

Religion is necessary to secular reason, since it is part of its roots but also because it still has the power to produce moral insights useful to postmetaphysical societies. The real question is, I believe, what happens when religion enters the public sphere. Habermas is conscious of the dangers theology faces when opening to science: "the more that theology opens itself in general to the discourses of the human sciences, the greater is the danger that its own status will be lost in the network of alternating takeover attempts." Can we say the same thing about the "translation program"? Are there any dangers in the process itself for religion or for philosophy? How can we know that our translation is still consistent with the original religious claim?

3. Discussion: a dysfunctional marriage's insecure daughter?

In the beginning, says the Old Testament, "the whole world spoke the same language" (Gen 11:1); at some point, men became confident and started to build a tower "with its top in the sky" (Gen 11:4). God, fearing human ambition and pride ("nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do", Gen 11:6), multiplied languages, creating confusion and scattering them in every direction. With Babel, human history properly begins: human beings actually have different languages, that is to say, cultures, mores, and understandings of what is good and wrong, beautiful and ugly. An interesting idea lies behind the Bible: it is language, and nothing else, what stops humanity from achieving "whatever they presume to do" (good or evil). It is the lack of understanding, the incommensurability of practices and cultures what prevent us from constructing the world we want.

To understand how Christianity was able to make sense of this passage we must take a look to the discourse Peter gave after Pentecost. According to the book of Acts, the Spirit descended and "filled" the place where the disciples were gathered, "and the Spirit enabled them to proclaim" (Acts 2:4):

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem.

At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

"… We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God" (Acts 2:6-10).

Christianity, as the religion of "logos", is the way of understanding, the path to truth and life. Its language is not presented as having any cultural particularities, but as speaking words that anyone can understand, the universal words.

Habermas denies this: it is not Christianity, but secular reason, the one which can achieve consensus on the base of pluralism. In his view, Christianity is incapable of proving—that is, empirically or fully rationally, the way scientific knowledge does—that what it proclaims is the truth. Ratzinger, too, is sensitive to this problematic when he states: "No one can lay God and his Kingdom on the table before another man; even the believer cannot do it for himself. But however strongly unbelief may feel justified thereby, it cannot forget the eerie feeling induced by the words 'Yet perhaps it is true'". Since religion and revelation, by its nature, deal with something beyond reason, then it is impossible to fully justify them by reason alone. Faith is the only human capability capable of introducing men into the metaphysical world of God, the immortality of the soul and life everlasting. Ratzinger's conclusion about the relationship between faith and reason is, I think, indisputable:

In other words, both the believer and the unbeliever share, each in his own way, doubt and belief, if they do not hide from themselves and from the truth of their being. Neither can quite escape either doubt or belief; for the one, faith is present against doubt; for the other, through doubt and in the form of doubt. It is the basic pattern of man's destiny only to be allowed to find the finality of his existence in this unceasing rivalry between doubt and belief, temptation and certainty. Perhaps in precisely this way doubt, which saves both sides from being shut up in their own words, could become the avenue of communication.

This is Max Frisch's doubt: a sort of uneasiness, an anxiety about what is coming after our bodies finally refuse to function. This is, perhaps, the source of all our fears: What if God is actually waiting for us? What if, after all, it was important to believe,

to hear Christ's maxim: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (Jn 20:29)? This is Pascal's solution to the riddle; in Ratzinger words, to "seek to live and direct [my] life 'veluti si Deus daretur'," as if God existed. This is consistent, finally, with Augustine's thought: Si enim comprehendis non est Deus, if you understand him, he is not God. Be as it may, we still have a couple of words to say about the relationship between faith and reason in the public sphere.

I find it useful to think about this relationship as the one we find between husband and wife. In a marriage, both man and women are different, but united in the pursuit of a common goal (love, happiness, support, communication, etc.). The independence of both parties does not prevent them from achieving these goals together. Let's think of truth as the daughter of this marriage: once upon a time, this marriage was governed in the form of a patriarchate , all the important decisions had to be understood as the patriarch would do: faith, law, morality and knowledge was related to him and the world was understandable because of this relation of powers; years passed and, little by little, women started to gain control and power, to demonstrate that it was them, and not their counterparts, whom should rule the world. This marriage happens to be in a crisis: husband and wife seem to be unable to pursue a common good because each one claims primacy over the other. In the meantime, and as in most dysfunctional marriages, the little daughter has grown up insecure and timid. Both of her parents claim parental rights. If the separation turns into divorce—and regardless of who keeps the child—we can be certain that the little girl will grow up with that specific feeling of "an awareness of what is missing."

Finally, I would like to close this article analyzing Habermas's project. If it is true that he is trying to refrain the secular impetus to claim a parental right over truth ("a philosophy which has become self-critical does not trust itself any longer to offer universal assertions about the concrete whole of exemplary life"), it is also true that

his insistence on the need for translation is not easy to subscribe. He himself admits that "religious discourses could lose their identity if they were to open themselves up to a radical type of interpretation which no longer allows the religious experiences to be valid as religious". I believe that the task of translation, as I said before, ends up stripping religion of its substance. I agree with the analysis of Maeve Cooke, where she claims that "rational conviction that secular justifications are pragmatically necessary in a given context fails to secure the conditions of political legitimacy as understood by Habermas, providing the basis only for a modus vivendi that does not produce social stability 'for the right reasons'." The translation process leaves the believer in a difficult situation: the logic of secular authority is not evident for them, so that the restriction may impose an unjustified burden on him. Furthermore, Cooke questions the inner logic of the restriction: "it is strange, therefore, that… Habermas denies the dynamic, transformative aspect of public deliberation." The function of the public sphere is precisely the search for the right answers, so "the requirement of translation into a generally accessible language prior to the deliberative process makes no sense."

Both Habermas and Ratzinger claim for a renewed understanding between faith and reason. They are both different and their agendas do not always match. In the end, it is all about a healthy relationship, a fruitful contribution between the two human capacities. The future will provide the answer about the renewed relationship or final divorce between faith and reason.

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