

Postscript

The problem with any strict doctrine of church/state separation is the failure to understand how religion tends to permeate all levels of society. Its influence is felt within a wide range of institutions, inspiring its rituals from birth to death, promoting certain types of behavior and actions, while condemning others as unacceptable.¹ Its ideas are integrated within the forces of life and often served as a necessary and critical part of the past when evolving modern beliefs and practices, making it difficult to label current institutions as secular or sacred and creating a coherent division between the two realms. Often those who label certain aspects of life as secular are presenting little more than an argument from ignorance (*argumentum ex ignorantia*) by failing to acknowledge or find any connection with religion in certain areas of interest due to their inability or unwillingness to discern it. Any argument from ignorance fails to account for the possibility of future historical or philosophical insight into the nature of things and discovering what was missing. Religious apologists made this same mistake in the past when inserting God into the gaps of their scientific knowledge to explain the inexplicable in the universe, but the modern theological community showed the basic fallacy of this approach and now tends to abandon the argument from silence for the most part.² This type of argument is no longer considered valid among modern religious thinkers, and its secular counterpart is no different and must be rejected similarly. Ignorance never serves as a sufficient reason for proving much of anything.

Those who believe in God tend to see God everywhere through the eyes of faith. They do not discover the presence of God dwelling in an isolated corner of the universe or existing within certain gaps of our scientific knowledge, but think of God as an omnipotent and omnipresent force who exceeds all possible limitations in ruling the entire universe. Their faith beholds the presence of God in all dimensions of life, from the depths of Sheol to the farthest reaches of the heavens, from the innermost recesses of the heart to the outward affairs of everyday business at the city gates (Pss 24:1, 7; 139; Is 66:1). George Hegel viewed reality as the external expression of the divine Spirit and found the relationship growing more intimate through the historical process of reconciling divine subjectivity and objectivity into an ultimate unity.³ Ralph Waldo Emerson found revelation within the everyday occurrences of life. He thought the world develops from a transcendental center of spiritual life and exemplifies its origin like a parable or metaphor, inviting the pilgrim to soar beyond the external scientific surface and develop a metaphysical eye in searching for its ultimate meaning.⁴ Paul Tillich thought of God as the ground of all being, providing the ultimate justification of life or depth of the human spirit. God is not a being alongside other beings as if circumscribed within a limited dimension of existence, but comprehends all things and defines their very being as *esse ipsum*, *verum ipsum*, and *bonum ipsum*.⁵

Religion provides those who can believe in God with an answer to the heart-felt need of most human beings in their quest for some sense of value and meaning in life. A simple scientific description finds no real imperative to change the way things happen to exist in the world. It provides no real standard of perfection to distinguish between what happens to occur in the natural course of events and what “ought” to transpire in creating a better world from an ideal point of view.⁶ In recognizing the dichotomy, many people have found it necessary to look beyond the phenomenal world and the many secular ways to describe it and find a firm foundation for their society and its norms within some ideal ontic dimension. The Hammurabi Law Code and the Hebrew Torah represent the most famous examples of this longing by looking to the revelation of the divine will in founding the laws of their people. The western philosophical tradition contains the same longing for a metaphysical basis of society, reaching back to the Graeco-Roman world and extending to modern times via the Middle Ages. Plato thought of an ideal realm existing apart from the sensible world as embodying universal concepts. He particularly related the ideal good to the existence of an ultimate or supreme form to provide ethical statements with some transcendental and ontic dimension.⁷ Cicero followed the Platonic tradition and spoke of a natural law that first develops out of the mind of God and provides the basis of justice in all of the society.⁸ Christians carried on the tradition of natural law and deconstructed it in

the Middle Ages through the work of William Ockham and the Decretalists into the modern concept of natural rights.⁹ John Locke made these divine rights the basis of good government and influenced the Founding Fathers of America, who constantly refer to the importance of religion in providing a basis for the moral life and justification for the social order.¹⁰

The nineteenth century ushered in a more skeptical era with many philosophers expressing doubt about the existence of God and placing the former emphasis on the moral life under serious question.¹¹ The skepticism of the academy was burgeoning during the era and reached a fervid pitch in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, who provided the most scintillating presentation of its brutal logic as the manifestation of the “Antichrist,” but only to reel from the utter darkness of the position in the end. In his work, Nietzsche announces on behalf of the academy that “God is dead,” even if it takes some time for the multitudes to receive the news and accept the full ramifications of the new reality.¹² At first, Nietzsche tries his best to accept the verdict and offers a consistent anti-metaphysical confession, which finds no goal or meaning in life and dispenses with the presence of a moral conscience as the remnant of the old theistic point of view, wanting the *Übermensch* to live “beyond good and evil” and question the “value of moral values.”¹³ However, his “revaluation of values” soon reverses its course and decides to offer a new moral truth to replace the old religious values, rather than dispense with moral categories once and for all.¹⁴ Derrida says that Nietzsche destroys all metaphysical truth, then forgets what he says or erases the previous comments so that he can speak the truth once again with great boldness.¹⁵ This inconsistency gives rise to the type of multiple readings associated with Derrida’s approach to the reading of a text, but it also reveals a human problem or weakness that prefers to remain inconsistent and reel from the utter darkness of a meaningless existence than face all the brute logic of an atheistic point of view.

The modern world is caught between its head and its heart. The reasons for unbelief appear much more serious than the possibility of faith, given the clear limits of philosophical inquiry in addressing metaphysical concerns, the plausibility of finding any historical truth in many biblical stories, the power of alternative explanations in fields like science and economics, and the growth of technology replacing former spiritual resources. For these and many other reasons, it appears as if the process of secularization is gaining momentum and sure to overwhelm the religious community if the trend continues in its present direction, with no sign or prospect of significant reversal. And yet, religion has a way of hanging around as an indispensable element in addressing the basic needs of the human heart, which remain unfulfilled in the secular world of instrumentality, or treating human beings as a means without ends, only leaving one to wonder, “Is that all

there is?”¹⁶ Faith wants to believe too much and prefers to reject the limitations of a secular answer. It would rather be wrong with those who accept the possibility of meaning in life and the hope of immortality than sink into the secular abyss with the boast of being right about the utter futility of one’s existence. It would rather cling to the words of Jesus and the promise of eternal life than give up all hope and follow the path of oblivion (Jn 6:60, 66–68). It rejects the secular answer because it refuses to entrust its soul to the natural course of events or follow the path of rational expectation toward the inevitable conclusion. It refuses to limit its hope to the principalities and powers of this world as if dwelling in a self-contained system of cause and effect, preferring to look beyond these forces to the apocalyptic and catastrophic activity of God making all things new. It sees real possibility within the future activity of a God who can contradict the present course of things with supernatural power, pronouncing the poor blessed and giving hope to the hopeless through a simple word of promise. It has no reason to believe that the promise will find fulfillment, given the present state of affairs and its natural course, and no expectation that the process of secularization will change in any significant way since faith is never able to capture God dwelling in the present through a direct vision and prove its point.¹⁷ It must rest content in the promise and continue to believe despite all the evidence to the contrary—“in hope against hope” (Rom 4:18).

Notes

1. *Rethinking Secularism*, Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.
2. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 1.6.
3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, A. V. Miller (trans.), J. N. Findlay (Analysis) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 12, 356–57, 417, 457, 487, 492, 587, 774 (22–23, 584–85, 684, 755, 801, 808).
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays*, Larzer Ziff (ed.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 18, 43, 53, 60, 242, 260.
5. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1.172–73, 207–9; *The Courage To Be* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 187; *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 5–7, 13–16.
6. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 12, 33, 45, 48; Hilary Putnam, *Words & Life*, James Conant (ed.) (Cambridge, MA and London: 1995), 156, 217; John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth, UK and New York: Penguin, 1977); Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

7. Plato, *The Republic*, Paul Shorey (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), VI, 509–18 (105–33) 385, 389, 427–28; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Greece & Rome* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), I/1.192, 202–3, 216ff.
8. Cicero, *De legis*, in *The Loeb Classic Library*, C. W. Keyes (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 1.18–35, 42–43; 2.8–10; Strehle *The Egalitarian Spirit of Christianity*, 135.
9. Strehle, *The Egalitarian Spirit of Christianity*, 135–41.
10. John Locke, *Concerning Civil Government, Second Essay*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, Robert Maynard Hutchins (ed.) (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1978), 135 (56); Strehle, *Egalitarian Spirit*, 111–13, 147–49.
11. There are some philosophers who try to base morality on human reason, but their treatments are unsatisfying. Ludwig Wittgenstein represents the most rigorous approach to philosophy in modern times by exorcising all metaphysical concepts like God and ethics from the discipline as defying the logic of language, which must remain rooted in the things of this world. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 3, 5 (1, 2, 2.01), 19 (4.003), 25–26 (4.112–4.1212), 56–57 (5.6–5.61, 5.632–5.633), 67–74. Immanuel Kant tries to ground the moral life within a categorical imperative of practical reason but fails to keep reason within its proper limits in doing so. At best, reason can *describe* what it observes around it in a human way, but it can never transcend the situation and *prescribe* what is right or wrong. Beside this fundamental error, Kant's work still finds a connection between God and morality. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he postulates the existence of metaphysical ideas as representing the “natural disposition of the human mind.” In *Critique of Practical Reason*, he postulates the existence of God as a means of “promoting the *summum bonum*,” connecting happiness and virtue together since the phenomenal world possesses no particular reason in rewarding the moral life with its just deserts. In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, he thinks of God as a “holy Legislator,” who destined humankind to serve the divine will and inscribes the moral duties upon each and every heart. Here the autonomy of practical reason and its categorical imperative is set aside for a more traditional concept of the relation between God and morality, creating some tension with his previous statements in *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. *Critique of Pure Reason*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 19, 178, 200; *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Great Books*, 260, 268, 291–92, 302, 317, 339–45, 348; *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (trans.) (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), 3–5, 95, 130–31, 142, 170–71; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Kant*, 6/2.97, 219. Utilitarianism attempts to reduce ethics to a calculating sum, but it has difficulty establishing the end as worthy of moral approval. For example, J. S. Mill proposed a utilitarian scheme that would identify what was good with what we desire or produces pleasure. “The sole evidence...that anything is desirable is the people do actually desire it.” However, this solution commits the “naturalistic fallacy” by mixing what we ought to desire with what we do in fact desire, which might include many unseemly things. *Mill's Utilitarianism*, J. M. Smith and E. Sosa (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1969), 34, 60–61. John Searle proceeds in another direction and tries to demonstrate that some value judgments are descriptive, not just metaphysical. In the case of a promise, he finds an implicit obligation, but he later admits that

the entire institution of making a promise might be questioned. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990), 182, 189. Jürgen Habermas also tries to find meaning and ethics in a world that has lost its metaphysical moorings. As part of the Frankfurt School, he looks to the community and its ability to reach agreement and coordinate actions through communicative reason or action. He thinks the give-and-take of mutual intersubjective recognition contains a binding force of universal validity, but he ends up having the same problem as Kant in trying to make reason prescriptive. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Thomas McCarthy (trans.) (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 1.xxii, 26, 86, 137, 180, 193, 219, 230, 264, 287; 2.77, 290; *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Frederick Lawrence (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 198, 314–15, 324. See also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 255–61 for the same type of argument and fallacy.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 167, 181–82, 279 (108, 125, 343); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 14. Zarathustra uses this phrase to mock the God of Christianity, who suffocated on the cross from excessive pity and compassion for the lowly. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 249, 272–73; *Beyond Good and Evil*, Helen Zimmern (trans.) (New York: The Modern Library, 1917), 68–70 (61–62). Nietzsche is a disciple of the atheism and voluntarism of Arthur Schopenhauer.
13. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 7 (1), 140 (244); *The Gay Science*, 280, 289 (343, 347); *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 20, 110, 161, 236, 280, 283, 312.
14. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, 33–34, 52–53, 258, 261, 270, 283; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 40, 87–88 (34, 149, 154); *Twilight of the Idols*, Anthony Ludovici (trans.) (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2008), 33; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 218–19; *Will to Power*, 129, 522 (221, 1008); Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 110–12.
15. Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, Avital Ronell and Kamuf (trans.), Christie MacDonald (ed.) (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 30–31; Steven Ascheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany: 1890–1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 11, 19. Jean-Paul Sartre serves as another example of this inconsistency. He admits that all ethical ideals disappear if God does not exist and “man is condemned to be free”—free to do anything, but he spends much of his public life on moral crusades, joining the French resistance, supporting the Communist Party, and condemning the “unjust” actions of his own government in Algeria or America in Vietnam. Cf. *Existentialism and Human Emotion* (New York: The Wisdom Library, 1957), 21–23. Bertrand Russell confesses his own inconsistency on this matter.

I am accused of inconsistency, perhaps justly, because, although I hold ultimate ethical valuations to be subjective, I nevertheless allow myself emphatic opinions on ethical questions. If there is an inconsistency, it is one that I cannot get rid of without insincerity; moreover, an inconsistent system may well contain less falsehood than a consistent one.... In the first place, I am not prepared to forego my right to feel and express ethical passions; no amount of logic, even though it be my own, will persuade me that

I ought to do so. There are some men whom I admire, and others whom I think vile; some political systems seem to me tolerable, others an abomination. Pleasure in the spectacle of cruelty horrifies me, and I am not ashamed of the fact that it does. I am no more prepared to give up all this than I am to give up the multiplication table. Paul Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (Evanston and Chicago, IL: Northwestern University, 1944), 720.

16. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 311, 503, 533, 595, 598. This is the question that the singer Peggy Lee poses in her famous song. Max Weber sees the modern technicalizing world as robbing life of all meaning. He is skeptical whether modern reason can supply values through ethical naturalism and thinks that a moral conscience arises from religion alone. Only a “few big babies” pretend otherwise. *Max Weber’s ‘Science as a Vocation’*, Peter Lassman and Irving Velody (eds.) (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 17; Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 194; Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1.168, 229, 254; 2.302, 312.
17. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, James W. Leitch (trans.) (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), 18, 22–23, 30–32, 58, 103ff., 69, 85–86, 92, 176–79, 281–88.

