

## **The *Cosmological Inversion*: Sacred and Secular Constructs of “Faith” and “Belief”**

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### **Abstract**

In the October, 2002, *The Atlantic*, Philip Jenkins made some disquieting observations concerning the future of Western Christianity under the title, “The Next Christianity.” Given the current preoccupation with Islamic countries, the suggestion that Christianity is itself in trouble is being given little attention:

Christianity as a whole is both growing and mutating in ways that observers in the West tend not to see. For obvious reasons, newspapers today are filled with material about the influence of a resurgent and sometimes angry Islam. But in its variety and vitality, in its global reach, in its association with the world’s fastest-growing societies, in its shifting centers of gravity, in the way its values and practices vary from place to place—in these and other ways it is Christianity that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century. The process will not necessarily be a peaceful one, and only the foolish would venture anything beyond the broadest predictions about the religious picture a century or two ahead. But the twenty-first century will almost certainly be regarded by future historians as a *century in which religion replaced ideology as the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood, and, of course, conflicts and wars.* (Italics added.)

In the face of this prediction, would it be anachronistic to return to those philosophic voices which were, in the age of evolutionary theory and broad scientific research, in the earlier age of Kant’s critical investigations and, later, John Dewey’s quest for a “common faith,” slowly moving in the direction of a *ubiquitous secularity*? And, notwithstanding Charles Taylor’s attempt, in his *A Secular Age*, to critically examine such secularity as an ontological example of an “immanent frame”—with all its limitations—would not that move be a final thrust at the underlying ontological ideology of theistic religion, a desultory ideology identified here as the *cosmological inversion*? This ideology portrays a gyrating deity (the monotheistic God) whose ontological gyrations are the effects of a series of demands critically difficult to comprehend in a secular framework: from a cosmogony of “unconditioned” origins to the manifold conditions of human morality, this God is made responsible both for all that IS (Parmenides’ rational domain) and all that is NOT (*doxa* or opinion derived from sensory experience). The *cosmological inversion* portrays a singular deity who now exists at an infinite distance from mankind, but then

reappears in a mono/poly theism in which His business (and the business of His heavenly servants and angels) is essentially to identify and rigidly control mankind's ever-expanding domain of the "profane"—a control, to use Taylor's term, of an exponentially expanding system of "excarnations". (Taylor, 288.)

This ideology provides an escape mechanism required and utilized by the sacred liturgies of monotheism. When attacked by atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, who question the truth of theistic propositions, "right-wing" literal monotheists escape by arguing that this God's infinite distance from humankind permits only metaphoric or analogical propositions—that atheism is a theological distortion due to the limitations of human language. And when all such attacks are overpowered, inquisitorially or violently, by "reactionary" monotheists, the theistic God is gyrated back into the secular world wielding the sin-cutting scythe.

At this point, "moderate" theologians emerge who argue that this evanescent deity can actually be encountered in mankind's religious "experiences," but soon fear that the reports of such experiences could very well be "spurious" and are therefore in need of rational examination. The gyration of the *cosmological inversion*, now in the direction of an anti-rationalist theism, is then re-directed toward the feasibility—indeed the necessity—of a rationally accessible deity.

The great classical Greek hope that humans would master the theologically-neutral art of dialectical thinking, through a concentrated examination of the logic of the *judgment/contradiction* nexus, gives way, historically, to a theistic religion involved in a fearsome promotion of a *justice/punishment* nexus and the consequences of exponentially growing "sinful" human behaviors. In Taylor's terms, this great religion of the Incarnation, which deteriorates into expanding systems of "excarnations," is driven by power-hungry religious institutions. In effect, the *cosmological inversion* opens theism to a gyration between the heuristic ideal of "purity" and the demands of consumptive human perversions. Jenkins comes precisely to that point in the article just cited, by concretizing the manifestations of this ideological inversion:

An ever greater reliance on individual choice, the argument goes, will help Catholicism to become much more inclusive and tolerant, less judgmental, and

*more willing to accept secular attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles. In the view of liberal Catholics, much of the current crisis derives directly from archaic if not primitive doctrines, including mandatory celibacy among the clergy, intolerance of homosexuality, and the prohibition of women from the priesthood, not to mention a more generalized fear of sexuality. In their view, anyone should be able to see that the idea that God, the creator and lord of the universe, is concerned about human sexuality is on its way out.*” (Italics added.)

The idea that God is both infinite and yet caught up in human politics, that “liberal” and “reactionary” views of God are possible, makes a mockery of many theological perspectives. The point of view taken in this paper is that this underlying ideology of theistic religion, expressed in the notion of a *cosmological inversion*, rather than the accidental/historical development of institutional Christianity, is responsible for the parochial conflicts which writers like Jenkins are noting. The philosophic point taken here is that one way out of this conflict is to neutralize ideologies which exacerbate the human struggle with the inexplicable, and explore the possibility of a neutral ubiquitous secularity. A starting point would be to demonstrate that the key terms used in the sacred liturgy of monotheism, “faith” and “belief,” when deconstructed, turn out to be meaningful only from the standpoint of a secular framework. However, seen from a contemporary world perspective, as he contrasts “Northern Christianity” (Euro-American) with “Southern Christianity” (African and Third World varieties), Jenkins does not leave room for optimism: after some 500 years of Northern Christian struggles with the consequences of the *cosmological inversion*, this ideology is back in full swing in the Southern Christian recapitulation of the crises of early Christianity:

Alongside the fast-growing churches have emerged apocalyptic and messianic movements that try to bring in the kingdom of God through armed violence. Some try to establish the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth, as prophesied in the Book of Revelation...Extremist Christian movements have appeared across parts of Africa where the mechanisms of the state are weak. They include groups such as the Lumpa Church, in Zambia, and the terrifying Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), in Uganda. In 2000 more than a thousand people in another Ugandan sect, the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, perished in an apparent mass suicide. In each case a group emerged from orthodox roots and then gravitated toward apocalyptic fanaticism. (Jenkins, 2002:10.)

**A Narrative Introduction: The *Cosmological Inversion*: The Ideological underside of Theism and Atheism:**

From time to time, I have asked myself, “Who is the most sensitive critic of Dawkins’ atheism, an anti-theist position built on Science and Evolutionary Theory?” Dawkins has a critical field day with theism and certainly does not settle for agnosticism. Ironically, experienced theists and agnostics are not his dauntless critics; calloused by a long history of criticism, theists simply snub him. Dawkins’ ferociously aggressive tone betrays a failure to realize that he is in a “game” situation, one whose outcome is intentionally enervating. It is a game whose memorable losers were Giordano Bruno and Galileo. The ferocity of this “game,” going back to antiquity, was due to a draconian effort to maintain a religio-legal framework in the face of critical social reactions. The “*amendment by noose*” (mentioned by Diodorus) allowed all citizens to “submit a change of law to the assembly, provided they argued their position with a rope around their neck and remained in that unfortunate condition until the magistrates had reached a binding decision. If the suggested amendment was rejected, the petitioner was hanged on the spot.” (Hermann, 145.) And so I asked myself, “Who, most of all, recognized the game-character of theistic disputation, and escaped with his life intact?” Blaise Pascal came immediately to mind. Who would better play the theistic game than a mathematician who was gifted enough in probability theory to make a sure bet? Having just heard Dawkins do a presentation at Oxford, and with his *The God Delusion* in hand, I felt strong enough to struggle through the issue of “Pascal’s wager.”

Thus, while browsing through the books at Blackwell’s bookstore in Oxford, with Dawkins’ book, *The God Delusion*, under my arm, and with his vibrant presentation still ringing in my ears, I conjured up the ghost of Pascal in the bookstore’s theology section. This veteran of theological wars sensed my strong resolve and seemed to gird himself for a familiar confrontation. In a querulous voice, I asked him why he wagered that it is better to believe in God than not to believe! His response was statistically simple:

“I had everything to gain and nothing to lose,” he responded.

“But isn’t that cowardice?” I retorted. “Here is Dawkins’ book—from a scientist, and aren’t you, a famous mathematician, giving in to the God delusion? Isn’t Dawkins heroic to fight this theistic game—to fight this addictive religious gambling on God’s existence?”

Pascal was slow to respond. And then, slowly, he said: “Look at how much energy Dawkins expends. Theists don’t work as hard: in their game they have the ‘God hypothesis’ on their side; it’s much easier to gamble when God is in your corner.”

My response was passionate: “But who can really tell that God is in his corner? As an atheist, Dawkins is fighting this vacuous God-presumption. He is as opposed to this sort of gambling as he would be to any other addictive gambling!”

“Well,” Pascal responded, an incipient smile on his lips and a subtle crescendo in his voice, “Dawkins is as much in this game as I was, but he is too hard-headed to recognize that *he cannot win!* You see, I am still here, unashamedly, to talk to you; I wagered correctly, not because I can now tell you that there is a God, but because I was saved from the fate meted out to Giordano Bruno, who was incinerated, and Galileo who was forced to recant! And earlier, Socrates’ fate was determined by a religio-political junto which found power a more convincing tool than dialogical philosophy. Sooner or later Dawkins too will be silenced. He is going to lose—in fact, the more he writes and argues, the more significance and credibility he bestows on the theist’s position.”

“But how can that be?” I responded. “Dawkins has science on his side! He asks for *evidence* and is not taken in by arguments from the side of Faith. How can anyone in the modern world not be an atheist?”

“I don’t think you understand,” Pascal responded. “This is not a game made and played in the sacred domain of heaven; this is a secular game! Theists are condemned to the same secular world we are all in, and in that world all that counts is *power*; so if you can make the claim that your religious Faith accounts for a true cosmogony, it is hard to win against you. By comparison, Dawkins’ evolutionism, as he must admit, is mere hypothesis: Moses heard God speak. Darwin only gave us *doxa!*—how does that empower anyone?”

“But isn’t that sense of “Faith”—for example Faith in the veracity of Biblical Genesis—a violation of the secular use of the same term? How,” I asked, “does that use of Faith affect the theist’s game? The literal theist seems to be using a recognizable secular language to talk about something alien to the secular world.”

“That’s the point,” Pascal replied, “theists can slip into and out of this secular world at will! They win by playing with a stacked deck. All thinking is propositionally rooted in the secular world, and all such thinking is rooted in the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of *doubt*. It is contingent, and for that reason Dawkins keeps insisting on the presentation of evidence. Thus even if Dawkins argues that theistic propositions are non-demonstrable, that they lack

evidence, that they are *false*, he is still acknowledging their *meaningfulness*. And if, finally and out of frustration, he argues that they are *meaningless*, as T. R. Miles does, then only *silence* can be his last resort—which will make theists happy. His opponents are not simply *semantic ghosts*. I could see that, so I made a wager that I could not lose—it was a safe bet!”

“But what do you mean when you say theists are playing with a stacked deck? That indicates an entrapment,” I argued.

Pascal gave this some consideration, and then revealed what seemed like two related traps: “This is the first trap,” he said: “When theists connect their monotheistic God to such concepts as ‘causation’, ‘design’, and ‘existence’, they are obviously using terms which are grounded in a secular context. Thus when arguments for God based on these concepts are challenged, theists make the first move in the direction of what I will call a *cosmological inversion*—that is, their God becomes infinitely distant and, hence, cannot be captured through ordinary propositions; theists then claim that they are only speaking metaphorically or analogically. They will insist that propositions simply cannot give God His true measure. The more we try to make sense of God, the more God moves out of sight.”

“But didn’t Plato indicate that when it comes to such things as ‘Absolute forms’, our knowledge cannot be propositional; that ‘non-propositional knowledge’ is possible and is not contaminated by contingency and doubt? (Gonzalez, 7, 10) And was not Parmenides successful in his attempt to concretize God’s thinking by negating the sense experience which most mortal humans depend on? (Hermann, 170, et passim.) Shouldn’t an atheist be able to construct an ontological highway to a God who seems infinitely remote—if that God exists in the first place?”

Well,” Pascal retorted, “the Greeks you mention did not have a full-blown monotheism to contend with. In fact, they tried to avoid a *cosmological inversion* by keeping their gods within range. Their gods were almost too human for comfort. That’s the virtue and plight of polytheism. They did not require the esoteric bridge of Faith.” “And the second trap?” I listened closely, since I planned to convey Pascal’s thoughts to Dawkins.

Here Pascal expressed a real concern for Dawkins: “When Dawkins and all other disbelievers are finally worn down and silenced, literal theists will bring God back into view—

through a renewed polytheism of angels and holy spirits, through ‘excarnations’ which expand exponentially the domain of the profane—all in an attempt to achieve power, to control and restrict the secular life of humans. The ancient ‘*amendment by noose*’ becomes an institutionalized model in the hands of those clerics and clergy who claim the power to read God’s intentions: And now God is back in the secular world! The *cosmological inversion* circles God back into view and is now complete. ‘Faith’ and ‘belief’ serve this inversion process: When inconvenient, God is withdrawn mysteriously and Faith becomes hopelessly ‘petitionary’; when convenient, God’s iconic presence becomes overwhelming, but Faith remains hopelessly ‘petitionary’ (Miles, 86). Humans must live with unanswered prayers. And so I made a wager. Perhaps I gained nothing. But at least I had the peace of mind which Dawkins and others do not have. My wager allowed me to live in peace and to work in the secular world. This ghost to whom you speak is not an immortal being. My wager is my immortality, since it continues to live in the minds of others. And so, in the end, God has served me after all.”

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Theism, atheism, agnosticism—all produce unending conflict. The entire dispute is the result of a series of category confusions or mistakes, especially evident in the tendentious conceptual division of ‘sacred’ (God-dependent) and ‘secular’ (God-independent) liturgies. This confusion emerges largely in a deconstruction of the two terms which are the landmarks of both sacred and secular domains: *faith* and *belief*. There seem to be only two pathways out of the theological confusion created by the *cosmological inversion*, and these ultimately involve the promotion of a comprehensive secular liturgy:

- 1) A “ubiquitous secularity” which distinguishes “faith” and “belief” and makes belief/believing a tool used exclusively for producing correctible knowledge.
- 2) A Spinozistic pantheism in which everything secular is really sacred (or the other way around), since the *cosmological inversion* is thereby neutralized; science and any effort to treat the human planet as a precious object will become a manifestation of a ubiquitous secularity—and a compelling secular liturgy.

The *cosmological inversion* was anticipated in David Hume’s *The Natural History of Religion* (1757):

[Monotheism, which is] somewhat disproportioned to vulgar comprehension [requires the support of] the notion of inferior mediators or subordinate agents which interpose between mankind and their supreme deity...The feeble apprehension of men cannot be satisfied with conceiving their deity as a pure spirit and perfect intelligence; and yet their natural terrors keep them from

imputing to him the least shadow of limitation and imperfection. They fluctuate between these opposite sentiments.

The *cosmological inversion* appears unavoidable wherever and whenever a literal monotheism manifests itself. It appears in a dramatic form in a reported conversation between the writers Mary McCarthy and Flannery O'Connor:

Elizabeth Hardwick took her [Flannery O'Connor] to dinner at Mary McCarthy's apartment where McCarthy conceded that the communion wafer was a symbol of the Holy Ghost and a pretty good one, whereupon Flannery made her famous reply, "Well if it's a symbol, to hell with it."

(Joy Williams, *The New York Times*, Book Review, March 1, 2009.)

No matter how McCarthy would have represented this experiential manifestation of monotheism, O'Connor would have pushed this transcendent God ever farther into the mists of non-secularity; and conversely, as human experience expands its grasp and command of the secular domain, this God of a literal monotheism returns to this domain with an ever-expanding agenda of what is and is not profane.

### **A Deconstruction of "Faith" and "Belief"—The Politics of Theism:**

From the standpoint of cognition in a secular framework, the complex concept "belief/believing" denotes two competing senses: On the one hand, the term denotes a *rocess* which is cognitively *tentative* (involving hypothesis formation and the sifting of evidence in the pursuit of knowledge); but on the other hand, it denotes a *less tentative* (at times less rational) manifestation of *trust* (an acceptance which is often driven by an absence of knowledge). As a process, the tentative sense of "belief/believing" can be quantified or qualified—can be partially correct or totally incorrect, confirmed or opined, partial or complete. (Plato's cautious attempt to characterize knowledge as "true justified belief" was a recognition that the process, in a sense, was more important than the mere outcome.) The *less tentative* sense of "belief/believing", the one which involves *trust*, can be driven to a level of incontrovertible, apodictic conviction. It is this latter sense that makes "belief" vulnerable to the theistic attempt to identify it with "faith." Theistic "faith," which is not a verb, thus gains from the transformation of a secular process verb (belief) into a non-process (sacred) noun which indicates the achievement of conviction—but a conviction, unlike "knowledge," which is shorn of the secular form of the truth-criterion.

But “belief” has a temperament: In its secular frame, belief is always tempered by *doubt*; in its sacred frame, in “belief as faith in God,” such doubt is generally abandoned. “Faith” thus *gyrates* around the category of knowledge, now touching tenuous belief, but then adopting the strong truth condition which identifies a proximity to the knowledge-relation. This gyration constitutes the political/epistemological reflection of the *cosmological inversion*. Here, theistic faith moves from some theological acknowledgement of the importance of doubt, doubt grounded in the notion of an infinite distance between God and man, to those who, secure in their prayers, bring God back into the secular world of human petitioning. Ultimately, this theistic gyration which generates this *inversion* is the basis of that groundswell of theologies which produces the ongoing controversies concerning man’s relationship to God. While for some theologians, doubt demands religious toleration, for others, toleration is a purely secular matter rooted in fallible human experience (compare Locke and Spinoza on toleration).

The effects of the placement of doubt at the heart of theistic theology are essentially political in nature: At the “right-wing” side of the *cosmological inversion*, the arch-conservative side, faith moves beyond doubt to a radical dualism which separates God from man. We might call this the *Parmenidean stance*. Theological “centrists,” on the other hand, those who wish to avoid the extreme “right-wing” version of the *cosmological inversion*, support the factor of doubt, while still maintaining the ultimate separation of God and man. They strongly maintain that the need for a theological rapprochement between secular and sacred liturgies is the most urgent issue. However, “left-wing” theists bring God back into view through the promotion of a quasi-secularized sacred liturgy. The resulting political spectrum is reflected in the distinction between “petitionary” and “performatory prayer.” (Miles, 86.) The latter, a devotion to the well-being of others, is a form of religious involvement with the world, but one in which God is not petitioned to enter as a causal agent. In effect, it is simply a secularized form of religious practice.

From a philosophic standpoint, this political wrangling over God’s relation to man, which marks the birth of the *cosmological inversion*, is first given voice in Plato’s *Parmenides*. In an imagined interchange between Parmenides and the younger Socrates, the ontological legitimacy

of Platonic “Forms” is examined, and with it the foundation of later theological views concerning God’s knowledge and man’s. Commenting on this interchange, Friedlaender notes:

The prototypes [Forms such as “beauty itself, goodness itself,” etc.] are the objects of knowledge for him who has knowledge itself—and that can only be a god; but then things in our world cannot be known by him...Let us also consider the most radical implication of this last problem raised by Parmenides. The gods are not our masters nor do they know things human. Human thought, in turn, cannot know anything of divine being, and furthermore—though this is not said explicitly, it is implied by the reference to masters and servants—we human beings are not capable of serving the gods. (Friedlaender, 3, 199f.)

It is not insignificant to note that what is problematic in the Socratic approach to the prototypes or Forms of knowledge, the approach which brings the gods into question, foreshadows the political troubles which will face Socrates later in life.

But notwithstanding this ancient concern, contemporary theologians attempt to meliorate this division. Thus Ferre notes: “Faith...as the stubborn determination that evidence not ‘seen’ is yet there, remains a counterweight in retaining cognitive and valuational balance.” (Ferre, 108.) But if it is possible that the “evidence not ‘seen’” is a pseudo-evidence of an impenetrable kind, would that upset the epistemological “balance” which Ferre projects? The possible equivocality of “evidence” as we move through the sacred and secular domains leads Ferre to set out admonitions to both theologians and scientists concerning an authentic and open involvement with faith. We see here a “centrist” position in the making:

Theology...cannot do its own work without relating the religious vision it articulates to the best warranted beliefs of the age. And its mode of relating cannot merely be negative, excluding or denying what the sciences claim to be the case...When theologians have been so unwise as to set themselves up as head-on rivals in the matter of describing the domain of empirical regularities, they have again and again suffered ignominious confusion. (*Ibid.*, 106.)

In another “centrist” view, R.C. Neville goes directly to secularity by linking philosophy and theology in an “ontotheology.”

One might be tempted to aim at presenting the core answers on which all Christians agree. The core of common theological agreement is an illusion, *however*. Even the choice of topics reflects a particular theological perspective. This already biases the alleged core of common agreement, even if one can gerrymander the problems to find apparent unanimity. Furthermore, the presentation of a “common core” has the consequence in intellectual politics of

marginalizing and probably delegitimizing those positions falling outside the core.  
*That is dogmatism at its worst.* (Neville, xxvi. Italics added.)

In the secular domain, belief drags faith into itself—faith *as belief* is then subject to the same insecurities which govern beliefs—insecurities expressed in trusting or in questioning. But sacred liturgies have given “faith” a different, mysterious power, a power which connects it to a secure, but idiosyncratic conviction—an “indubitable knowledge” which lacks evidence: and here faith drags belief into itself, thus converting a process verb (believe) into a noun (faith) which fixes and crystallizes the process. Faith and belief now together—*fides* and *fiducia* in one breath—identify an incontrovertible non-evidential “knowledge” which is called (a process-free) “religious faith” or “belief system.” When, at one side of the *cosmological inversion*, the incomprehensible object of literal monotheism is connected to the secular category of “knowledge,” faith drags belief into itself resulting in a cognitive achievement which supposedly supercedes commonplace usage. This violated sense of the typical, secular use of “belief”, when immersed in the experientially variegated religious framework, leads to a fractioning of sacred liturgy into an irreconcilable sectarianism.

**Prospects of a Ubiquitous Secularity: The Politics of Religious Experience:**

No sooner does a theologian begin to characterize the attributes of the monotheistic deity, the inevitable secularity of his language emerges. A prime example is St. Thomas. Speaking of “God’s knowledge,” he states: “Since the knowledge of God is his substance...just as His substance is altogether immutable...so His knowledge likewise must be altogether invariable.” However, “But from the fact that He knows that some things can be which are not, or that some things can-not be which are, it does not follow that His knowledge is variable, but rather that He knows the variability of things.” (*Summa Theologica*, Fifteenth Article.) Here, secular notions are being used to express the attributes of divinity, but can they be understood in the light of the radical distance between God and man as reflected on the far side of the *cosmological inversion*? As T.R. Miles insists, that side of the *cosmological inversion* “can be met only by ‘the way of silence’.” “Literal theism,” Miles argues, “must be regarded as meaningless,” though “the formula of ‘silence qualified by parables’ can legitimately be used as a basis of a religious system.” (Miles, 178.) Since parables can cover the entire range of the *cosmological inversion*; since most moral convictions are expressible in parable form, this unnamed perspective which

Miles recommends is really the manifestation of a secular liturgy—indeed, a ubiquitous secularity. The notion that the monotheistic God has characteristics or attributes, something easily taken care of in polytheism, inevitably requires a framework of functions which can only be described in secular language. The virtue of polytheism was that it recognized the diversity of secular life and could not therefore make divinity less diverse, while monotheism struggled to square secular diversity with an ever more remote and monolithic deity.

Modern theologians have had to come to terms with secularity by attending to its primary component—human *experience*. Prospects of a ubiquitous secularity are governed, essentially, by the philosophic successes in formulating a theory of experience. Modern philosophy (Locke, Kant, and on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century) has made “experience” its core metaphysical or ontological issue. This concern has emerged as a key issue for modern theists:

Experience, moreover, stands as a *prius* to expression and articulation as being the what and how that is being expressed. As we learn from the history of religion, religious insight exists in an experiential mode before it comes to full articulation in a conceptual system, which is the reason for the crucial role it played in the revelatory persons who have been the Founders of the great religious traditions. In each case it was their experience and their being as shaped and expressed in that experience which has been the primary focus of interpreters seeking to lay hold of the religious insight disclosed through their lives. (Smith, 12.)

This attention to “experience” (which takes us back to the early confrontation between Parmenides and Socrates) pushes the discussion back to the other side of the *cosmological inversion*—back to a fractioned divinity; the socio-political effect is a rabid sectarianism. Smith then points out that there is a contemporary thirst for this “experiential participation in a Power that transcends merely human and finite concerns,” but quickly worries (as anyone would who is sensitive to the history of religion) that the “immediacy” of such experience can lead to “frenzy” and “spurious” approaches to religion—the “*frenzy of immediacy*.” Smith then declares that we are in need of a “critical theory of experience and a grasp of its proper function as both participation and understanding through an interpreting word,” otherwise “it will be impossible to sift the genuine from the spurious...” (*Ibid.*)

The *cosmological inversion* seems, then, to be an inevitable effect of any theological dualism. And that dualism seems unavoidable, as long as the determination of what is and what

is not “spurious” plays out on a secular stage. As long as Reason is necessary to make that determination, the prospects of a ubiquitous secularity loom large. John Macquarrie insists that voices of a sacred liturgy cannot be trusted without being subjected to “rational examination.” Macquarrie states: “In the case of religious beliefs, especially the fundamental belief in God, the experience comes first. Then follows the argument, which may either confirm the interpretation of the experience or, in the case of some people, fail to do so. Thus the two ways [faith and reason] which in their beginning were so different finally converge.” (Macquarrie, 38f.) The question persists: is this interpretation of the rational testing of “religious experiences,” in order to eliminate what is “spurious,” in any way different from the general testing of non-religious (i.e., God-unrelated) beliefs? Are they not both simply framed in a ubiquitous secularity? Yes and no! “Yes”—to the extent that experience and reason transact in both because they are ontologically univocal. “No”—to the extent that the “experiences” referred to on the religious stage or framework are simply not open to evidentiary reproduction, that is, to *prediction* on the one hand, or *experiential continuity* on the other.. “No”—as long as and to the extent that the implicit “God Hypothesis” still drives this matter in the direction of the *cosmological inversion*, a drive whose intractable divisions make it arguably impossible to comprehend the distinction between the “authentic” experience and the “spurious.”

Returning to the deconstruction of “belief,” is Macquarrie’s “convergence” of faith and belief clear? If the religious experience comes first, which is then followed by the rational (argument) determination that the experience is not “spurious” but authentic, why then should Macquarrie end up with nothing more than “religious *belief*”?

When convenient, or even inconvenient, the “frenzy of immediacy” has had a strong and compelling impact on both the experiential and rational involvement with sacred liturgy; either way is open to manipulation by the powers which seek to control the politics of religious institutions. Hence, it was precisely the need to avoid this “frenzy of immediacy” which brought the concept of “experience” to the attention of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American philosophers. Progressive philosophies and theologies in America had to deal with two issues: *Experiential pluralism* and the possibility of experiential (constitutional, political and jurisprudential) *continuity*.

In the Parmenidean world of Euro-American Christianity, the use of reason to control the sensory “frenzy of immediacy” is by now well known; however, that sensory preference still commands attention wherever religious prophecy reappears—as is now the case in Third World Christianity. And it is that “frenzy of immediacy” that can be counted on to feed the voracious appetite of a popularized version of the *cosmological inversion*:

[The prophetic] Alice Lakwena was a former Catholic whose visions led her to establish the Holy Spirit Mobile Force, also pledged to fight witches. She refused to accept the national peace settlement established under President Yoweri Museveni, and engaged in a holy war against his regime. Holy Spirit soldiers, many of them children and young teenagers, were ritually anointed with butter on the understanding that it would make them bulletproof. When Lakwena’s army was crushed, in 1991, most of her followers merged with the LRA, which is notorious for filling its ranks by abducting children. Atrocities committed by the group include mass murder, rape, and forced cannibalism. Today as in the sixteenth century, an absolute conviction that one is fighting for God’s cause makes moot the laws of war. (Jenkins, 2002:10.)

The Euro-American perspective is radically different from the larger global perspective described by Jenkins. Ferre, recognizing the need to attend to both issues, experience and pluralism, has emphasized non-subjective (non-frenzied) pluralism:

“Pluralism is not merely a fate to be endured but an opportunity to be cherished...[Our response] is not to retreat nor to dig in but to treasure the intrinsic value of the other’s vision for his or her sake, not merely for the contribution it can make to mine.” Ferre challenges the claim that some party has the “unquestionable authority to dictate knowledge.” And, using some of the very same language John Dewey used for the same purpose, Ferre argues that “Theology...cannot do its own job without relating the religious vision it articulates to the best *warranted beliefs* [Dewey’s term] of the age. And its mode of relating cannot merely be negative, excluding or denying what the sciences claim to be the case. The descriptive rigor of the scientific enterprise requires that at a very minimum the findings of empirical research be taken by theology as setting forth how the world presents itself to human observation.” (Ferre, *loc. cit.*)

The original intent of the term “liturgy” involved the performance of a public service. That might seem to indicate a built-in value preference for a concept of “faith” which is judged in and by its ongoing communal effects rather than its capacity to finally end doubt—a matter seriously investigated by Charles Peirce. In America, while flip-flopping all over the place (Supralapsarians, Sublapsarians, Arminianizers, true Calvinists, Pelagians and Augustinians, just

to mention a few American sects—(cf. Hoopes, 192)), the evolution of a productive communal liturgy took years to develop and was arguably most clearly enunciated in Dewey's *A Common Faith*. It was Dewey's general direction to develop the notion that Democracy thrives on the *doubt/resolution* process. In Dewey's secular liturgy, there is an examination of religion as an aspect of ordinary human experience, a dimension of human life which unfolds as a history of transactive social and environmental activities. "The core of religions," Dewey wrote, "has generally been found in rites and ceremonies. Legends and myths grow up in part as decorative dressings, in response to the irrepressible human tendency toward story-telling, and in part as attempts to explain ritual practices. Then as culture advances, stories are consolidated, and theogonies and cosmogonies are formed..." (Dewey, 696f.)

The implications of Dewey's analysis is far-reaching for understanding the philosophic underpinning of Western theological perspectives: Stories-as-experiences (as in Plato's allegories) are formed, in the traditional story-form, through the creation and manipulation of "binary tensions" which, when generalized, form the dualisms of the great oral and written traditions: God/man, good/evil, appearance/reality, unity/diversity...etc. These "binary tensions" have led to the "antinomies of reason" which served as the critical (Kantian) basis for the reactive unfolding of a new, ubiquitous secularity. The social, intellectual and political ramifications of this development were vast. A "common faith" is tied into progressive evolution, while, in the process, ontological discontinuity gives way to continuity: art and science, religion and social morality can now be seen as functional aspects of human experience rather than expressions of a *transcendent/profane* duality. "Faith" and "belief" can now be clarified through an examination of the place of rational enquiry in a surrounding world, while, at the same time, the Parmenidean bifurcation of reason and sensory experience is reintegrated; thus, the deconstruction of those narrative binaries which became the rigid, hypostatic dualisms of the *cosmological inversion* now become the focal point of a new reconstructive philosophy.

The binary tensions of traditional morality plays and stories of the past, which served the dualisms of the sacred and profane, must now give way to the infinitely more diversified and contemporary novel. In this light, Mikhail Bakhtin argued that "It is considerably more difficult to incorporate semantic changes into such [sacred] discourse, even with the help of a framing context: its semantic structure [because authoritative] is static and dead, for it is fully complete,

it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it.” Thus the text of a sacred liturgy, even if incorporated in a novel, “If completely deprived of its authority, it becomes simply an object, a *relic*, or a *thing*.” (Bakhtin, 533 n.3.)

**Conclusion:**

For a ubiquitous secularity to function, transcendental doubts or Cartesian doubts must give way to functional approaches—in law and politics, as in religion, there cannot be permanent ends to man’s evolution, since there are no traceable *unconditioned origins* to come back to (Kant’s great contribution to this discussion). Proximate ends become the means to new directions in a secular liturgy which establishes communal integration through a process of continuous education and social growth. From a philosophic standpoint, if we take Dewey as our model, a *ubiquitous secularity* can be established and, at the same time, the *cosmological inversion* neutralized, if the following four philosophic pillars of traditional Western thinking can be reconstructed: *Discontinuity*, or dualism must give way to the ongoing quest for intellectual and social continuity; *Antecedence*, or non-experimental, *a priori* Truth, must give way to a continuous effort to justify beliefs experientially, i.e., experimentally; *Priority*, or non-temporal or a-historic Values, must give up the notion of an unconditioned “fundamentality” and adopt a pluralistic perspective in which “fundamentals” are open to continuous reconstruction; *Abstractionism*, involves the cognitive attempt to construct non-pragmatic hypostatizations of concepts and ideas, rather than organize the meaning of concepts around developing practices. Once religious thinking is divested of these four footings, the *cosmological inversion* and all of its negative attributes should give way to a ubiquitous secularity in which pluralistic secular liturgies become free to engage dialogically.

There is a cultural need to re-engage with the Greek philosophic interest in the *judgment/contradiction* nexus. The *justice/punishment* nexus, which has dominated Western theistic religion, Christian and Islamic, prolongs the reign of the *cosmological inversion* as the battleground of religious experience. Unhappily, with the *cosmological inversion* now spreading globally, Jenkins’ foreboding of an apocalyptic future might be prescient:

Some of the likely winners in the religious economy of the new century are precisely those groups with a strongly apocalyptic mindset, in which the triumph of righteousness is associated with the vision of a world devastated by fire and

plague. This could be a perilously convenient ideology for certain countries with weapons of mass destruction. (The candidates that come to mind include not only Iraq and Iran but also future regional powers such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Congo, Uganda, and South Africa.) All this means that our political leaders and diplomats should pay at least as much attention to religions and sectarian frontiers as they ever have to the location of oil fields.

(Jenkins, 200210.)

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