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3 RELIGION AS SOURCE, RESOURCE,
5 EVALUATION, AND HINDRANCE:
7 INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY AND
9 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
11 RELIGION AND POLITICS

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17

19 **ABSTRACT**

21 *How ought religion and democratic politics relate to each other in a spirit of*
23 *intellectual humility? This chapter suggests four potential understandings of*
25 *the relationship: hindrance, resource, evaluation, and source. Each of these*
27 *understandings seems to take for granted a form of Enlightenment rationality*
29 *(whether in support or opposition), and the final section of the chapter devel-*
ops a synthesis of Durkheim and Dewey to consider a different way through
which religion and deliberative democracy can coexist, one more sensitive to
the role of emotion, ritual, and contingency and thereby more open to the
problem of epistemic arrogance and the necessity for intellectual humility.

31 **INTRODUCTION**

33 In different ways, any form of deliberative democracy requires some level of
35 humility, in that a deliberation in good faith will always require interlocutors
37 to be willing to change their minds. Religion can complicate such humility,
39 as has been described since at least as far back as Kant’s definitional work on
the Enlightenment: if people make certain claims based on *revelation* rather
than *reason*, then not only are they bringing the nonrational into a space that
is meant to be saved for reason-giving, but, more importantly, they make it
very hard for the “best argument” to win as not all interlocutors necessarily

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1 agree on the nature of the revelation from which certain arguments draw. In
this sense an argument such as “we should abolish the death penalty because
3 it fits the message of the New Testament” is very different from “we should
abolish the death penalty because it is unjust.” While the latter claim could
5 be true or false, it is an argument in which all interlocutors might have
stakes. In contrast, the former argument presumes that all interlocutors care
7 about the message of the New Testament and will be moved by its authority.
There is, some might say, an arrogance to this, and in two senses: first, that it
9 insists that non-Christians concern themselves with the arguments of
Christian sacred texts, and second, that it is relatively unmovable. Even if
11 everyone else in a deliberative body gives compelling reasons that the death
penalty is just, a Christian committed to her interpretation of her sacred text
13 could refuse to be moved, citing a sacred commitment above and beyond
deliberative democracy.

15 However, recent studies of the secular have suggested that revealed reli-
gion is really not so different from secular “social imaginaries” (Asad, 2009;
17 Taylor, 2007). This is to argue not that to be secular is actually to be religious
but rather that both contain commitments to certain moral and political
19 priors that come to feel self-evidently true. To return to whether the death
penalty is just, whether or not justice should be equal for each individual in a
21 society can be an argument to discuss, but it can also, even for the secular, be
a non-negotiable commitment that is as much believed to be true as it is felt
23 to be *right*, and right in a sense that exists prior to and extends beyond any
argument.

25 Such moral immovability can be inspiring if we consider it a form of righ-
teous prophecy, a status its proponents might well designate themselves. But
27 what if it is cruelty or bigotry? It is almost certainly prejudice, not in the sense in
which the word is often used today, but in its more straightforward etymological
29 sense of judging something or someone before it has been fully considered:
regardless of what we learn or the claims we hear in deliberation, there are cer-
31 tain things we believed before the interaction that we will still believe to be true,
and we believe those even *regarding the matters under deliberation*. Nothing
33 could have changed our minds. How can a democratic politics move forward if
minds cannot be changed?

35 Hundreds of scholars have attempted to answer these questions, and none
has seemed to solve the problem in full, so I suggest what follows here with
37 my own form of humility. Yet I nonetheless suggest that part of the problems
I describe above come from a confusion about the relationship between reli-
39 gion and democratic politics. I review these distinctions below, using that
work to set up a contrast between Habermasian/neo-Kantian models
41 of deliberation and a more Deweyan focus, albeit one rendered more sensi-
43 tive to emotion and ritual via Durkheim. While I am sufficiently humble
about this fusion of Dewey and Durkheim to solve our problems of intellec-
45 tual humility, I nonetheless hope it is an argument worth considering in the
public sphere.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

If the Enlightenment opposed itself to anything, it was to religion. Indeed, an opposition to religious dogmatism forms a key element of Kant's *What is Enlightenment* (2013), and, in different ways, the Scottish, French, and German Enlightenment each shared a suspicion of institutional churches and constraining doctrines. However, they did not necessarily all oppose religion per se. Kant, after all, was a famous defender of some kind of religious experience, as was Rousseau. The Scottish Enlightenment was more famously atheist, though Smith still nods at the importance of religion in *The Moral Sentiments* (2010). Where the Enlightenment came together in opposition to religion was not necessarily regarding the existence of God or even belief in and respect for such a being. While there were a few radically aggressive and scornful atheists, most saved their opprobrium for those who would say, in Kant's words, "Do not argue—believe!" This phrase from *What is Enlightenment* is how Kant imagines "the pastor" speaking to those who would seek the freedom of the Enlightenment, which is to say the freedom to use their own reason. Yet it is striking how Kant situates a religious dogmatism next to the strict constraints of tax collectors, officers, rulers, and rigid texts. Political and intellectual dogmatism is parallel to and intermixed with religious dogmatism. The problem is an intellectual leadership who lacks humility, in contrast to a democratic polis willing and able to subject anything to criticism.

Ever since these Enlightenment critiques, assumptions that the institutional church would eventually fade – and with it, potentially, any kind of religious belief – have pervaded Western thought. Challenging these theories of secularism have become increasingly common lately, and while there have been many theories of the relationship between religion and politics, I organize them here into four categories: hindrances, resources, evaluations, and sources. In the interests of space and relevance to the topic at hand, I focus almost exclusively on democratic politics, so while there are a wide variety of important texts on religion's relationship to other forms of government, especially monarchy, theocracy, totalitarianism, and fascism, I will not be able to engage those here.

Hindrances

Casanova lists three "clearly distinguished dimensions" of the "Enlightenment critique of religion":

a cognitive one directed against metaphysical and supernatural worldviews; a practical-political one directed against ecclesiastical institutions; and a subjective expressive-aesthetic-moral one directed against the idea of God itself. (2011, p. 30)

Each of these is important in different ways regarding the question of democratic participation, but by far the most important was the idea of *freedom*. Whether that freedom was more a freedom from (negative) or a freedom to (positive), the Church (and to some degree, any kind of theology) got in the way. Neither Rousseau nor Spinoza nor Kant had any trouble with a kind of

1 natural religion; in fact, all three thought it was to some degree necessary. While
 3 certain other Enlightenment characters treated any form of religion with out-
 5 right suspicion, most regarded religions, and even a church, as Kant did: a
 7 sometimes-necessary element of moral formation, even if we should be suspi-
 9 cious of their potential to evoke superstition, fetishism, and slavish devotion to
 11 unprovable and unreasonable claims.

13 Religion, in other words, is *unreasonable* – not of necessity, but as a general
 15 rule. As such, it must be cordoned off. Yet why is religion unreasonable? For
 17 Kant, Rousseau, Hume, Voltaire, and Spinoza, much of the problem was in the
 19 relationship between epistemology and politics: people could not be free to
 21 determine their own lives if they were beholden to particular “revealed” commit-
 23 ments, commitments which were especially vulnerable to historical and philo-
 25 sophical critiques. They sought a religion without scripture and without clerics,
 27 and they did so in a way that emphasized spontaneous human interaction and
 29 the giving of reasons.

31 These are old philosophical problems with massive literatures, and so there is
 33 not sufficient space here to examine all of their implications. For this argument,
 35 what matters most is the way that Habermas (1991) deals with the problems of
 37 separating interests from reasons through insisting on the importance of *deliber-*
 39 *ation*: people bring their respective interests to the discussion, and these interests
 41 are always supported by reasons. After a sharing of opinions, interlocutors will
 43 deliberate rationally, with the best argument winning and people’s interests
 45 aligning with the best course of action. There are many criticisms of this insis-
 tence that the best argument will win despite social differences, yet most relevant
 for our purposes here is the way that Habermas’s discourse ethic seems necessar-
 ily to oppose religious commitments in the revealed sense that his
 Enlightenment forebears also opposed. After all, if something is ipso facto true
 and therefore immune to rational critique, it makes any kind of real deliberation
 about the thing impossible.

31 While recognizing the problem of religion, Habermas, like Kant before
 33 him, has much less of a problem with the sacred, although his recognition of
 35 sacred experience is more sociologically Durkheimian than noumenally
 37 Kantian. Synthesizing Mead and Durkheim, Habermas argues that the
 39 sacred has become *linguistic*, for example, “the transfer of cultural reproduc-
 41 tion, social integration, and socialization from sacred foundations over to lin-
 43 guistic communication and action oriented to mutual understanding” (1987,
 45 p. 107). The description might well work as a Durkheimian understanding of
 the secular, for example, how the emergent sense of the “sacred” power of
 society maintains itself in a nonreligious age. Yet for those for whom
 revealed religion continues to matter, the call of the sacred demands very dif-
 ferent things than just talking to each other. Nonetheless, it is *through* talking
 to each other that such demands must be carried out. Habermas is suspicious
 of religious arguments as *justification for power*: this is not necessarily
 because religious arguments lack “semantic contents, and even secret intu-
 itions of their own” (2017, p. 223) but rather because they are not yet *trans-*
lated in a way that any rational speaker could understand. He is not opposed

1 to religious arguments in the “public sphere” provided they are “translated” –
 3 (2017, p. 223).

5 This acknowledgment of the space for religious deliberation contrasts with
 7 the more restrictive understanding of the place of religion in Rawls’s under-
 9 standing. While Rawls moderated himself over time – going from a complete
 11 rejection of religious reasons to a need for translation – he nonetheless
 13 emphasizes the degree to which public reason must appeal to one of three
 15 political conceptions: applying to basic political and social institutions,
 17 presentable independently from comprehensive doctrines, and understandable
 19 from the ideas already implicit in constitutionalism. “This requirement,” he
 argues, “still allows us to introduce into political discussion at any time our
 comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, provided that, in due course,
 we give properly public reasons to support the principles and policies our com-
 prehensive doctrine is said to support” (1997, p. 776). While Rawls distinguishes
 public reason from “secular” reason, his critics do not necessarily appreciate the
 distinction: they argue that they are still forced to “split their identities in public
 discourse” with “the burdens of citizenship” thereby “asymmetrical distributed.”
 (Yates, 2007, p. 880).

21 Habermas is sensitive to such criticisms, and he acknowledges that religious
 language should be allowed in the public sphere. More than this, he suggests
 23 that just as the religious should seek to understand their fellow citizens of differ-
 25 ent religions or without religion, so those without religion should seek to under-
 stand the religious. Yet this only goes so far: Habermas wants to keep the state
 from justifying its actions through religious reasons. This is illegitimate, he
 argues, because of:

27 the violation of the principle of the neutrality of the exercise of political power which holds
 29 that all coercively enforceable political decisions must be *formulated* and be *justifiable* in a lan-
 guage that is equally intelligible to all citizens. (2008, p. 134; emphasis in original)

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31 This restriction goes further than it might appear however, because even if
 Habermas grants that anyone can say whatever they would like in the public
 33 sphere, for their words to have an effect on government policy, the religious (or
 their government allies) must find ways to translate their commitments. As a
 35 result, it still seems fair to argue that Habermas requires religious citizens to split
 their identities, at least to the extent they want their reasons to reach the highest
 37 levels of the society.

Such a need for splitting seems to give secular liberals an unfair advantage
 39 both politically and epistemically (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997, pp. 67–120). The
 question becomes even more complicated to the degree that a commitment to
 41 Habermasian deliberative democracy cannot necessarily distinguish itself from
 any other revealed commitment. Rawls attempts to overcome this problem
 43 through his commitment to “overlapping consensus” while Habermas suggests
 that his procedural (as opposed to substantive) focus distinguishes deliberation
 45 and, for that matter, justice, from more substantive questions of the good life.
 The distinction is not without its uses, yet Habermas’s own genealogical linkage

1 of the sacred to the discursive challenges any easy separation. As Taylor argues,
 3 even the most stripped down of proceduralism still hinges upon certain moral
 imaginaries, imaginaries with both religious roots and religious parallels (2007).

5 This is not necessarily to argue that Habermasian discourse theory is an
 ersatz religion, even if some like Neuhaus (see below) might make such an argu-
 7 ment about robust liberalism, a position shared by Durkheim, albeit regarding
 French republicanism (1958, 2011). Yet such questions about the real nature of
 9 religion can distract from more relevant questions about the role of things peo-
 ple call “religion” (Guhin, 2014). Religion can be more than simply a hindrance
 11 to – or replacement of – democratic politics. In the next two sections, we
 review how religion can be a resource or an evaluation of democratic politics,
 13 then turning to a study of how some regard religion as a source of democratic
 politics.

15 *Resources*

17 Those who view religion as a *resource* for politics (Williams, 1996; Wood, 1999)
 19 tend to emphasize its importance as a mediating and socializing institution for
 democratic processes that are not themselves necessarily religious. Others
 21 describe how religious ideas can serve as important resources even without a
 necessary connection to religious beliefs. Finally, religion can serve as a motiva-
 23 tor and tool to engage in politics without necessarily being the *source* or *content*
 of democratic politics.

25 *Mediating Institutions*

27 Tocqueville’s study of religion (2000) in the United States has been hugely influ-
 29 ential to a variety of thinkers, especially those who emphasize the role of “civil
 society” (Cohen & Arato, 1994) in creating mediating institutions between the
 31 state and the individual (Deneen, 2018; Nisbet, 2014; Putnam, 2001). For these
 thinkers, whether or not religion is necessary as a *source* for politics, it serves as
 33 a necessary resource in maintaining democratic associations and (properly
 ordered) democratic sensibilities. Tocqueville states simply:

35 I doubt that man can ever support a complete religious independence and an entire political
 freedom at once; and I am brought to think that if he has no faith, he must serve, and if he is
 37 free, he must believe. (2000, pp. 418–419)

While Tocqueville acknowledges his own religiosity, his argument employs a
 39 “human point of view.” In so doing, he puts the majority of the causal power
 for this situation less in religion itself than in the fact of equality in America,
 41 both as a material reality and as an ideological commitment. That equality’s
 material effects on religion can be rendered less deleterious if religion maintains
 43 its “greatest advantage” (2000, p. 419).

45 That advantage is religion’s ability to temper individualism and keep it from
 turning into selfishness, which “withers the seed of all the virtues” (2000,
 p. 483). It is “free institutions” that combat individualism, and religious

1 institutions are some of the most important of these, not so much in explicitly
 influencing laws or politics but rather in forming morals and ideals:

3 Religion, which among Americans, never mixes directly in the government of society, should
 5 therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not give them the
 taste for freedom, it singularly facilitates their use of it. (2000, p. 280)

7 Religion's separation from power prevents it from taking on the veneer of
 corrupt self-interest it has in Europe, and it is able to maintain itself as a moral
 9 support and counter-weight to the raucous self-interest of democratic citizens.

11 While Tocqueville often talks about religion as a thing in itself, he almost
 always refers to it in its organizational form, with its ministers, rites, and beliefs.
 13 Those organizations are actually what is most important, because it is in them
 that people will be socialized into the right kinds of democrats, those who care
 about freedom as much as equality, and who do not retreat so far into individual-
 15 ism that they lose all sense of community. Contemporary Tocquevillians are often
 conservative, though not necessarily so, and nearly all of them warn of vicious circle that begins once mediating institutions weaken (Deneen, 2018). Without such
 17 institutions, individuals depend more upon themselves, and then rely on the state
 for what they cannot do, which grows in response, leading both individualism and
 19 statism to grow in concert and at the expense of the institutions (and democratic
 21 deliberation) in between. Religious institutions are therefore a necessary resource
 not only for the edification of democratic citizens but as stopgaps to prevent either
 23 individualism or the state from growing too strong. Such concerns have important
 resonance for those worried about the problem of arrogance (or the possibility of
 25 humility) in a democracy: mediating institutions are forced to work without the
 coercive power of the state, and against the atomistic indifference of individual-
 27 ism, making a commitment to some form of humility a necessary element.

29

Concepts

31 Another way that religion can serve as a resource for politics is through provid-
 ing concepts that can be useful for democratic citizens without necessarily
 33 requiring religious commitments. While there are many examples of such con-
 cepts, I want to focus on two: Augustine's conception of the just war (Langan,
 35 1984) and Niebuhr's description of original sin. First, Augustine's description of
 the just war, worked out in *City of God* and *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, has
 37 been an incredibly influential concept that has been useful to both leaders and
 citizens in opposing and justifying war. One of the most recent important appli-
 39 cations of this concept was that of the political theorist Jean Elshtain, whose
Just War Against Terror (2008) used Augustine to argue that the wars in Iraq
 41 and Afghanistan were both just. This suggestion was paralleled by many of the
 neoconservative thinkers of the era. Whether or not Elshtain and other cheerlea-
 43 ders for the Iraq invasion were correct is irrelevant to the point at hand, which
 is that the concept of just war, developed by a theologian and used, originally,
 45 primarily within a religion context, became an important concept for secular dis-
 cussion of political decisions (Chesterman, 2001).

1 Similarly, various secular scholars have found the writing of Reinhold
 2 Niebuhr increasingly helpful as a means of understanding human anthropology
 3 and political decision-making, and the early twentieth century saw a rise of
 4 Niebuhr interest, with then candidate Obama describing him as one of his favor-
 5 ite philosophers (Crouter, 2010; Lemert, 2011; Sabella, 2017). What is important
 6 here is that such insights can be gained without necessarily getting on board
 7 with Niebuhr's broader theological vision (Elie, 2007). Perhaps, the most impor-
 8 tant of Niebuhr's insights was his deeply ambivalent view of human nature,
 9 expressed in one of his most famous epigrams: "Man's capacity for justice makes
 10 democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy neces-
 11 sary" (2011, p. xxxii). That quote is from *The Children of Light and the Children*
 12 *of Darkness*, subtitled "a vindication of democracy and a critique of its traditional
 13 defense." The book's defense of democracy is generally secular, though Niebuhr
 14 argues "modern idealists" must "recognize that the profundities of the Christian
 15 faith, which they have disavowed, are indispensable resources for the historic tasks
 16 which lie before us" (2011, p. 188). Yet such an emphasis on Christianity is not
 17 actually necessary for what is primarily a realist study of human selfishness and
 18 vainglory alongside, somehow, a capacity to do (and to want to do) good.
 19 Niebuhr would have understood this tension as that of original sin opposed to
 20 humanity's being made in the image of God, yet the hard willingness to acknowl-
 21 edge human evil in a way that was relatively translatable to secular concerns was
 22 what made Niebuhr so attractive to so many. As Crouter puts it:

23 Niebuhr believed that humanity is afflicted with excessive pride and a self-preoccupation that
 24 distorts moral judgment. For him this view was an empirical fact of human experience, borne
 25 out in everyday observations of human affairs. (2010, p. 41)

26 What those politicians, scholars, and journalists who read Niebuhr take from
 27 him is this sensitivity to evil alongside, even more importantly, a sense of irony:
 28 what Americans think is their reason for pride might well be their greatest sin.
 29 We should tread carefully, as a result, with humility and care. These insights
 30 make sense in a religious context, but they do not require it, making them one
 31 example of how religion can provide insights as resources for a broader, secular
 32 politics. And relevant for this discussion, they provide an example of how reli-
 33 gion need not provide resources for intellectual arrogance: as Niebuhr shows,
 34 sometimes religion cautions us to be humble.

37 *Motivations and Cultural Tools*

38 The third way that religion can be a resource is through providing the motiva-
 39 tion to act politically, as well as a means of acting. This insight is similar to
 40 those described by Tocqueville, though with a more specific focus on *motivation*
 41 and *form*. What gets people moving and what enables those movements? This is
 42 a subtly different issue from the *source* or *basis* of politics. For example, the
 43 sociological study of social movements has often identified religion as an impor-
 44 tant motivator for social action, as well as an important "tool for facilitating
 45 local organizing and activism" (Patillo-McCoy, 1998, p. 767). Patillo Mc-Coy
 shows how, for the black Chicago neighborhood she studied, the *content* is often

1 not “explicitly religious” though “the form takes on the tenor of a black church
 3 service” (1998, p. 769). Yet the black church provides more than simply “a com-
 5 mon language that leaders and followers, workers and supporters can share to
 7 coordinate action” (1998, p. 781). It also provides a source of motivation, a
 9 means through which problems are framed and then acknowledged as *religious*
 11 problems rather than purely secular ones. Certain forms of religious culture *in*
 13 *and of themselves* provide tools for sustaining social movements (Braunstein,
 Fulton, & Wood, 2014; Effler, 2010; Wood, 1994). In a similar way, scholars of
 religion and social movements have shown how, as with Casanova’s work on
 public religion, religious movements identify religion both as a reason to do
 what they do and a set of tools to solve the problems they have identified as
 their own (Braunstein, 2017; Lichterman, 2005; Williams, 2003).

Evaluations

15 Religious evaluations of politics can take a variety of forms, some of which ulti-
 17 mately come to resemble the concepts or cultural tools described above. Yet
 19 there is another way of thinking of religion as an evaluation, or rather the
 phenomenological grounding through which evaluations come to make sense
 and gain salience. As such, religions can provide not only alternative visions of
 21 how a secular, public modernity might operate, but, as a result of this counter-
 23 factual to modernity, they can also provide a contrary means of evaluating polit-
 25 ical decisions. Casanova, for example, argues that “public” or “de-privatized”
 religion in the 1980s “compels us to rethink the relationship of religion and
 27 modernity and, more importantly, the possible roles religions may play in the
 public sphere of modern societies” (2011, p. 6). Casanova cites both Neuhaus
 (who we will describe in the next section) and Tocqueville, but more important
 is that the basis of the evaluations Casanova describes is often rooted in religious
 29 language: “public religion” in Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States all
 31 make claims for and about the public good that are evaluations of how their soci-
 33 ety is and how it should be, evaluations that are unapologetically religious.
 Casanova cites Benhabib’s criticism of Habermas (1992) calling for the radical
 critique of the Habermasian distinction between justice and the good life (2011,
 35 p. 65). Public religious actors seek to talk about the good life as well, sharing ev-
 37 aluations that are rooted in religious commitments and thereby challenging secular-
 39 ist theories of religion’s inevitable differentiation and privatization (2001, p. 39).

Both Habermas and his Kantian cousin Rawls have been sensitive to such
 critiques, especially the idea that religion can provide an important means of
 39 *public* and not simply *private* moral life. Yet what if religion is not *separate* from
 41 politics but is actually the *source* of politics? It is a provocative claim, and one
 we explore in the next section.

Sources

45 As I see them, there are two ways to think about religion as a source for demo-
 cratic politics, and I will title each with the different names associated with the

1 approach I am describing, even if these authors might not agree: Durkheim and
 3 Neuhaus. A Durkheimian approach does not necessarily acknowledge “religion”
 5 as referring to an actual God or moral law, but it does describe how society cre-
 7 ates something that *feels* religious and which thereby exerts a kind of religious
 9 power. Society is necessarily religious, as a result, and so are its politics. A
 11 Neuhasian approach is quite different, in that it assumes a kind of religious (and
 generally Christian) understanding of the universe is necessary for the proper
 functioning of democratic liberalism. However, Neuhaus is careful never to call
 for a theocracy: the separation of church and state matters on a *procedural* level,
 but those procedures only continue to work because of people’s commitments to
 religious practices and beliefs.

13 *Durkheim*

15 To the extent that politics is something different from society, then Durkheim’s
 17 *Elementary Forms* (1995) is rarely about politics at all: there is little meaningful
 19 discussion of contestation, deliberation, or working out with (or against) each
 21 other the best way to organize a society. He does describe – in painstaking
 23 detail – how tribes have found various strategies for coexistence, particularly
 25 regarding the disparate treatment of totem animals. Yet the politics are never
 especially important; instead, Durkheim focuses on the *social*, the moments of
 “collective effervescence” and collective meaning-making through which society
 comes to recognize itself and becomes felt as an autonomous force of real
 power. This, for Durkheim, is the source of religion itself, a misrecognized
 means through which individuals come to understand the emergent and ever-
 present role of society in their lives.

27 Yet there are a few famous moments in Durkheim’s discussion of totems
 29 where he links all of this back to the modern era, politics and all:

31 [...] social life is only possible thanks to a vast symbolism... Collective feelings can just as well
 be incarnated in persons as in formulas. Some formulas are flags; some real or mythic perso-
 nages are symbols. (1995, p. 233)

33 This insight links Durkheim’s conception of a primitive society all the way to
 35 the contemporary, a claim he makes throughout the book (e.g., that modern sci-
 37 ence is not so epistemologically different from early Australian religion). In this
 39 sense, Durkheim’s study of religion *is* about politics, in that the book is about
 41 social life, and how every human experience – including politics – is necessarily
 43 social. While Durkheim’s thesis does not necessarily contradict a social contract
 45 understanding of politics, it does challenge its underlying ontology significantly.
 For Durkheim, any social contract can only exist because people are already
 and necessarily embedded within an emergent reality called “society.” In much
 social contract theory, politics (e.g., the contract) precedes and even makes pos-
 sible society. For Durkheim, the situation is reversed. As a result, everything
 political exists and gains its meaning through the social, and it is social experi-
 ences and processes (codes, boundaries, totems, and taboos) that give politics its
 meaning. Such has been the central insight of Durkheimian studies of politics,

1 especially those of the “strong program” of cultural sociology (Alexander, 2006;
Alexander & Smith, 2010).

3 In this “strong program” work, and in other sociological projects that link
Durkheim’s study of religion to contemporary politics, there is often little use of
5 the words “religion” or “religious” even if words contained within that category
are quite common, such as sacred, profane, totem, and ritual. Yet even the pres-
7 ence of these terms seems to point to an argument common among more liberal
Christians in the second half of the twentieth century: that everyone is really reli-
9 gious. In different ways, both Tillich’s conception of “ultimate concern” (1964)
and Rahner’s concept of “anonymous Christianity” (1976) argue that religion
11 forms the basis of human experience and that something like faith – or even
Christianity itself – is actually the template for how humans live. Such argu-
13 ments are not new, and they parallel very old discussions of “natural religion”
in early modernity up through sociology’s founding generation (Byrne, 2013;
15 Hume, 1980; Marx & Engels, 1970; Müller, 1889). We’re all actually religious, **AU:6**
these people argue, whether we admit it or not. And so religion and politics
17 intersect because people and politics intersect.

There are two ways to understand such arguments, and many of the propo-
19 nents slip between the two as they need not necessarily contradict each other:
the first position is that intellectual modernity – that is the Enlightenment and
21 its aftermath – is not “legitimate” (Blumenberg, 1985), that is, it is not actually
marked by a separation from its religious past. Instead, religious language,
23 values, and identities are constitutive elements of the modern project, even those
projects that understand themselves as militantly secular (Gillespie, 2008;
25 Löwith, 2011; Nietzsche, 1996; Taylor, 2007). Such an argument does not neces-
sarily imply that these religious undercurrents are true or normatively good: it is
27 simply establishing a genealogical, practical, and ideological continuity. In this
reading, it is not necessarily the case that *everyone is religious* or that *politics*
29 *always has religious elements*. It is simply a contingent story of Western moder-
nity, so while such arguments more or less capture the North Atlantic and its
31 settler colonies, it need not describe, for example, Japan (Josephson, 2012).
Indeed, perhaps paradoxically, an argument that religiosity is baked into the his-
33 tory of the West has been an important element of arguments that religiosity
need not be understood as a central part of social life (Asad, 2009).

35 The second way of understanding the term that “we are all religious” is to
assume that religion, in some form, is actually true. The most parsimonious way
37 of understanding such a position is simply to posit as a theory that God exists
(Smith, 2003). Yet this second position also need not be theist, though it often
39 is. Durkheim himself is perhaps the best manifestation of the atheist version of
this argument, as he regularly insists that religions are “grounded in and express
41 the real” (1995, p. 2). Indeed, for Durkheim it is religious experience that helped
to form social life itself: if there is such a thing as an original “social contract”
43 for Durkheim that precedes social life, it is not the meeting of individuals to
determine as a group their best interest but rather the meeting of semiconscious
45 beings who create religious rituals through which society – and with it,
consciousness – emerges (Rawls, 1996). To the extent that Durkheim is right

1 about the social requirements of political life, he provides us with a different
 2 way to orient our deliberations, one that might be able to ground a commitment
 3 to humility – or so we will discuss in this chapter’s final section.

5 *Neuhaus*

6 In *The Naked Public Square* (1984), written in the wake of the Moral Majority’s
 7 role in electing Ronald Reagan, Neuhaus seems at first ambivalent about the
 8 necessarily religious nature of what he describes as the “public ethic” that makes
 9 liberal democracy possible, that is, the common understandings and forms of
 10 mutual recognition through which people are able to be *liberal* and *democratic*
 11 to and with each other. He argues that such a public ethic must be “informed by
 12 religiously grounded values” because of the “sociological fact” that the “values
 13 of the American people are deeply rooted in religion” (1984, p. 21). Yet as the
 14 book goes on, it appears more and more certain that Neuhaus believes this is
 15 more than simply an American situation or a sociologically contingent one.

16 Neuhaus’s need to clothe the public square in religious garb is also just a
 17 numbers problem: there are many religious people who feel alienated by a public
 18 square that asks the religious “to check our deepest beliefs at the door” (1984,
 19 p. 28). Neuhaus’s argument remains a liberal one: he insists that “public deci-
 20 sions must be made by arguments that are public in character. A public argu-
 21 ment is trans-subjective. It is not derived from sources of revelation or
 22 disposition that are essentially private and arbitrary” (1984, p. 36). The question
 23 is not the content of the arguments but the *source* of the arguments, as well as
 24 the underlying *ethic* that makes the relationships and trust through which to
 25 have the arguments imaginable and then possible.

26 For Neuhaus, such an ethic must *necessarily* be religious. “When recogniz-
 27 able religion is excluded [from the public square], the vacuum will be filled by an
 28 *ersatz* religion [...] Again, to paraphrase Spinoza, transcendence abhors a vac-
 29 uum” (1984, p. 80). The very nature of laws, Neuhaus insists, requires a tran-
 30 scendent rooting for those laws. Even if some do not recognize the source of
 31 right versus wrong as transcendent, it is nonetheless the case that “law is pro-
 32 duced and sustained by the perception of a people that law is somehow corre-
 33 lated with the way things really are, or with the way things really should be”
 34 (1984, p. 254). It is only through religion (or *ersatz* religions like communism)
 35 that liberal democracies can move beyond their proceduralist negative freedoms
 36 and determine what their freedom is actually *for*. Liberal democracy provides
 37 the how, but religion provides the why. Neuhaus is suspicious of Rawls for
 38 much the same reason we described above concerning Durkheim and the social
 39 contract: society – and the politics which drive it – must be considered more
 40 than simply the sum of so many individuals.

41 Neuhaus cites the Jesuit priest John Courtney Murray to distinguish his poli-
 42 tics from those of fundamentalist “majoritarians” (1984, p. 201): while the latter
 43 seek an imposition of Christian law without any appeals to public reason, the
 44 former sought to show the necessary relationship *between* public reason and
 45 public religion. While Murray’s book *We Hold These Truths* (2005) was

1 primarily an insistence that the American experience disproved the Catholic
 3 Church's centuries-old suspicion of democracy, it was also a reflection on
 5 democracy itself, including its underlying "public philosophy." Murray distin-
 7 guishes himself from pragmatists – "it is false to say that what works is true" –
 9 but he shares with Dewey (and, for that matter, with Niebuhr, Durkheim, and
 11 countless others) a commitment to figuring out what unites a society besides its
 13 social contract. For Murray, natural law provides the authority for democracy's
 15 consensus which is, if nothing else, a consensus to focus on certain shared pro-
 17 blems even if we disagree on how they ought to be solved. That natural law is
 19 recognizable to anyone, religious or not, but its "ultimate origin" is God (2005,
 21 p. 117).

23 That commitment to natural law is increasingly common in conservative
 25 American politics (Finnis, 2011; George, 1994), and it has been criticized for
 27 naturalizing what are actually historically arbitrary moral commitments, thereby
 29 being able to make religious claims while claiming a nonreligious natural argu-
 31 ment. Regardless of the relative merits of natural law, it is important as an
 33 example of something similar to what Neuhaus describes. For even though natu-
 35 ral law claims to be a nonreligious (*natural*) way of describing the world, it is
 37 nearly always religious people who use it, and it borrows its concept from
 39 Thomistic theology. Yet in presenting natural law arguments in the public
 41 square, advocates take from their revelation those elements they feel can be
 43 adjudicated by any reasonable person, as opposed to those which require
 45 revealed commitments.

25 DEWEY ON DEMOCRACY, EMOTION, AND FAITH

27 In the preceding section, we described how we could understand religion as a
 29 hindrance, resource, evaluations, or source of democratic politics. However,
 31 none of these depictions finally resolves the deeper ontological questions of, first,
 33 whether religion (or something like religion) is *necessary* for democratic politics
 35 and, second, whether religion (or something like religion) is *good* for democratic
 37 politics, especially regarding a capacity to, at the same time, maintain prophetic
 39 commitments while remaining humble to the possibility of error.

41 Perhaps, the answer to these questions is simply to reject them, or at least to
 43 reorient them, in the spirit of pragmatism, toward a concern about what works
 45 within our experience as opposed to what must be true about the world previous
 to and beyond our experience within it. If that is the case, then religion can serve
 less as an ontological sounding board and more as a useful resource for giving
 individual and collective lives a unified integrity, an integrity through which pol-
 itics at once becomes more meaningful (because it builds upon something dee-
 per) and less fundamental (because it is not the exclusive or even most
 important domain of social life).

43 John Dewey sought to answer similar questions in his insistence that democ-
 45 racy required "a common faith" that unapologetically adopted religious lan-
 guage: perhaps the most famous discipline of his lifetime, Sidney Hook,
 criticized Dewey for making too many concessions to religion (Ryan, 1995,

1 p. 273). Yet Dewey did not necessarily see it that way. He wanted to separate
 2 religion from the supernatural, and he did so by understanding religion as any-
 3 thing that provides a unity to a self toward particular ideals:

4 Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of per-
 5 sonal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality. (1971,
 6 p. 27)

7 Such a religion is “morality touched by emotion,” though only “when the ends
 8 of moral conviction arouse emotions that are not only intense but are actuated
 9 and supported by ends so inclusive that they unify the self” (1971, p. 22). Dewey
 10 distinguishes these moral and emotional commitments from intelligence, arguing
 11 that moral faith is much more than an assent to an intellectual proposition.

12 An ideal’s authority, he argues, is more than simply the authority of certain
 13 facts. His suggestion that these two can often be conflated calls to mind recent
 14 concerns about humans’ *capacity* to have rational deliberations (Chen,
 15 Duckworth, & Chaiken, 1999; Giner-Sorolila & Chaiken, 1997; Kahan, 2013;
 16 Mercier & Sperber, 2011; Redlawsk, 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006; von Hippel &
 17 Trivers, 2011). “What we ardently desire to have thus and so, we tend to believe
 18 is already so,” he warns. “Desire has a powerful influence upon intellectual
 19 beliefs” (1971, p. 22). Dewey therefore calls not so much for more intelligence
 20 but rather a faith *in* intelligence, a faith in “continued and rigorous inquiry” that
 21 “can become religious in quality” (1971, p. 26). It is only through such faith that
 22 deliberation becomes possible as a *social* process.

23 As such, Dewey’s commitment to a common faith comes to resemble
 24 Tillich’s ultimate concern, and Rorty argues the two are basically indistinguish-
 25 able (1991, p. 69). The similarities are important, not least in how they share a
 26 move that some consider the unintended endgame of liberal Protestantism: a
 27 move from doctrine to morals, locating the experience of God so fully in mysti-
 28 cal experience and moral commitments that it is utterly immune to empirical cri-
 29 tique (Berger, 1969; Rockefeller, 1994). Such a move, Asad argues, keeps
 30 religion safe from liberalism and liberalism safe from religion (2009). Yet, even
 31 if the move toward a moralistic religion might be a rearguard maneuver for the
 32 liberal Protestant theologians of Dewey’s era, Rogers (2008) argues that this
 33 description doesn’t really fit what Dewey is up to, nor, I would argue, does it
 34 accurately capture Tillich’s project, which is at its most basic a phenomenologi-
 35 cal attempt to capture how human understanding can reconcile the problems of
 36 ambiguity and the ultimate, especially within questions of religion.

37 Dewey is trying something similar but in a different realm. Rorty tells his stu-
 38 dents “they should treat Dewey and Tillich as saying the same thing to different
 39 audiences” (1991, p. 69), yet Dewey’s fixation on democracy means that not
 40 only was the audience different but also, to a large degree, so were the goals and
 41 the methods. Dewey, like Tillich, wanted to challenge some of the unnecessary
 42 cognitivism of religion, focusing instead on the moral and emotional capacities
 43 of religion. The move parallels long-standing critiques of fundamentalism from
 44 within Christianity, especially the degree to which fundamentalism tends to
 45 unintentionally imitate the Enlightenment’s focus on discursive truth claims in

1 place of ritual and liturgy, thereby ignoring the truth contained within narra-
 2 tive's *meaning*, focusing instead on the truth claims contained within the content
 3 (Noll, 1994).

4 However, Dewey argues that pushing against cognitivism is still not far
 5 enough, because the point is bringing people together for the good of a demo-
 6 cratic public. He describes three stages of historical growth related to religion.
 7 The first views humans as so evil as to need redemption from the supernatural;
 8 the second, what he described as the position of liberal theologians of his era,
 9 finds the significance of human relations in something distinctly religious. "The
 10 third stage," Dewey writes, "would realize that in fact the values prized in those
 11 religions that have ideal elements are idealization of things characteristic of nat-
 12 ural association, which have then been projected into a supernatural realm for
 13 safe-keeping and sanction" (1971, p. 73). The point of religion, then, is to honor
 14 what is immanent rather than what is eternal: it is a deeply Emersonian insight
 15 (Rogers, 2008, pp. 107–144), as well as one that connects Dewey as much to
 16 Durkheim as to Tillich.

17 Like Durkheim, Dewey here insists on the *reality* of religion, even if it is not
 18 necessarily related to anything transcendent. Dewey is much harsher than
 19 Durkheim regarding belief in the supernatural, though he shares Durkheim's
 20 connection of religion to emotion. Yet while Durkheim's theory of religion must
 21 be *applied* to politics, for Dewey the very point of religion is its applicability to
 22 our common problems as a group, which, for him, is basically his understanding
 23 of politics as well. Reason is a key element of this, but a reasoning intelligence
 24 guided and driven by emotion, which can therefore be understood as itself a
 25 kind of common faith that undergirds political life:

26 Intelligence, as distinct from the older conception of reason, is inherently involved in action.
 27 Moreover, there is no opposition between it and emotion. There is such a thing as passionate
 28 intelligence, as ardor in behalf of light shining from the murky places of social existence, and
 29 as zeal for its refreshing and purifying effects. The whole story of man shows that there are no
 30 objects that may not deeply stir engrossing emotion. One of the few experiments in the attach-
 31 ment of emotion to ends that mankind has not tried is that of devotion, so intense as to be
 32 religious, to intelligence as a source for social action. (1971, p. 79)

33 By intelligence, Dewey means science in its broadest sense (1971, p. 33), a kind
 34 of collective testing of ideas together, making him an important early forerunner
 35 of contemporary debates about deliberative democracy (Bohman, 2000;
 36 Honneth, 1998; Westbrook, 1998).

37 If Dewey is a forerunner of deliberative democracy, then his late theory of
 38 democracy, seen most clearly in *The Public and its Problems* (2016), provides
 39 solutions to some of the problems we described above. Most important, in Axel
 40 Honneth's opinion, is an underlying emphasis on a just division of labor rather
 41 than simply proceduralist speech codes. The "common ground" required to
 42 undergird speech is more possible in Dewey than in Habermas because a more
 43 just division of labor makes it "possible to experience communicative related-
 44 ness" as a middle way between "an overethicized republicanism and an empty
 45 proceduralism" (1998, pp. 779–780). While Honneth points primarily to prob-
 46 lems of economic inequality in his description of the flaws of democracy,

1 Dewey's work also recognizes the problems we would now refer to as "identity
 3 politics," which he believed were soluble to the degree that Americans could
 5 come together in democratic efforts. He wrote that he prefers the metaphor of
 7 the orchestra to that of the melting pot, "but genuine assimilation to *one*
 9 *another*—not to Anglosaxondom—seems to be essential to America [italics
 11 his]." Note that in this sense, Dewey calls just as much for those groups in the
 13 elite to be assimilated as those who are not: "That each cultural section should
 15 maintain its distinctive literary and artistic traditions seems to me most desir-
 17 able, but in order that it might have more to contribute to others" (Westbrook,
 19 1998, pp. 212–214).

21 A conservative critic might find fault with Dewey's argument, as might a sec-
 23 ular critic or a religious critic who is not Christian or Jewish. While a non-
 25 Christian or atheist might reject Dewey's use of the implicitly Christian concepts
 27 of faith and God, another kind of religious critic might reject their inability to
 29 make claims based on their revealed texts, arguing that certain philosophical
 31 positions are just as intractable and unfalsifiable. More importantly, some con-
 33 servatives (religious or not) might argue that Dewey's position is simply too
 35 optimistic.

37 Dewey anticipates such a complaint in *A Common Faith*, writing that his
 39 argument "involves no expectation of a millennium of good" (1971, p. 46). He
 41 might well acknowledge the Christian heritage of his use of words like "God"
 43 and "faith," but he is situating them in a Christian society in which they are
 45 intended to do a certain amount of work. Similarly, Dewey would have no prob-
 47 lem admitting that philosophies can be just as dogmatic as religions, and this
 49 makes those philosophies just as much of a problem. The point is to rid our-
 51 selves of dogma, and the supernatural weight and restriction dogmas tend to
 53 accrue. The use of the word "God," like anything else Dewey suggests, is an
 55 attempt to solve a problem, in this case the sense of isolation and alienation
 57 from nature, community, and the world at large. It is an attempt to isolate the
 59 power of the "religious" (as opposed to religion) in focusing on a human life, in
 61 giving it a sense of continuity and purpose. In this sense, the problem is only
 63 partially that dogmas are wrong.

65 The problem is that dogmas might not *work*, and to see if they work, we
 67 have to be open to testing them. As Rogers (2008) makes clear, Dewey was pro-
 69 foundly influenced by Darwin's emphasis on contingency, and it is a fundamen-
 71 tal misreading to regard Dewey as an optimist: things very well might not work.
 73 The point is not that things will always get better but that they can get better,
 75 and that there is no necessary reason to be cynical about human capabilities
 77 (Rogers, 2008, pp. 120–125; Westbrook, 1998, pp. 523–532). No matter what,
 79 we can try, and we can try with the tools available to us at the time. We are
 81 born *into* the use of these tools rather than freely choosing them, making our
 83 agency socially constituted and humble rather than autonomous and heroic. In
 85 this sense, Dewey has no problem with many of the ways religion can be a
 87 source, resource, or means of evaluation for people in politics, provided, in open
 89 conversations, they are willing to acknowledge the ways any of these applica-
 91 tions of religion might no longer work or might not work in this context. There

1 is thereby an emphasis on humility in *practice* rather than in *person*. People can
2 make whichever arguments they like, but the arguments do have to work.

3 The obvious response to such a pragmatic compromise is that it does not go
4 far enough. For example, one of Habermas's sternest critics, Iris Marion
5 Young, is certainly committed to democratic deliberation: she simply believes
6 that publics must take account of group interests, often through specific mechan-
7 isms such as "group veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group
8 directly" (2011, p. 184). However, privileging certain groups over others can
9 sometimes lead to intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) problems that can penalize
10 women of color (Karpowitz, Mendelberg, & Shaker, 2012). Similarly, others
11 suggest that a lack of real-world equality makes an ideological commitment to
12 conversational equality all but unrealizable (Fraser, 1990, p. 63); for these
13 critics, democratic deliberation is ironically antidemocratic inasmuch as it tends
14 to exclude certain historically marginalized groups or populations from the dis-
15 cussions themselves. Even when such individuals can enter into the conversa-
16 tions, formal inclusion mechanisms are still often insufficient (Young, 2001),
17 and marginalized groups' arguments are accorded less respect and esteem,
18 whether consciously or subconsciously (Sanders, 1997).

19 These questions of group interests nearly always refer to historically margin-
20 alized communities; however, many conservative Christians believe they are
21 unfairly marginalized in the United States and other countries they consider
22 "militantly secular." Regardless of the empirical merits of the claim, religious
23 groups might insist they also need special protections and privileges in the course
24 of a conversation, thereby directly challenging the separations called for by both
25 Rawls and Habermas and seemingly also undercutting the possibility for intel-
26 lectual humility. However, as Iris Marion Young and others have shown, some-
27 times the best answer to the problems of deliberation is to remake the rules of
28 deliberation using nondeliberative means. It is worth acknowledging that nearly
29 everyone has certain hard-to-articulate non-negotiables they think are worth
30 protecting, including democracy itself and the protection of marginalized
31 groups. As discussed earlier, there is no necessary reason to separate the reli-
32 gious and nonreligious in this regard (Taylor, 2007). However, an important dis-
33 tinction would be the degree to which anyone can separate non-negotiable
34 *claims* from non-negotiable *sources*, as the former can more easily be established
35 in a pluralistic politics than the latter. This does not mean that people must give
36 up their non-negotiable sources or even that they must translate its claims into
37 "secular" claims. It is simply to say that claims can be shared as resources in
38 ways we described above; it is harder to do so with entire sources. As such, the
39 question of religious claims' function becomes practical rather than categorical.

40 So, our first criticism of Dewey was that a religious critic would see it as
41 unfair to prevent them giving religious reasons in deliberation, a problem he
42 might resolve by emphasizing a pragmatic distinction between reasons that are
43 not allowed and reasons that just will not work. A second criticism of Dewey is
44 perhaps more damning, even if it is correctable with Durkheim's help. While
45 Dewey recognized that the "core of religion has generally been found in rites
and ceremonies" (59), he generally fails to recognize these as anything except

1 implicitly cognitive and discursive claims rather than as processes through which
 3 people are socialized into certain ways of understanding the world. Of course,
 5 Dewey recognizes the role of religion in socializing certain understandings of the
 7 good life; indeed, it was exactly because of this socialization that Dewey wanted
 9 to weaken the restrictive power of scripture, thereby allowing religious argu-
 11 ments about the good to be tested in the way that any argument would be. Yet
 even if Dewey could see the way that religion socialized and even if he also
 could pay a bit more attention to the *emotional* aspects of religion, he paid less
 attention to the specific role of *ritual*. Dewey was a Protestant after all, and he
 was responding primarily to Protestants: these were largely questions of theol-
 ogy and morality rather than liturgy and sacrament.

13 Yet what if Durkheim is right, and ritual is actually what matters? The move
 15 is not that far for Dewey to make. After all, he already acknowledges, with
 17 Durkheim, the importance of emotion in social and political life. He already
 19 recognizes the importance of community and physical co-presence, of sharing a
 sense of common identity before the deliberation can even happen. All that
 remains is for him to recognize the role of ritual life in democratic politics, even
 rational deliberation.

21 So what if speech thereby becomes a kind of liberal ritual, in exactly the sense
 23 Habermas describes in the sacralization of language? And what if that ritual
 25 takes on a kind of sacred sensibility, helping to maintain Dewey's "common
 faith"? This focus on ritual would help air out the Protestant dryness of Dewey's
 faith, and it would also help to show the way that the faith comes to live in the
 day to day, not only as emotional commitments, but as rooted in practices with
 sacred stakes.

27 Of course, the fact that something is a ritual does not necessarily mean it is
 29 right. Maybe certain kinds of speech are wrong, or maybe the kinds of speech
 31 we thought were wrong are actually okay. Maybe the things we thought were
 33 sacred are actually harmful or just uninteresting. Dewey's faith in the demo-
 35 cratic process allows us to push these questions forward. We are able to do so in
 part because of a confidence in human capability, but it is not only confidence.
 After all, if we were completely confident, we would need to change nothing. It
 is humility, as well, that drives Deweyan democracy. Rogers cites *Human*
Nature and Conduct to open his first article, and it is worth repeating here:

37 When the future arrives with its inevitable disappointments as well as fulfillments, and with
 39 new sources of trouble, failure loses something of its fatality, and suffering yields fruit of
 instruction, not of bitterness. Humility is more demanded at our moments of triumph than
 41 those of failure. For humility is not caddish self-depreciation. It is the sense of our slight
 inability even with our best intelligence and effort to command events; a sense of our depen-
 dence upon forces that go their way with our wish and plan. (Dewey in Rogers, 2008, p. 25)

43 To turn Niebuhr's maxim around in the service of his enemy: our humility
 45 makes deliberation possible and our hope makes deliberation necessary.

Yet this might all seem a bit too easy. After all, for those who hold to a
 revealed text and believe its maxims must be carried out, Dewey's understanding
 of religion is less a compromise than a frontal assault, insisting, as it does, that

1 even the sacred should be subject to critique. And this is why Durkheim again
becomes helpful and the glimmers of Durkheim's theory of sociality are visible
3 in Dewey's commitment to a middle way between dogmatic communitarianism
and atomistic individualism (Rogers, 2008).

5 As various scholars of deliberation have suggested (Ryfe, 2005;
Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008; Thompson, 2008), to give and exchange reasons in
7 a fair and egalitarian manner are not necessarily impossible, provided there are
certain conditions beforehand, equality of interlocutors and openness to correc-
9 tion of course, but also, and more fundamentally, a commitment to the conver-
sation itself and to learning from the conversation. The challenge then shifts out
11 of the realm of either religion or politics, instead showing potential interlocutors
how we share certain common problems that make us, through this commonal-
13 ity, common citizens. The problem of religion and politics thereby shifts from
an all or nothing binary forcing questions of the suitability of translation to a
15 pragmatic series of practical solutions to the problems we all share, and the
degree to which religious or nonreligious actors can bring particular tools to our
17 common table. Understood pragmatically, whether or not religion is fundamen-
tally true is not really a question we as a deliberative democracy need to have:
19 instead the question becomes whether or not this or that element of a religion is
helpful in our common projects. Of course, religious politics here still has the
21 problem of translation, but not because of some fundamental misfit between reli-
gion and public deliberation but simply because other members of the public
23 might not share these religious backgrounds, and the tool has to be proven to be
effective to at least a majority of them.

25 The ground thereby shifts in two important ways. First, the religious and
nonreligious both are forced to recognize a kind of humility to the degree they
27 all recognize a common problem they cannot at this moment fix. And second,
both religious and nonreligious are forced to develop a second kind of humility,
29 in that even though they might firmly believe in the *rightness* of their commit-
ments or claims, that is a separate question from whether their suggestions will
31 *work*, both in the sense of eventual policy and, just as importantly, in the sense
of convincing interlocutors. Solutions become practical rather than absolute,
33 pragmatic rather than ontological. Yet that does not mean religion ceases to
have a fundamental character for the religious: it is only that its elements can be
35 shared and suggested within something just as fundamental, social life itself.
A fusion of Durkheim and Dewey helps us to recognize and reorient both our
37 social existence and our politics to make this kind of "common faith" possible,
that is, a mutual recognize that our problems are truly shared and therefore our
39 solutions must be as well.

The next – and obvious – question is whether such recognition actually
41 obtains, as so much of society seems committed to the maintenance of inequality
and privilege. What if we actually do not agree that a certain kind of inequality
43 or a certain lack of recognition is a problem? It is no coincidence that both
Durkheim (2011) and Dewey were so concerned about political education, and
45 in both cases the concern regards the sort of inculcation of something Durkheim
might call the "sacred," yet an immanent sacred rooted in an emotional

1 commitment to democratic ideals. Such education is as important as ever, in
 3 schools of course, but most importantly in community organizations and orga-
 5 nizing, in political campaigns and conversations, and even in academic fora like
 7 this chapter. For Dewey, we become socialized not through ideals downloaded
 9 into us wholesale but through *doing*, and in doing, through coming to under-
 11 stand our way of doing as a habitual way to understand the world and our place
 13 within it. The project of democracy is always and necessarily a gradual one: we
 15 become democrats not because of one amazing conversation but through the
 long steady work of doing democracy and educating others within it, both in
 and outside of discourse (Young, 2001, 2011).

11 That commitment to education is at once arrogant and humble: arrogant in
 13 the sense that it assumes we can gradually convince a massively unequal world
 15 that democratic ideals are worthwhile, and humble in that we have no idea
 whether that education will work, and even if it does, what such a democracy
 would produce. Yet, as Dewey insists, we do have faith.

17 CONCLUSION

19 Religion, I have argued, can be a hindrance, a resource, an evaluation, and a
 21 source for democratic politics, especially deliberative politics. Yet deliberation is
 23 only possible given a prior commitment to democratic equality and to the kind
 25 of humility that makes possible an acknowledgment someone else has a better
 27 answer. Religion can obviously prevent such humility, leading to an arrogant
 29 dogmatism that only one way of operating will do. Yet religion is not alone in
 insisting on certain non-negotiables, both through deliberation and through
 other nondeliberative methods. What concerns Enlightenment thinkers from
 Kant down to Rawls and Habermas is less religion itself and more a dogmatic
 fealty to certain doctrines, unwilling to be moved by what they are unwilling to
 recognize is a better argument.

31 A fusion of Durkheim and Dewey helps us to think about these problems in
 33 a different way. First, we separate religious *claims* from religious *sources*, not
 35 banning religious claims per se but instead insisting on a basic pragmatic test:
 37 could it actually convince anyone? Second, we emphasize the importance of
 39 society itself, especially in its emotional, ritualistic sensibility, making political
 41 differences more a series of practical problems rather than a means of establish-
 43 ing social identities. This is not to deny that many people's social identities are
 45 always already political, referred to by others, dismissively, as practical prob-
 lems: look at late nineteenth-century studies of "the woman problem" or "the
 Jewish question." It is simply to argue that to the degree that people can identify
 as a community first and a group of individuals working out politics second,
 then they will perhaps become more in tune with each other's recognition of the
 problems themselves. However, developing such a community with shared
 visions is no easy feat, and both Dewey and Durkheim insist on the importance
 of education, not only in schools, but also through activism, media, and many
 other means.

1 Indeed, as Iris Marion Young argues, an exchange of ideas can be more “dis-
 2 orderly” than standard accounts of deliberation, with “enraged and responsible
 3 democratic communication” such as “street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical
 4 works, and cartoons” (Young, 2001, p. 688) alongside more staid approaches to
 5 politics. Young does not deny that deliberation matters – “the best democratic
 6 theory and practice will affirm them both” (Young, 2001, p. 689) – yet she
 7 seems to imply that, given the grave injustices all around, activism is the more
 8 urgent and the more necessary, and, we might add, the more open to radically
 9 different ways to evaluate our common world. Religion provides one such evalu-
 10 ation, as well as a series of resources and even sources for democratic politics.
 11 Of course, religion might well be a hindrance as well. At any rate, the relation-
 12 ship of religion to politics does seem worth discussing.

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