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Habermas's Politics of Rational Freedom: Navigating the History of Philosophy between Faith and Knowledge[*]

Peter J. Verovšek[†]
Department of Politics & International Relations
University of Sheffield
Elmfield, Northumberland Road
Sheffield, S10 2TU
United Kingdom
p.j.verovsek@sheffield.ac.uk

ABSTRACT Despite his hostility to religion in his early career, since the turn of the century Habermas has devoted his research to the relationship between faith and knowledge. His two-volume *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (2020) is the culmination of this project. Spurred by the attacks of 9/11 and the growing conflict between religion and the forces of secularization, I argue that this philosophy of history is the centerpiece of an important turning point in Habermas's intellectual development. Instead of interpreting religion merely as part of the history of postmetaphysical thinking, Habermas now sees it as a crucial normative resource for both philosophy and social cohesion in the future as well. Despite its backward-looking approach, my basic thesis is that this book is best understood as forward-looking appeal for a tolerant, self-reflective democratic politics that brings religious and secular citizens together in dialogue through the cooperative use of their rational freedom.

KEYWORDS Jürgen Habermas, Philosophy of History, Politics and Religion, Postmetaphysical Thinking, Postsecularism

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[†] Dr. Peter J. Verovšek is permanent Lecturer (tenured Assistant Professor) in Politics/International Relations at the University of Sheffield and is the author of *Memory and the Future of Europe: Rupture and Integration in the Wake of Total War* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

"Modernity can and will no longer borrow
the criteria by which it takes its orientation
from the models supplied by another epoch;
it has to create its normativity out of itself.
Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself
without any possibility of escape."
- Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 1983 (1987, 7, emphasis in original)

"Nothing of theological content
will persist without being transformed;
every content will have to put itself
to the test of migrating into the realm
of the secular, the profane."
- Theodor W. Adorno, *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, 1957, quoted in Habermas (2019, II.806)

Introduction

Jürgen Habermas's *Also a Philosophy of History* is a remarkable book. Published by Suhrkamp Verlag shortly after his 90th birthday, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Habermas 2019, hereafter AGPh) may well be Habermas's final scholarly monograph. It is certainly his longest work, which is saying something for an author famous for writing long books. At 1752 pages, its two volumes easily eclipse the similarly bifurcated text of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (hereafter TCA), whose original German edition clocks in at a *mere* 1167 pages. For students of Habermas, his 1981 "big blue monster" has been replaced by a new, even weightier navy-colored colossus.

For a work of this length and scholarly merit, AGPh is unexpectedly readable, especially given Habermas's reputation for dense academic prose. Its flowing narrative presents a genealogical defense of "postmetaphysical thinking," Habermas's shorthand for the paradigm of social cooperation based on the communicatively mediated search for mutual understanding (*Verständigung*), which he has spent most of his career developing and defending. In this sense, AGPh is an appropriate capstone to his academic corpus.

Although this book is Habermasian in its basic presuppositions and theoretical orientation, it is also surprising in many ways. To start, Habermas is decidedly *not* a historian of philosophy; both his approach and the temporal breadth of AGPh present radical departures in his work. Before this monograph, whose narrative starts in the Axial Age (roughly between 800 and 200 BC) and runs through the middle ages to the beginning of the twentieth century, Habermas rarely engaged with intellectual movements or cited thinkers from before the 1700s. Additionally, for the majority of his career he was not particularly sympathetic to the idea that religion had much to offer the modern world, even though he engaged extensively with the Jewish sources of German idealism as well as debates surrounding political theology in the postwar Federal Republic. Recalling Max Weber's famous statement that he was "unmusical in matters religious"

(1909, letter to Ferdinand Tönnies, quoted in Kloppenberg 1988, 498), as late as 2006 Habermas still referred to himself as "tone-deaf in the religious sphere" (in Ratzinger & Habermas 2006, 11).

His longstanding view of religion is summed up in the first epigraph quoted above. In the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (hereafter PDM), originally delivered as a series of lectures in 1983, Habermas defined the modern age in terms of the break or "rupture" (see Verovšek 2020) signified by "the Enlightenment and the French Revolution." Whereas thinkers in previous historical periods saw themselves as part of a "*continual renewal*" or "rebirth" of the past, as the label for the Renaissance makes particularly clear, in PDM Habermas argued that modernity could no longer take "its orientation from the model supplied by other epochs." Instead, it is "cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape" and has to "*create its normativity out of itself*" (1987, 7, emphases in original). Until fairly recently, Habermas thus thought that modernity had to let go of metaphysical and religious worldviews, i.e., "the authoritarian normativity of a tradition interlinked with the chain of generations," in favor of a communicative model of cooperation based on the "the unforced force of the better argument" (1987, 107).

The second epigraph from Theodor Adorno (1958/2005, 167) appears on the penultimate page of AGPh. Building on Habermas's newfound "religious musicality," this quotation from his mentor at the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) signals how much his view of the place of religion has changed over the past 35 years. Far from demanding that the modern age (*Neuzeit*) generate its own normativity "*out of itself*," Habermas now admits not only that modernity is the product of a movement of sacred contents into "the realm of the secular, the profane," but also that this process is both legitimate and ongoing. Adorno's words thus serve as the starting point for and summary of his argument: "Using this sentence as a my guiding threat, I sought to depict the process of 'migration' [*Einwanderung*] of theological content into profane thought as a philosophically comprehensible learning process [*Lernprozess*]" (quoted in Klingen 2019).[1]

Building on the transformation reflected in the two epigraphs – as well as on the central place of the latter in Habermas's historical narrative –I argue that AGPh is the centerpiece of an important *Wendepunkt* (turning point) in Habermas's intellectual development. Instead of seeing religion merely as part of the history of postmetaphysical thinking, Habermas now sees it as a crucial component of its future as a normative resource for social cohesion and good arguments more generally. Viewed within the broader context of his career, these two volumes are thus best understood as "an enigmatic appeal to the use of our *rational freedom* (*vernünftige Freiheit*)" (I.13, emphasis in original). In this sense, Habermas's history of the religious origins of important secular ideas, including individual autonomy, equal rights, and democratic participation, is not primarily backward-looking; instead, it is a forward-looking "call to enlightenment" (I.13) urging citizen-believers and their secular counterparts to work together to generate new, shared normative standards through an ongoing "transformation in the form of social integration (*Formwandel der Sozialintegration*)" (I.136).

The argument proceeds as follows. I start by reflecting on the context surrounding Habermas's so-called "religious turn." In light of the evidence I present – and in contrast to the contentions of many of his critics – I argue that Habermas is a political thinker committed resolving the pathologies of contemporary society (I). Turning to the monograph itself, I examine AGPh's method, focus, and approach (II). A brief overview of the historical narrative

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German to English are mine.

follows (III). I then interrogate what I see as its core message: the socio-political role of "postmetaphysical thinking" today. As a discipline that keeps its eye on the big picture and on what developments in other areas mean "for us" in our everyday lives, Habermas argues that postmetaphysical philosophy needs to mediate between naturalistic, secularized science on the one side, and religious, theocratic convictions on the other (IV). I conclude by reflecting on the place of AGPh in Habermas's corpus and its call for greater global solidarity at the start of the twenty-first century. In the face of growing conflict between religious fundamentalists and radical secularists – and in line with his broader philosophical project – AGPh is a historical appeal for a tolerant, self-reflective democratic politics based on rational dialogue mediated by open secular translation.

I. The Political Context of Habermas's Religious Turn

The relationship between "faith and knowledge" (*Glauben und Wissen*) is the focal point of AGPh. In fact, an early draft of the book that Habermas shared with the participants in a colloquium on his work on religion was originally entitled *Essay on Faith and Knowledge: Postmetaphysical Thinking and the Secular Self-Interpretation of Modernity* (Calhoun, Mendieta, & VanAntwerpen 2013, 469). Despite the change to *Also a Philosophy of History*, which I discuss in further detail below, this initial emphasis is preserved in the subtitles of the two volumes, both of which retain this phrase (Vol 1. "The Occidental Constellation of Faith and Knowledge," and; Vol 2. "Rational Freedom: Tracing the Discourse of Faith and Knowledge"). This aspect of the text's evolution explains AGPh's focus on religion and theology at the expense of mathematics, science, and art, which also played a crucial role in the development of postmetaphysical thought, despite the title's claim to be a general philosophy of history.

The fact that Habermas chose to focus his *Spätwerk* on the relationship between faith and knowledge – this dichotomy maps onto his related and overlapping distinctions between theology and philosophy, as well as religious community and society or the political community more generally – is somewhat unexpected given the progression of his thought. It is true that Habermas dealt extensively with outwardly religions themes in his dissertation on *The Absolute and History: On the Ambiguity in Schelling's Thought* (1954). However, although his *Doktorarbeit* engages deeply with Schelling's evaluation of the relationship between God and (historical) reality, Habermas's analysis there revealed "no interest in Christological connections"; instead, he chose to focus on "the philosophy of history in terms of politics" (Frank 2009, 223). In this sense, the basic orientation of AGPh represents a return to some of the themes he had developed in his earliest philosophical writings.

Following his dissertation – which remains unpublished – Habermas did not engage extensively with religion. On the rare occasions he addressed issues relating to the sacred during the first fifty years of his career, Habermas usually treated faith as a historical relic. Following Weber (1905/1985), he generally expected the process of modernization to lead to a "demystification" or "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) of the world. In TCA, Habermas therefore argued that through a process he calls "the linguistification of the sacred (*die Versprachlichung des Sakralen*)," the modern West had successfully translated the basic insights of faith into a secular vocabulary as "the *spellbinding* power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding* force of criticizable validity claims" (1984/1987, II.77, emphasis in original).

As I pointed out in the introduction, AGPh is the culmination of a *Wende* in Habermas's understanding of religion, bringing him back full circle to issues from his doctoral thesis. Although he remains committed to the idea of "linguistification" developed in TCA, citing

Adorno Habermas now admits of "the possibility of a *continued* 'migration of theological contents into the secular, the profane'" (2013, 353). Given his own growing awareness that "something is missing" (2006) in our "ambivalent modern age" (2010), he (2006, 44, 50) affirms not only that "philosophy must be ready to learn from theology," but also that "religious convictions have an epistemological status that is not purely and simply irrational." Religion is thus no longer simply part of the backward-looking genealogy of reason; it is also a resource of forward-looking normative inspiration in the present.

Habermas's newfound appreciation for the important historical role played by the "migrations" from sacred content into the profane has far-reaching implications. In a statement from 2002 that recapitulates the basic thrust of AGPh he (2002, 149) acknowledges the theological origins of the basic concepts of modern philosophy: "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." Habermas (2002, 160) has even retrospectively uncovered the influence of the sacred in his own thought, confessing that "my conception of language and of communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding nourishes itself from the legacy of Christianity." As much as occidental, postmetaphysical philosophy might wish to distance itself from the normative origins of Judeo-Christian theology, Habermas now acknowledges that "[u]p to this very day there is no alternative to it." AGPh is his attempt to justify these claims.

Despite the new theoretical insights involved in his "religious turn," its context and timing indicate the importance of geopolitical developments his renewed interest in the sacred. In addition to his scholarly work, Habermas is also the leading public intellectual of postwar Germany, frequently speaking out in political debates when he judges that "current events are threatening to spin out of control" (2009, 55). Building on his status as "the Hegel of the Federal Republic" (Ross 2001), after the fall of the Berlin Wall Habermas has expanded the scope of his public engagement to affairs in the European Union as well as to broader geopolitical developments (Verovšek 2012).

As a frequent visitor to the US – and to New York in particular – Habermas was profoundly shaken by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He had already been observing the growing tension between science and religion in debates surrounding abortion and genetic engineering for some time. Additionally, he also had previously expressed concerns about Europe's inability to integrate an increasingly vocal and visible Muslim minority, symbolized most directly by the Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) who had settled in West Germany after initially being invited as a temporary supplement to the labor force. However, with the attacks of 9/11, Habermas (2003, 101) notes that "the tension between secular society and religion exploded in an entirely new way."

On 14 October, a little over a month after the destruction of the Twin Towers, Habermas was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Book Sellers Association (*Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*). His interest in religion starts with this speech, which was delivered from the lectern of the St. Paul's Church (*Paulskirche*) in Frankfurt am Main. In his *Friedenspreisrede*, Habermas sought to understand "fundamentalism [a]s an exclusively modern phenomenon and, therefore, not only a problem of others." Instead of condemning religion as the "opium of the masses" in the manner of orthodox Marxism, he instead called for dialogue and self-criticism, noting the need for self-reflection in the West, where "feelings toward 'secularization' are still highly ambivalent" (2003, 102). Rather than

blaming the Muslim, Semitic, premodern, fundamentalist "other," he sought instead to reflect on the failures, weaknesses, and pathologies of secular modernity in Europe, i.e., precisely where it is most fully developed. Rejecting the idea that 9/11 represents a "clash of civilizations," he warns, "We do not want to be perceived as crusaders of a competing religion or as salespeople of instrumental reason and destructive secularization" (2003, 103).

The key insight of the *Friedenspreisrede*, which announced the research agenda that culminates in AGPh, is that secularization is not a Manichean either/or choice. The question for Habermas is not one of "faith *or* knowledge," but of how "faith *and* knowledge" can coexist and learn from one another. In reflecting on the concept of secularization as it developed in Europe, he notes that it is typically interpreted either positively as a way of *taming* religious authority, or negatively as a form of unlawful *appropriation*, a meaning that is tied to the fact that this term initially described the expropriation of Church property by the secular state. Rejecting his own earlier use of the term's former connotation, Habermas (2003, 104) argues, "Both readings make the same mistake. They construe secularization as a kind of zero-sum game…. Gains on one side can only be achieved at the expense of the other side, and by liberal rules which act in favor of the driving forces of modernity."

Keeping this insight in mind, in his post-9/11 research agenda Habermas seeks to turn these "distortion[s] in communication…of which terrorism is the most extreme version" (in Borradori 2003, 64) into a productive conversation that can address the underlying causes of both violent religious fundamentalism and the occident's own ambivalence with regard to secularization. In line with his discourse theory of society, his search leads him to conclude that "[t]he mode for nondestructive secularization is translation. This is what the Western world, as the worldwide secularizing force, may learn from its own history" (2003, 114).

AGPh presents the European narrative of faith and knowledge as the direct "result of a series of learning processes" (I.68). Although these events were conflictual and sometimes even violent, Habermas's "reconstructive presentation of these steps in historical education" (I.69) within their "contingent, admittedly socially generalized contexts of origin" (I.72) also demonstrates their productive potential from the perspective of the present. It does so by tracing the origins of modern science – as well as of postmetaphysical thinking – to religion, particularly to the transcendental, generalizing views of the world that first developed during the Axial Age. Although the potential of this dialogue is clearer to the historian of philosophy, who has the privilege of examining and reconstructing it in retrospect, Habermas notes that it must also be visible to "the participants" (I.69), who have to learn in real time.

The political message of AGPh – its Kantian "hope" (*Hoffnung*) for the present – is that an awareness of the historical significance and achievements of the relationship faith and knowledge will foster a more productive, less antagonistic debate in the present – i.e., that it will allow for mutual understanding and the desire to live together in a shared political community. Although religious fundamentalists will obviously have to adjust their behavior by refraining from violence, Habermas also rejects the anti-religious polemics of radical secularists, who want to banish religion from the public sphere altogether. He therefore distinguishes between the necessary "secularization of the state" and the unnecessary, repressive, and impoverishing desire to "fully secularize civil society" (I.45). In contrast to the secularism of unbelievers like himself, who are agnostic about the claims of religion, Habermas introduces the term "secularistic" to describe those who display a violent intolerance towards faith-based propositions as *a priori* false, misleading, and even dangerous by definition (2008, 141).

In taking this position, AGPh offers a subtle but profound rejection of the secularization thesis and of the "secularistic" expectation that religion will disappear in the modern world. He (2013, 348) therefore begins to use the term "postsecular" to describe the fact that even the "largely secularized or 'unchurched' societies" of the West will have to "come to terms with the continued existence of religious communities, and with the influence of religious voices both in the national public sphere and on the global political stage." As with so much of Habermas's critical theory, this empirical, sociological statement of the actual state of affairs also contains a normative claim. In addition to the fact that West can no longer count on the disappearance of religion in practice, AGPh also argues that it can benefit from the continued presence of believers, who can salvage (*bergen*) valuable resources for the present from their faith traditions (see Aguirre 2019, 407-8). In this way, Habermas hopes that a self-consciously postsecular society can work with religion to not only combat fundamentalism, but also "to counteract the insidious entropy of the scarce resource of meaning in its own realm" (2003, 114) brought by worldviews that rely solely on the development of science and technology.

In contrast to critics who accuse Habermas of shirking away "real politics" (Geuss, 2008) and of "diverting attention from the actual social context" (Geuss, 2019), the historical and geopolitical origins of this project demonstrate that he is both deeply aware of the broader situation in which he works and also actively adjusts his research agenda in response to contemporary events. The political appeal contained within AGPh is that only a respectful dialogue believers and non-believers has the potential to "mitigate the conflict potential of forms of life that seek to maintain their internal integrity from each other" (II.795) in an increasingly globalized, multicultural, and interconnected world; this is also through line connecting his *Friedenspreisrede* and subsequent political writings on religion to this history of philosophy.[2] AGPh can and should thus be read as a call for critical self-reflection, rather than the demonization of both the internal and external "other."

II. Method, Focus and Approach

With this book Habermas caps his intellectual career with a historical text. However, AGPh is not a history of philosophy that any professional historian would recognize. The text is governed by Habermas's own idiosyncratic interests and his desire to address the contemporary political questions that emerge from the clash of faith and knowledge, not by any clearly defined methodological principle (Rosen 2011).

Methodologically, AGPh thus fits into Habermas broader philosophical approach, which is based on voracious reading and the "take over of other theories," not on careful historical reconstruction. He admits, "I make foreign tongues my own in a rather brutal manner, hermeneutically speaking. Even when I quote a good deal and take over other terminologies I am clearly aware that my use of them often has little to do with the authors' original meaning" (in Honneth, Knödler-Bunte, & Widmann 1981, 30). In the text Habermas reinforces this point, repeatedly acknowledging the important role that his "underlying assumptions (*Hintergrundannahmen*)" (I.10, 39, 74), "deep-seated, background premises (*tiefersitzenden Hintergrundprämissen*)" (I.37), "fundamental convictions (*Hintergrundüberzeugungen*)" (I.128) and "basic viewpoint (*Hintergrundeinverständnis*)" (I.106) play in structuring the argument.

Although Habermas's historical reconstruction contains some very original readings of classical texts for critics to chew on and disagree with, the basic framework of his analysis build

[2] A number of Habermas's contributions to political debates in the public sphere as a public intellectual are collected and have been reprinted in his *Kleine politische Schriften* (short political writings).

on the work of previous luminaries, such as Karl Jaspers, Max Weber, and Hans Blumenberg. In this sense, his work is indeed a form of "constructive puzzle work (*konstruierende Puzzlearbeit*)" (in Honneth, Knödler-Bunte, & Widmann 1981, 30), where not even all the pieces are his own. For better or worse, AGPh is a history told by a systematic philosopher interested in reconstructing the historical background of his own work, not of an intellectual historian tracing the development of a thinker or tradition.

This methodological reading is confirmed by the title: *Also a History of Philosophy*. The word "also" (*Auch*) immediately indicates that this is not a definitive narrative, not *the* or even *a* philosophy of history, but *another* – perhaps even unlikely – interpretation among many. Seemingly wary of the effect that his intellectual stature will have on the reception of the ideas he presents in AGPh, Habermas observes that the title is a "gesture of modesty (*Bescheidenheitsgeste*) that protects the reader from misunderstanding" (in Schwering 2020).

The meaning of this phrase, however, goes beyond a mere admission of restraint; it is also a message about the type of history Habermas seeks to present. He borrows the title from Johann Gottfried Herder's book, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774/2002, *Also a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*). Although Habermas leaves out the last few words from Herder's original, this choice suggests that AGPh also has a pedagogical purpose. This functional interpretation is rooted in Habermas's politically motivated desire to uncover "what we can learn from the historical discourse of faith and knowledge" (in Schwering 2020).

The connection of Habermas's AGPh to Herder's earlier work has important methodological consequences. The latter's eighteenth century manuscript was written as a counterbalance to the universalistic, all-encompassing philosophies of history told by the thinkers of the "high" Enlightenment, such as Voltaire and David Hume, the latter of whom thought that "mankind are so much the same in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new or strange. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature" (Hume 1748/2007, 60, section VIII, part I). By contrast, Herder (1774/2002) argued that individuals were radically temporally and geographically situated, producing a tremendous variation in their beliefs, understandings, and worldviews. This led him to focus his inquiry on the inner experience of the participants of history (see Berry 1982, 30ff).

In addition to emphasizing the educational task of "history [a]s a laboratory for arguments" (1996a, 471), Habermas's choice to quote Herder in the title of AGPh also signals the fact that his interpretation of the sacred will focus on the "internalized faith experience (*verinnerlichten Glaubenserfahrung*)" (II.121) of "the participants" (I.69) within religious traditions, not on theological dogma. While doctrine is an important aspect of faith, Habermas admits that it is inaccessible to him as a "secular non-theologian" (II.701). By contrast, as a sociologist he contends that he *is* able to study the effects of religion on the behavior of believers by examining "the core of the ecclesiastical cult (*der Kern des kirchlichen Kultus*)" (II.698).

In reflecting on the place of faith in a postsecular society, Habermas argues that "religious teaching can only survive in modernity in so far as it is practiced in the ritual of a community's liturgy (*Gottesdienst*)" (II.699). He notes that dogma must "find its linchpin (*Stütze*) in the sacramental actions of the community" (II.699) if it is to affect the everyday actions and moral behavior of its adherents. Given his underlying political motivations, after the events of 9/11 Habermas is interested in how continued translations from faith traditions "at the end of the age of worldviews" (II.699), i.e. after the death of metaphysics, can help to address the loss of meaning and community associated with modernity by "play[ing] a role in the production and

stabilization of social solidarity" (II.702). He is therefore particularly interested in how religious distinctions between sacred and profane, clean and unclean, good and evil, are transformed or translated into secular evaluations of individual behavior through the "moralization of the sacred (*Moralisierung des Heiligen*)" (I.312ff).

Despite the changes in his thought signaled by AGPh, Habermas remains committed to the idea that the historical development of the occidental discourse of faith and knowledge can be described through the process of "linguistification." However, given that this is a philosophy of history, not a merely social theory, Habermas needs to explain how this Adornian "migration" of theological commitments from the premodern metaphysical worldviews of the sacred to into the profane form of postmetaphysical discursive rationality actually occurs. In order do so, he contends that developments in the relationship between faith and knowledge lead to *Schüben* (thrusts, pushes, boosts) that force contemporaries at the time to rethink their understanding of their surroundings, both in terms of the physical *earth* (though the natural sciences) and the social *world* (via the humanities and social or "spiritual" sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*]), to borrow a distinction from Hannah Arendt.

While these impulses often come from problems within politics and society, they lead to cognitive dissonances that drive the "learning processes (*Lernprozesse*)" that "push (*schieben*)" post-metaphysical thinking forward through a series of "paradigm shifts (*Paradigmenwechsel*)" (I.11). Interestingly, the language Habermas uses to describe this mechanism of change draws extensively on the natural sciences. For instance, the term *Schüben* makes an allusion to Newtonian mechanics, while his use of the concept of "paradigm shifts" is indebted to Thomas Kuhn's logic of scientific revolutions. His theory of change is thus based on an seemingly mechanical vision of the world, in which "functional disturbances (*Funktionsstörungen*)" (I.140) are gradually stabilized through change and adaptation.

The key difference between this social mechanism and a Darwinian vision of social evolution that Habermas rejects (see II.579ff) is the fact that the "solutions" offered to social problems are not random or arbitrary in the way that genetic mutations are. On the contrary, not only are they the product of human reason, they also have to be self-consciously accepted and appropriated by individuals in order to have an effect. In this sense, the historical "participants" in social evolution – unlike the changes produced by the process of natural selection – always maintain their "communicative freedom to say no (*kommunikative Freiheit zum Neinsagen*)" (II.596). The learning processes that drive the narrative of AGPh do not occur by themselves, but have to be self-consciously appropriated: "without such a self-conscious act [historical experiences] cannot attain the power to shape our identity" (2005, 10).

Interestingly, although Habermas includes short treatments of "Buddha's Theory and Practice" (I.361ff) as well as "Confucianism and Taoism" (I.383ff) in his overview of the Axial Age, the narrative of AGPh is generally confined to what he calls "the occidental path of development (*der okzidentale Entwicklungspfad*)" (I.110ff). This narrow focus is surprising and somewhat disappointing given the length of the text. Habermas recognizes this weakness and provides a number of preemptive justifications for what he acknowledges is a "Eurocentrically limited perspective" (I.126). To start, he notes that despite the ideals of the natural sciences, as a scholar of the "spiritual sciences" (*Geisteswissenschafften*) he cannot "take up an imaginary *view from nowhere* [English in original] by denying my own location" (I.172). As both the products of and as participants in a historical process, Habermas argues that "knowing subjects cannot shed the 'skin' of their own way of life (*Lebensform*)" (II.774).

Despite this historically and culturally limited perspective, Habermas resists both the idea of progress and mechanical philosophies of history (Verovšek 2019). While he recognizes the situatedness of his own perspective, he also acknowledges that "'learning' is path-dependent (*pfadabhängigen*)," contingent process, which is not governed by any telos (in Schwering 2020). Although Habermas argues that his genealogy must start from within his own historical legacy, rather than intellectually colonizing traditions that belongs to others, he does also note the "universal aspirations (*Universalitätsanspruch*) of postmetaphysical thought" (I.110ff) despite its "particular context of origin." In making this seemingly Eurocentric claim, he observes that the "universal validity" (*Geltung*) that emerges "from the occidental history of development cannot justify itself through itself *alone*" (I.111, emphasis in original). Habermas therefore rejects both Niklas Luhmann's systems theoretical conceptions of world society and Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" in favor of what he calls "comparative cultural research (*vergleichende Zivilisationsforschung*)" (I.114).

Building on Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's "multiple modernities" and Jóhann Páll Árnason's "third conception of modernity," Habermas argues that modernity represents a new form of life with various components (political, economic, cultural) that are open to diverse interpretations. How concrete individuals experience these "varieties of modernity (*Vielfalt der Moderne*)" thus depends both on cultural legacies as well as other factors, such as class and religion (Blokker & Delanty 2011, 122). Given the increasing global interconnectedness of our multicultural world, Habermas asks his readers to imagine "'the modern' today as creating something like the arena, in which *different civilizations* meet each other in the course of designing a more or less culturally specific shared infrastructure" (I.119, emphasis in original). In this sense, it is possible to understand his choice to focus on the West as part of the broader project of building such "a reflexive conception of 'modernity' (*ein reflexiver Begriff von »Moderne«*)" (I.118) alongside interpretations from other parts of the world based on different intellectual traditions.

It is also important to recognize that far from seeing Europe as the logical end-point of modern development, as he did in his earlier work, Habermas now regards it as outlier: "Viewed in terms of world history, Max Weber's 'Occidental Rationalism' now appears to be the actual deviation" (2008, 116). In rejecting the ideal of secularization, Habermas instead emphasizes the continued importance of the presence of religion in the postsecular West, particularly given the ability of religious communities and sacred ritual to combat the Weberian "loss of meaning (*Bedeutungsverlust*)" (I.116) and the "breakdown of solidarity (*Zerfall der Solidarität*)" (I.39) that plagues these secularized societies.

At a time of increasing individualization, loss of meaning and social fragmentation, Habermas (I.266, 265) argues that religion – especially its ritual expression – can be an important source of "authority, which is expressed in claims based on examples and in normative behavioral expectations" that are stronger than "the weak grammatical normativity of speech," upon which his own secular postmetaphysical philosophy is based. While every region of the world has its exceptional features, in terms of the discourse of faith and knowledge it thus makes sense to focus on the Europe's unique path of development. AGPh should thus be read as a "secular self-interpretation of modernity," as the subtitle of the draft manuscript Habermas circulated almost a decade before its final publication made clear.

Finally, Habermas justifies his focus on the West through his political motivations for undertaking this project. As he laid out in his *Friedenspreisrede*, his argument is addressed first and foremost to his fellow Europeans and the rest of the postsecular West, not the religious or fundamentalist "other." He therefore interrogates this history in order to combat the kinds of

Eurocentric "crusader" narratives that portray modernization as "a competing religion" caught up in an either/or struggle with premodern metaphysical worldviews. In this sense, AGPh is not a triumphal narrative of modernization and development, but one which warns against the rise of "instrumental reason and destructive secularization" (2003, 103). Since the argument is addressed primarily to Europe, it is perhaps understandable that it follows the European path of development. Among the many debates this text is sure to generate, will be interesting to see what postcolonial scholars, who approach the discourse of faith and knowledge non-European perspectives, make of Habermas's narrative and of his justifications for its occidental focus.

III. The Basic Narrative

Although Habermas relies extensively on secondary literature to structure his interpretations, this book demonstrates that he has retained his ability to consume and rework large amounts of primary sources as well. In the Foreword he observes, "It was simply a pleasure to go back and read so many important texts which I had read before" (I.9). Sadly, an exhaustive overview and assessment of AGPh would require more space and expertise than I have at my disposal. Given these limitations, I will not attempt to provide a detailed evaluation of the narrative, which Habermas himself admits is a "daring, frankly not entirely serious enterprise (*waghalsiges, eigentlich unseriöses Unternehmen*)" (I.9). The reader will have to be satisfied with a brief overview of the key themes and turning points in the argument.

AGPh starts with the origins of philosophical thinking itself, which Habermas traces back to the Axial Age, that is to about 600 years before the birth of the historical Jesus. Building on Karl Jaspers (1953/2014), Habermas argues that this era is defined by the transition from mythical thinking to the first metaphysical worldviews. The Axial Age, which includes the rise of the Jewish prophets, the Pre-Socratics, Confucius, Buddha and Zoroaster, represents a key "cognitive breakthrough" (I.182) that is preserved in the "historical religions" (I.185), a term he borrows from Robert Bellah, to which it gave rise.

These new religions differ from myth in that they are based on the "construction of a God's eye view" that "transcended the inner life of the individual, allowing *the whole* to be brought into view [*auf Distanz zu bringen*] and objectified" (I.183, emphasis in original). In addition to "making the deeper structure (*Tiefenstruktur*) of the world beyond appearances (*ein Jenseits der Welt*) accessible as the true reality," this rupture also led to the development of "the consciousness of personal responsibility and the pursuit (*Streben*) of individual salvation" (I.185). This was subsequently "embodied (*verkörpert*)" in the "communal, *ritual performance* (*Vollzug*)" of religious practice (I.192, emphasis in original).

Building on this foundation, the narrative of Volume I focuses primarily on the Judeo-Christian Heritage of Western and Central Europe up until the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church (Habermas sets Byzantium and the orthodox Christianity of Eastern Europe aside). The result of these developments is a fusion of the rationalistic tradition of Athens and with the religious heritage of Jerusalem within a Roman form of "Christian Platonism." What Habermas calls the "symbiosis of faith and knowledge" (I.481ff) that defines this period is based on an intellectual harmonization of Plato's all-encompassing "form of the Good (*Idee des Guten*)" (I.679) and the vision of the unity of God and His creation that emerge from Judaism and early Christianity. In reconstructing the intellectual history of this period, Habermas highlights the philosophical labors of Plotinus and Augustin.

This understanding of an increasingly institutionalized Roman Christianity sets the stage for the first major rupture or turning point in the narrative. Over the course of the middle ages,

Habermas argues that the unity of faith and knowledge realized in Rome was gradually broken apart by the "differentiation between *sacerdotium* and *regnum*" (I.617). This caesura was brought about primarily by the rediscovery and reappropriation of Aristotle's "*decoupling of practical from theoretical reason*" (I.689, emphasis in original).

Intellectually, Habermas notes that Thomas Aquinas, who was the subject of his final lecture before his retirement from the University of Frankfurt (Schwering 2020), initially Christianized Aristotle's bifurcation of rationality by distinguishing between "*the oppositional concepts of nature and grace*" (I.695, emphasis in original), while Duns Scotus then set the stage for the *via moderna* by "decoupling the knowledge of God from the metaphysical knowledge of nature" (I.766). William of Occam completed this crucial "mental turn" by abandoning metaphysics and transcendental conceptions of knowledge completely. Habermas argues that Occam thus paves the way for the modern natural sciences and analytic philosophy by "transforming the ontological dualism of spirit and matter into an epistemological relationship between the knowing subject and the world of objects" (I.824).

With this foundation in place, the second volume focuses on the parting of ways between faith and knowledge since the middle ages. Habermas specifically engineers the narrative so that the latter half starts with Martin Luther by placing the otherwise modern Niccolò Machiavelli at the end of Volume I. He uses Luther as the hinge, because he completes the break between faith from knowledge politically and philosophically. In the former, Luther's "Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms" leads to the "desacralization of authority (*Entsakralisierung von Herrschaft*)" (II.199) by separating secular from ecclesiastic power once and for all. As to the latter, Habermas credits Luther's theology for opening "the door to a anthropocentric turn in philosophy" (II.13) with his "faith-based (*fideistisch*)" (II.36) conception of the sacred, which allows secular forms of knowledge to break away from theology and the metaphysical presuppositions of Christianity more generally. He traces Luther's influence "on the philosophical thinking of modernity (*Neuzeit*)" all the way to the "sharp break between spirit and nature, inner and outer in Kant's philosophy" (II.14).

The rest of Volume II traces the origins of postmetaphysical thinking through Hume, Kant, Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, and Charles Sanders Peirce. The narrative is organized around the concept of "rational freedom" (*vernünftige Freiheit*), which Habermas calls one of the "decisive basic concepts (*maßgebenden Grundbegriffe*) of practical philosophy up until the present" (I.15). Within Habermas's narrative, this idea recalls Hegel's (1837/1988, 35) notion of the "cunning of reason (*List der Vernunft*)," which allows the irrational drives of historical actors to be rationally reconstructed by the backwards-looking philosopher of history. It also historicizes Habermas's concept of "communicative freedom," in which autonomous subjects either accept or reject the validity claims put forward by others in discursive interactions. Rational freedom for Habermas is thus most characteristically expressed in what he calls "the prerequisite of communicative freedom to 'no-saying' (*der Voraussetzung der kommunikativen Freiheit zum Neinsagen*)" (II.596).

Hume and Kant dominate this latter section because they define what Habermas calls the historical "crossroads (*Wegscheide*) of postmetaphysical thinking" (II.213ff). In this account, Hume opens the door to a non- or even anti-metaphysical approach based on a reductive naturalism that ultimately paves the way for a logic-based, analytic philosophy. Although there is nothing wrong with this approach *per se*, Habermas worries that Hume thereby reduces the scope of rationality to a purely instrumental reason (*Zweckrationalität*) that calculates the best means to ends determined either by functional imperatives or by subjective and affective "moral

sentiments" (see II.563). By contrast, he argues that Kant rescues practical reason through a transcendental, idealistic, rational and yet still postmetaphysical approach, which sets the stage for the classical tradition of German philosophy. Although Habermas generally associates himself with the latter tradition, he seeks to transcend this division by switching from the philosophy of the subject to the paradigm of communicative reason, which allows for the intersubjective reconciliation of inner states (Humean "moral sentiments") with universal moral norms (the Kantian categorical imperative).

The narrative of AGPh leaves off rather suddenly at the beginning of the twentieth century. Habermas addresses this abrupt ending in the Foreword, where he explains that he had originally planned to bring his history up through the twentieth century. However, he confides that doing so "would have required at least another volume, and my strength was simply no longer sufficient for that (*dafür reichen meine Kräfte nicht mehr aus*)" (I.10). He also notes that another volume is not really necessary, because as a "participating observer" in the controversies of the twentieth century, he is convinced that they recapitulate disagreements rooted in the "crossroad" represented by Hume and Kant. Fortunately, much of this "missing narrative" can be reconstructed through the historical discussions of the twentieth century included in TCA and PDM.

Although the book is organized chronologically, its key themes are interwoven in the text. Additionally, the plot is hardly straightforward. As I have already noted, AGPh is neither a whiggish narrative of progress (*Fortschrittsgeschichte*) nor is it a story of decline of the kind told by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/2002). On the contrary, Habermas explicitly distances himself from the twentieth century "architects of the *Verfallsgeschichten* of modernity" (I.41ff), including Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, Karl Löwith, and Martin Heidegger, who all sought the resurrect the truth of philosophy through a "return" to the premodern certainties of metaphysics mediated by what Habermas views as regressive forms of political theology.

Instead of falling into either of the Manichean tropes of progress or regress, AGPh is a story of both gain and loss told from the perspective of Habermas's social and political diagnosis of the pathologies of the West. The message underlying the historical narrative is that while modernity has gained much from secularization, it has also been impoverished by this sidelining of faith and religion. In this sense, postmetaphysical thinking, which is based on "the willingness to cooperate among communicatively socialized subjects," needs to make up for its inability to generate sufficient solidarity in our contemporary, globalized, multi-cultural world by learning from the metaphysical religious worldviews of the past, which were based on "the belief in a restorative or salvationary justice (*restituierende oder »rettende« Gerechtigkeit*)" (I.14). Quoting Árnason in English in the epigraph at the beginning of the main text of AGPh, Habermas notes, "The idea of a self-limiting secularization, reinstated as a regulative principle of modernity, would reopen and perpetuate the mutual interrogation of philosophy, science and religion" (I.23).

This brief overview does little to capture the depth of Habermas's reading or the many interesting subthemes that he takes up, such as his interpretation of the crucial role played by Roman law (I.156ff, II.779ff) or his reconstruction of Blaise Pascal's "dialectic of simultaneous *precision and limitation* (*Präzision und Eingrenzung*) of scientific knowledge" (II.132ff, emphasis in original). In addition to my brief chronological summary, there are numerous other ways to look at the narrative. For example, AGPh includes three *excursi* or "asides (*Zwischenbetrachtungen*)," which highlight key substantive themes. These are "The Conceptual Switches (*Weichenstellungen*) of the Axial Age" (I.461ff), "The Caesura (*Zäsur*) of the

Separation of Faith and Knowledge" (II.189ff), and the transition "From Objective Spirit to the Communicative Socialization of Knowing and Acting Subjects" (II.557ff).

In the Postscript Habermas presents his own tripartite division of AGPh's main "dramaturgical viewpoints (*dramaturgische Gesichtspunkten*)" (II.768). The "fruitful entanglement (*fruchtbare Verwicklung*)" of the traditions symbolized by Jerusalem and Athens in Rome (1) is followed by the "peripatetic" developments of the eighteenth century (2), before concluding with the various schools of thought that define the distinction between empiricism and transcendental philosophy up to the present day (3). This afterword also provides a good summary of the implications of AGPh for contemporary philosophical debates about the role of the "idea of justice" (II.791), "moral learning" (II.792), and the need for the recognition and "equal treatment of *the other as other*" (II.794) in a globalized, multi-cultural world defined by inescapable pluralism.

However one breaks it down, this is an engaging, thought-provoking narrative, even if it is too long and too narrowly focused on Western and Central Europe. That said, the length and depth of Habermas's analyses of individual time periods and thinkers will surely give scholars much to discuss in the coming decades. In addition to contributing to these debates, at the end of the narrative Habermas argues that postmetaphysical thinking has a crucial role to play both politically and socially at the start of the twenty-first century. Although we live in a time of increasing specialization and expertise, philosophy must continue to reconstruct how we acquired the competencies that we have, particularly our capacity for rational freedom.

IV. The Task of Postmetaphysical Thinking

Although AGPh has important political motivations and implications, Habermas does not conclude the narrative with clear "action guiding" political principles. On the contrary, although he recognizes the fact that "nothing and nobody (*nichts und Niemand*)" can force "us to understand ourselves as autonomously acting subjects" (II.805-6), his aim is to give us reasons to maintain our faith in our ability for social action as rational individuals. Habermas argues that key to achieving this goal is navigating between the Scylla of fundamentalism and Charybdis of scientism.

As regards the former, Habermas remains wary of the premodern desire to give direct political authority to religion. While these two volumes represent a profound *Wendepunkt* in his thought, for him postmetaphysical thinking is still secular thinking. Insofar as it is still governed by a non-subjective, communicative rationality, he argues that it must maintain its "methodological atheism" (2002, 160). Although secular citizens have no reason to accept the authoritarian claims of religious dogma, Habermas argues the historical process of "secular translation" that he traces throughout the course of his genealogy is not necessarily completed and he "cannot rule out its possible continuation" (I.75).

However, he is equally dismissive of the empirically-oriented naturalism of the Humean line of postmetaphysical philosophy, which approaches knowledge empirically as a series of discrete, logically-organized problems. In fact, although this project started in response to fundamentalism and the attacks of 9/11, since then Habermas has become increasingly worried by secularistic forms of scientism, which express themselves politically in the form of a depoliticized technocracy and sociologically in the desire of the biological and neurological sciences to control our bodies and minds through chemical and genetic interventions. In order to ensure that our autonomy – such as it is – remains our own, he rejects epistocracy (2015), especially as it has developed within the European Union, and has come to describe himself as a

"bio-conservative" (in Hacking 2009, 14), even though his politics remain rooted in the convictions of the egalitarian internationalist left.

An example of this can be found in Habermas's reflections on the politically sensitive debates around genetic manipulation. Although he does not think that religious appeals to human dignity or to the inviolability of God's creation are sufficient justifications for the banning of designer babies, Habermas nonetheless thinks that religious traditions have something important to offer in these debates. He is particularly intrigued by the emphasis faith traditions place on the creation of new life as "constituting a beginning we cannot control" (2003, 58), at least not in terms of the genomic constitution, despite our scientific and medical advances. Quoting the gospels, Habermas argues that there is something productive in the idea that "a child has been born unto us" through a process that we experience – in important ways at least – as passive observers. With the help of Arendt's conception of natality and her emphasis on the unpredictability of "new beginnings," he therefore seeks to translate such concerns about the sanctity of childbirth into secular arguments against genetic manipulation.

More specifically, Habermas worries that "the sedimented intention of a third person in one's hereditary factors" and "the programmer's intention, reaching through the genome" (2003, 60) would impede the ability of designer children to see themselves as free, autonomous subjects, who would instead experience themselves as being born to serve a particular purpose (be it athletic, intellectual, scientific, etc.). By emphasizing the "expectation of the unexpected" present in natural birth, Habermas argues that citizen-believers can provide their secular counterparts with convincing arguments against genetic manipulation without imposing their dogmatic views on those who do not share them or placing faith into a permanent, existential conflict with science.

In describing the task of postmetaphysical thinking, Habermas steers a middle course between theocracy and technocracy, or "between naturalism and religion" (2008), as the title of one of the preparatory studies for AGPh puts it. In the end, Habermas concludes that postmetaphysical philosophy has a crucial role to play in our political debates in the public sphere. More specifically, in helping us address specific issues, for him philosophy should act as the "stand-in and interpreter" (1990, 1-21) between the reason-based technical knowledge of the objectivizing sciences and the religiously-inspired worldviews of citizen-believers by "*re*constructing the rational core of these pre-existing cultural and social structures" (Habermas 2018, 154, emphasis in original). Ultimately, he argues that "what philosophy has learned from this discourse [i.e., of faith and knowledge]" (I.15, fn. 7) is that it should "contribute to *rationally clarifying our self- and world-understanding*" (I.12, emphasis in original). Habermas calls this the "enlightening role (*Aufklärungsrolle*)" (I.13) of postmetaphysical thinking.

What allows it to fulfill this task is precisely the fact that philosophy has learned from both faith and knowledge, religion and science. On the one hand, postmetaphysical thought shares the rational orientation of the sciences, all of which started historically as subfields of philosophy. However, on the other hand, European philosophy itself developed out of the unity of "Christian Platonism" into its own discipline that gradually separated from faith and theology over the course of the "differentiation between *sacerdotium* and *regnum*" and the "separation of faith and knowledge" that Habermas traces in Volume I. In recognizing the role of the sacred in this process – and in line with recent historical scholarship – AGPh is yet another sign that "religion has returned to the Enlightenment" (Sheehan 2003, 1062).

In light of this legacy, Habermas argues that philosophy must continue to draw on both faith and knowledge, while simultaneously not denying the importance of either. In regards to

the latter, he is particularly worried about the naturalistic tendencies of the analytic approach, which reduces philosophy to a "tool of conceptual analysis (*Werkzeug der Begriffsanalyse*)" (I.671). Although the ever-increasing production of science has increased our knowledge of the world and our material well-being, it cannot tell us what these "findings about the world *mean for us*" (I.12, emphasis in original). In other words, Habermas argues that the kind of technical, descriptive knowledge produced by the sciences cannot help us to make choices, either ethically in our personal lives or socially as a political community. He therefore notes that "philosophy would…betray its purpose (*ihr Proprium verraten*), if it…surrendered its holistic connection to our need for orientation (*Orientierungsbedürfnis*)" (I.13).

Similarly, a postmetaphysical and simultaneously post-secular philosophy must also not forget its connection to the sacred, particularly in light of the meaning-giving, orienting function of communal practices of faith. Habermas observes that "[a]s long as religious language bears with itself inspiring, indeed, unrelinquishable semantic contents which elude (for the moment?) the expressive power of a philosophical language…philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will neither be able to replace nor to repress religion" (1992, 79). This concern about the production of adherence to the dictates of a disembodied form of reason has been a philosophical problem ever since Hegel (1820/1991, 17) criticized Kant for "turning the form of right" into a "*cold, dead letter*."

In light of this so-called "motivation problem," Habermas (2006, 31) warns against putting "too much confidence in the motivational force of good reasons." In order to combat this tendency, postmetaphysical thinking needs to continue to learn from and draw on cultural traditions, including religion, that help to "*anchor* the moral point of view in the hearts of acting subjects" (2013, 355, emphasis in original). Habermas therefore encourages the "migration" of sacred resources into the profane world through the process of "secular translation," in order "to contribute to the production and stabilization of social solidarity" (II.702).

By tracing the genealogy of postmetaphysical thinking through its dual legacies in the discourses of *both* faith *and* knowledge, Habermas hopes to remind philosophers of their central mission: to encourage "their contemporaries…to make autonomous use of their reason and to practically shape their social existence (*ihr gesellschaftliches Dasein praktisch zu gestalten*)" (I.13). In order to "have a future" (I.11) in our increasingly specialized, technologically-driven world, he argues that a postmetaphysical and post-secular philosophy must continue to search for answers to Kant's "fundamental questions (*Grundfragen*)" (I.11): "What can I know?," "What should I do?," "What may I hope for?," and "What is the human?"

Echoing Herder, Habermas argues that philosophy must encourage us to make use of our "rational freedom," which he confides "also constitutes the red threat of my endeavor" (I.13). Building on Jaspers's analysis of the religions of the Axial Age, Habermas argues that emergence of monotheism resulted in a form of spiritualization that enhanced each person's sense of their own individuality while simultaneously elevating speculative thought towards the one God, i.e., "towards Being itself" (Jaspers 1953/2014, 3). In this process, these historical religions created the two crucial axes of freedom that persist into the present: the vertical connection to an imponderable, omniscient Deity that allows "*the whole* to be brought into view and objectified" (I.183, emphasis in original), and the horizontal, social relation to others, who are our equals as parts of God's creation (see II.769). The Axial Age thus set off a dialectic that has pushed human beings to become more objectively free vis-à-vis God and the external world, while also being attentive to the social freedom and equality of everyone else.[3]

[3] I would like to thank Eduardo Mentieta for drawing my attention to this point.

Habermas's genealogy shows that postmetaphysical philosophy has inherited this twofold model of freedom from religion. However, whereas modernity and secularization have greatly increased human freedom vertically vis-à-vis the natural, objective world through the development of science and technology, its legacy in social and political relations is more ambiguous. Although postmetaphysical philosophy shares certain meaning-giving functions with religion, Habermas argues that it is at a distinct disadvantage in generating horizontal solidarity because it cannot draw on the community-enhancing power of ritual. While the "linguistification of the sacred" may be able to give us good reasons to recognize our obligations to others, Habermas argues that postmetaphysical thinking must continue to learn how to generate solidarity and community with others from the realm of the sacred, in order to enable an "emancipation to the use of rational freedom [that] requires both liberation and normative binding at the same time" (I.14).

In the final pages of AGPh, Habermas reflects on the changing historical conditions of rational freedom. At the time of its origins in Kantian practical philosophy, such liberation "was still the destiny of the intelligible 'I' (*eine Bestimmung des intelligiblen Ichs*)" (II.802). By contrast, given the empirical complexity of modern society and the failure of the philosophy of the subject, the project of rational freedom can now only be realized by "communicatively socialized individuals" (II.806) through collective structures that allow them to take control of events in order "to *improve* the justice of existing living conditions through collectively agreed interventions" (II.802, emphasis in original). The collective action necessary to fulfill the conditions of rational freedom today should therefore serve to remind us that "nobody can be autonomous for themself alone (*niemand für sich alleine autonom sein kann*)" (II.806). As events at the start of the twenty-first century threaten to divide individuals and reduce global solidarity, this *political* message is the core lesson of Habermas's historical narrative.

Concluding Remarks

On June 18, 2019, Habermas celebrated his 90th birthday. If AGPh is indeed his last major monograph, it represents a suitable culmination of his career. Some might argue that writing such a long, all-encompassing narrative demonstrates the conceit of "an old philosophy professor looking back on his own, relatively privileged (*verschöntes*) life" (I.9), who thinks that he (throughout the history of philosophy, it is usually a he) can construct the many contingencies of intellectual history into a coherent whole. Habermas is aware of this, noting that he was "only nervous about making mistakes (*man hat nur Angst, Fehler zu machen*)" in the eyes of experts, who "surely know the details better" (in Schwering 2020). However, while the *lacunae*, blind spots, and partisan readings presented in these two volumes may bother specialists, I have argued that AGPh is better understood as a historical reconstruction of Habermas's own philosophical system.

From the perspective of intellectual history, the most important transformation or *Wendepunkt* signaled by this book is Habermas's simultaneous acknowledgement of both the limits of secular reason and of postsecular Europe's continued need for religion, especially in its attempts to resist the loss of meaning and autonomy brought about by technocracy. Reflecting on the attempts of modernity to "*to create its normativity out of itself*" (1987, 7, emphasis in original), which he had endorsed as necessary in 1983, in his 2001 *Friedenspreisrede* he argued instead that it has "become evident from the course of history that such a project was asking too much of reason" (2003, 112). Once again quoting Adorno, Habermas notes that in the face of

"these excessive demands" it is clear that "[k]nowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption" (Adorno 1951/1974, 247).

Habermas's newfound desire to reflect on how postsecular knowledge can supplement its conclusions "the help of the Messianic perspective" (2003) led him to devote over a decade of his old age to this singular history of philosophy. However, AGPh is more than just an endorsement of Adorno's conception of the continued need for sacred contents to "migrate" into the secular realm; it is also a plea for more recognition of our human capacity to learn from each other through the collective, cooperative use of our practical reason oriented towards mutual understanding (*Verständigung*). Although this has always been important, Habermas argues that it is especially necessary at a time of increasing globalization, complexity, and multi-culturalism, when "the conflict potential of forms of life that want to maintain their internal integrity can only be mitigated through the bond of a common political culture" (II.795) of toleration and respect "at the global level" (II.799). Reflecting on his own goals in writing AGPh, Habermas notes: "Insofar as I have succeeded, this genealogy of postmetaphysical thinking can itself be understood as an attempt to embolden us (*uns zu ermutigen*) to make use of our rational freedom" (quoted in Klingen 2019).

With the concept of rational freedom, Habermas reminds his readers that this book is ultimately a plea (*Plädoyer*) for what Kant called *Mündigkeit*, i.e., for the completion of the Enlightenment project encouraging us to have the "courage to use your *own* understanding!" (1784, in Kant 1991, 54, emphasis in original). Despite the achievements of modernity and of secularization, Habermas fears that the issues facing humanity at the start of the twenty-first century are leading individuals around the world to relinquish their capacity for rational reflection in favor either of a return to the premodern certainties of a fundamentalist faith or the reductive technical capacities of modern science. As a reflection on the rise of an increasingly instrumental (or, as Habermas prefers, functionalist) reason that can think only about how to achieve pre-determined ends, one can see AGPh as a successor to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/2002).

However, unlike his predecessors Habermas's history does not trace an inevitable downward rooted in "the uncontrollable side-effects (*die Komplexität der unbeherrschten Nebenfolgen*) of its self-imposed dynamics of technological growth" (I.14). Instead, he advocates "trusting practical reason with more than just making intelligent decisions based on our own preferences, values or feelings. By reflecting on the vulnerable structures that enable our coexistence," Habermas contends that "we can gain good reasons for the Kantian idea of justice and for universally binding normative orientations for action" (in Klingen 2019).

In order to complete what he has previously called the "unfinished project" of modernity (1996b), he argues that we must continue to believe in ourselves and in the capacities of our postmetaphysical, post-secular reason, without giving ourselves thoughtlessly over to science or religion. Such an attitude will be important in cooperatively resolving the problems of the contemporary world, from social pathologies such as rising inequality and the dominance of international finance over politics, to natural crises, including climate change, and COVID-19. In regards to this final issue, Habermas hopes that the indiscriminacy this virus force humanity find "the courage for a democratically controlled self-assertion" in support of the worst off both in Europe and around the world (in Truong 2020).

In an interview published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in April 2020, Habermas observes, "My 'story' (*Geschichte*) also sheds a light on the moral and philosophical background of current strategies for dealing with such crises" (in Schwering 2020). As both a philosopher of

communicatively mediated cooperation and as a public intellectual, who has consistently spoken up "about critical developments while others are still absorbed in business as usual" (2009, 55), Habermas believes the solution lies in communicative action mediated through democratic institutions beyond the nation-state. At a time of increasing nationalism, this project of increasing transnational solidarity seems to be under greater threat than ever before, especially at a time when the crisis brought about by the novel Coronavirus has closed borders and forced individuals to break their usual ties with each other through self-isolation.

Despite its Herderian aspirations, it seems unlikely that a two thousand page history of philosophy will make much of a difference in improving the quality of our public debates by encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding between different groups within political communities and across international borders. However, it might. Reflecting on the book few months after its release, Habermas notes that he is buoyed by the wide readership AGPh has generated. This includes not only the usual suspects (colleagues and students), but also "thoughtful individuals seeking advice" such as doctors, managers, and lawyers. Despite the problems involved in over-specialization and increasing social estrangement, this gives Habermas (in Schwering 2020) some measure of confidence in the fact that the reading public at large still "seems to trust philosophy to some of the work involved in self-understanding (*Sie trauen anscheinend der Philosophie noch ein bisschen Selbstverständigungsarbeit zu*)." We can only hope that he is right.

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