

THE FUTURE OF SECULARISM PAUL KAHN'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS POTENTIAL IN REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

Abstract: In this article, I address the problem of secularism as an ideology. I analyze its relationship to the concept of secularization as well as secularism's foundations and influences. I discuss the key points of the most prominent proponents of secularism, J. Rawls and J. Habermas, that rely on the idea, central to most liberal thinkers, that rational discourse is the sole form of discourse that should be used in the public sphere. I will oppose the reasoning for the primacy of rationalism in the public sphere by utilizing P. Kahn's interpretation of Schmitt's sociology of concepts, his particular interpretation of analogical thinking and the primacy of rhetoric in political discourse. My analysis will show that Kahn's contemporary political theology is the key to a successful opposition of the primacy of rationality in politics and opens a gateway to alternative modes of understanding that may be useful in recalibrating the future relationship between Church and State.

Keywords: Habermas, Kahn, Political Theology, Rationalism, Secularism.

The debates over religion's place in the public sphere haven't been quiet since at least the French Revolution and, frankly, a long time before that. But these days we can feel that the wall between Church and State is cracking with vicious intensity. Let us take a moment to look at some of the recent examples. The first one takes us to France where on April 9th 2018, Emmanuel Macron met the French Bishops and stated that „the link between the Church and the

State has been damaged and [...] it is important to repair it.” He also said that “the aim of *laïcité* is definitely not to deny the spiritual aspects of life in favor of temporal aspects, nor is it to wrench from society the sacred aspect which gives so much to our fellow citizens.”⁽¹⁾ These were the words of the leader of a country that historically prides itself on its strict Church and State separation policy. Another significant case was the speech made by the U.S. attorney general Jeff Sessions in June 2018, where he selectively quoted the Bible in an attempt to justify why separating over 2000 children from their parents at the U.S. — Mexico border was the right thing to do.⁽²⁾ This particular speech and the event itself undoubtedly caused a worldwide fury. Meanwhile, President Trump doesn’t hesitate to state that God is on his side during his rallies and takes part in mass blessings and prayers before introducing his alt-right ideas on immigration and reproductive rights to his supporters. We also mustn’t forget the discussions over the place of religious symbols in State institutions, starting with the ban of head scarfs in French schools⁽³⁾ and followed by mandatory crosses by the entrances of public institutions in Bavaria, Germany⁽⁴⁾. These and many other examples help us see that while the secular West willingly embraced the idea that political vocabulary should be dominated by non-religious and rational language, the Western presidents still finish their inauguration oaths with “so help me God.”

Keeping all that was said above in mind, I think it is important to take a look at the boundaries of secularism set by religion’s place in the public sphere. The questions that I want to address are not only whether secularism as an ideology needs redefining, but also, whether secularism actually works as well as liberal democracies tend to think it does? And while these discussions always urge us to rethink and redefine religion and our understanding of it, maybe we also need to rethink politics and whether rational arguments are the actual drives behind political processes or is there something more to it?

I will take on these questions by analyzing the arguments for secularism and rational discourse in the public sphere made by a prominent liberal thinker Jürgen Habermas and his particular mode of rationalism in the form of the translation requirement. After that, I will turn to the chief figure of

(1). Macron’s speech in English and French: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/transcript-of-the-address-given-by-the-president-of-the-french-republic-before-the-bishops-of-france/>.

(2). More on Jeff Sessions’ selective quotes: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/15/bible-jeff-sessions-sarah-sanders-trump-administration>.

(3). Wearing of headscarfs and burkas in public places in France has been forbidden since 2010.

(4). Since May, 2018, a cross must be hung by the entrances of Bavarian public places. The mayor of of the Bavarian towns, Deggendorf, stated that it is a cultural rather than religious phenomenon.

my essay — Paul Kahn and his contemporary political theology, which uses some of the Schmittian methods but also takes matters into a new and, in my opinion, very intuitive and productive direction by trying to explain the true motivations behind political processes. I claim that Paul Kahn's contemporary political theology is the key to a successful opposition to the primacy of rationality in politics and opens a gateway to new modes of understanding that may be useful in rethinking and recalibrating the relationship between Church and State.

In a broader academic context, it is important to mention that debates like this one are not only relevant within the secularism discourse but also in the discussions over Enlightenment-induced rationalism and its effects on the contemporary society and its way of life, both public and private. Most of the supporters of rigid boundaries between Church and State, such as Rawls (1993), Habermas (2008c), Bruce (1996), see Enlightenment as a great achievement that brought undeniable progress. Even though their positions differ to some extent, at the core these thinkers do rely on rationalist reasoning and the primacy of rationalism, while their opponents, Taylor (2007), Kahn (2004), Martin (2017), Calhoun (2011), Ratzinger (2007) question whether scientific reasoning stripped the society of other ways of understanding the world that were just as valuable.

I would like to notice that what I am going to analyze is the Western hemisphere and Christianity, since because of many reasons, the duration of the essay being one of them, I cannot discuss the situation in the Middle East and other important regions and their respective dominant religions. The only thing I can highlight is that the situation in other regions is as complex as the one in the West.

I would also like to briefly discuss the main concepts that I am going to be using — 1) 'the secular', 2) 'secularization' and 3) 'secularism.' I follow Jose Casanova's definitions because I find them to be the clearest and the most useful.

1) According to Casanova, 'the secular' is "a central modern category — theological–philosophical, legal–political and cultural–anthropological – to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm of reality differentiated from "the religious"" (Casanova 2011: 54). The concept itself was born within the Christian tradition and finds its roots in the Latin *saeculum* where at first it only meant an indefinite period of time and only later came to denote a whole realm of everything that is not spiritual and sacred but rather temporal, mundane and profane. Casanova also highlights that "the secular has come to

be increasingly perceived as a natural reality devoid of religion, as the natural social and anthropological substratum that remains when religion is lifted or disappears” (*ibid*). In my opinion, this observation is of crucial importance because in spite of all that the concept holds within itself, even the most prominent figures in the debates that I will talk about in the next part, seem to merge ‘the secular’ with ‘the rational’ or ‘the scientific.’

2) The second concept, ‘secularization’, Casanova describes as “an actual or alleged empirical historical patterns of transformation and differentiation of “the religious” (ecclesiastical institutions and churches) and “the secular” (state, economy, science, art, entertainment, health and welfare, etc.) institutional spheres from early–modern to contemporary societies” (*ibid*). Secularization is a separate research field but I would like to mention one important aspect that is relevant to this essay: the ongoing debates between those who support various similar versions of the mainstream secularization thesis (Bruce (1996), Wilson (1966)) and those who do not (Taylor (2007), Martin (2017)). Charles Taylor calls various versions of secularization thesis – subtraction stories. These are the “stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process — modernity or secularity — is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside” (Taylor 2007: 22). Taylor proposes a very elaborate counter–version to the aforementioned definition in his book “The Secular Age” (2007) by explaining the complex history of secularization and how it cannot be explained by perennial features of human life which means that he also stands against the idea that what is secular is somehow fundamentally *natural* and *real*. It is worthy of noticing that the proponents of secularism usually subscribe to a more or less nuanced version of the mainstream secularization thesis.

3) Finally, ‘secularism’, my main concept, is defined by Casanova as “a whole range of modern secular worldviews and ideologies which may be consciously held and explicitly elaborated into [...] normative–ideological state projects” (*ibid*). An example of such state project could be the French *laïcité* and many other versions of secularism that can be found in constitutions of most countries in the Western hemisphere. In my opinion, we should think about secularism as something more than just a part of the liberal agenda since it has become a part of nearly all political ideologies. On the one hand, it has many

features of an independent political ideology since it is a belief system which carries very particular social, economic, cultural and other implications, on the other hand, what it generates is not a positive agenda but rather a background and a foundation on which agendas are developed. So while secularization is a historical process, caused and influenced by many factors and events, in broad strokes, secularism could be understood as a belief that the history of secularization is the history of progress and deserves to be put into law.

1. Secular *versus* religious reasoning

In order to present a well-developed account of secularism, I will turn to Habermas. He dedicated a fair amount of his writings to thoroughly analyze, elaborate and scrutinize the standard liberal secularist views that are insightfully summed up in four points by Calhoun: “1) the classification of religion as essentially a private matter, 2) an “epistemic” approach to religion shaped by the attempt to assess true and false knowledge, 3) the notion that a clear and unbiased distinction is available between the religious and the secular, and 4) the view that religion is in some sense a “survival” from an earlier era – not a field of vital growth within modernity” (Calhoun 2011: 77). In spite of certain nuances on which I will elaborate below, Habermas fits this mold and finds the foundations of political legitimation to be fully rational and secular. Since religious language is neither of these things, what arises is Habermas’ particular version of the translation requirement. The requirement itself can be summed up as the thesis that religious people should *translate* their religious reasoning into rational and secular vocabulary in the public sphere. “Secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith, even though in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally accessible, discourses” (Habermas 2010: 16). However, even though in his earlier writings Habermas keeps the requirement for the entire public sphere, in his later thought, he splits the public sphere into formal and informal and aims the requirement at the formal public sphere.

As Tsz Wan Hung notes, “The informal public sphere refers, in his system, to civil society’s spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that “distill and transmit” (Habermas 1996: 367), the reactions of affected citizens to the public” (Tsz Wan Hung 2017: 553). The informal public sphere is where the citizens communicate, form opinions, and make

decisions without any political pressure, educate each other and keep their fingers on the political pulse. The formal public sphere refers to “political institutions, parliaments, cabinets, elected assemblies, and political parties. It is an institutionalized deliberative space that represents a model of liberal democracy that aims to protect individual autonomy” (ibid). Generally speaking, the formal public sphere is where the legal decisions are being made. In an ideal Habermasian world, the formal public sphere should be influenced and shaped by the informal public sphere and public opinion. Yet, we do not live in an ideal Habermasian world but I will elaborate on this later.

When it comes to religious reasoning, in particular, the informal public sphere accepts it as long as it stays within various unions and groups of shared interests and never reaches the formal public sphere, where all the official legislative work takes place. “The “separation of church and state” calls for a filter between these two spheres — a filter through which only “translated”, i.e., secular, contributions may pass from the confused din of voices in the public sphere into the formal agendas of state institutions” (Habermas 2008a: 28). Therefore, the translation of religious ideas and commitments that drive people in the informal sphere is the burning issue when it comes to their full participation in the formal public sphere.

The way Habermas views the translation process, the split of the public sphere and religion’s role in our society, springs from his concept of postsecularism. Habermas describes postsecularism as a particular change in consciousness which he credits to three phenomena: 1) global religion-related conflicts that make people understand that religion is still relevant; 2) religious organizations’ place in the public discourse regarding important controversial topics, such as euthanasia, climate change, etc. and the fact that people who live nearby practice different religions and are forced to become acquainted with different faiths and practices; 3) the refugee migration and “the challenge of a pluralism of ways of life” (Habermas 2008a: 20). One of the most important points that Habermas makes is that while religion did become a more private matter and the Church diminished its scope to mainly pastoral duties, it did not lose its influence in the way that the supporters of the secularization thesis anticipated. Therefore, what makes a society “postsecular” is its task to “adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment” (Habermas 2008a: 19). To put it differently, Habermas categorizes societies as postsecular if they deal with a situation where “religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularist certainty that religion will

disappear worldwide in the course of the modernization is losing ground” (Habermas 2008a: 21).

According to Habermas, post-secular societies should operate in a certain way. He highlights a few important points that are sometimes left overlooked by other secularism theorists. One of them is that, according to Habermas, state neutrality should not be blind, meaning, that religious people should not be met with indifference but rather with openness and certain curiosity. He prioritizes “an inclusive civil society in which equal citizenship and cultural difference complement each other in the right way” (Habermas 2008a, 24). As the central response to this postsecular state, Habermas introduces the concept of complementary learning processes. It is important to know that what Habermas aims for is a mode of communication and cooperation that goes beyond a mere *modus vivendi* because such superficial co-habitation would not make for a sufficient foundation for conscious citizenship and citizen solidarity, both crucial for maintaining a successful democracy. “Because a democratic order cannot simply be imposed on its authors, the constitutional state confronts its citizens with the demanding expectations of an ethics of citizenship that reaches beyond mere obedience to law” (Habermas: 2008a: 27). In a post-secular society both, secular and religious people need to take “each other’s contributions to controversial public debates seriously for cognitive reasons as well, assuming that they share an understanding of the secularization of society as a complementary learning process” (Habermas 2008a: 111). It is important to highlight that every person must recognize the value of the opinion of the other, whether they be secular, or religious or anything in between. In my opinion, this is where Habermas deviates from the secularist mold that I talked about above since he expects secular citizens not to view religion as necessarily innately irrational. He states that “the expectations that the disagreement between faith and knowledge will persist deserves the title ‘reasonable’ only if religious convictions are also accorded an epistemic status as not simply ‘irrational’ from the perspective of secular knowledge. Hence, naturalistic worldviews based upon speculative elaborations of scientific findings that have implications for citizens’ ethical self-understanding by no means enjoy *prima facie* priority over competing worldviews or religious outlooks in the political public sphere” (Habermas 2008b: 112–113). Yet, in my opinion, it is very important to note that while the “scientific findings that have implications for citizens’ ethical self-understanding” may not enjoy a *prima facie* priority over religious outlooks, it is important that the approach to religion, exercised by Habermas, still

remains formed by the attempt to assess true and false knowledge. While secular citizens are supposed to not deny the possibility that some religious statements might be true, their approach to religion still remains within that true/false epistemic framework.⁽⁵⁾

Yet, even if we were to believe that such mutual-learning-oriented shift in consciousness was possible (which is hard to do, especially considering the bursts of islamophobia caused by the refugee crisis, the daily mockery of religion entertained by the mass media, etc.) it is important to note that after all, these mutual learning processes and debates only take place in the informal public sphere and the formal public sphere still remains the domain of reason. “In a constitutional state, all norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated in a language that all the citizens understand. Yet, the state’s neutrality does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere as long as the institutionalized decision-making process at the parliamentary, court, governmental and administrative levels remains clearly separated from the informal flows of political communication and opinion formation among the broader public of citizens” (Habermas: 2008a: 28). So while religious citizens are free to use religious language in the informal public sphere, the formal public sphere which produces all the laws, is where the primacy of reason remains steady.

As one continues to unfold Habermas’ reasoning, it may sound peculiar that someone who claims to be completely post-metaphysical, believes in shared universal reason so profoundly. Yet, the reason Habermas defends is not exactly Kantian. Habermas claims that this shared reason is based on “fallible results of institutionalized science and the basic principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality” (Habermas 2010: 16). Since this reason is nonetheless shared, after thorough discussions and deliberations, people are supposed to be able to come to unified conclusions and agree on the right solutions for the problems that they are trying to solve. Because even though this shared reason is in no way metaphysical, it is purely secular, which means that it is somehow fundamental and not, at least in principle, *distorted* by any religious and ideological beliefs. It is supposed to promise us something that is as close to flawless communication as possible and the translation requirement guarantees that our vocabularies are ready for such communication. “The

(5). For example, consider this elaboration Habermas makes: “Secular citizens, in their roles as citizens, may neither deny that religious worldviews are in principle capable of truth nor question the right of their devout fellow-citizens to couch their contributions to public discussion in religious language. A liberal political culture can even expect its secular citizens to take part in the efforts to translate relevant contributions from religious language into a publicly intelligible language.” (Habermas 2008b: 112–113).

democratic procedure owes its legitimizing power to two components: first, the equal political participation of all citizens, which ensures that the addressees of the laws can also understand themselves to be the authors of these laws; and, second, the epistemic dimension of a deliberation that grounds the presumption of rationally acceptable outcomes” (Habermas 2008: 121). The main presupposition here is that the right decision exists even before people start discussing the issue. Communication does not have to help us come to a conclusion, rather it has to help us discover it. And that part is confusing to anyone who is a proponent of hermeneutics and/or creativity.

Of course, Habermas’ critics find many things that are wrong with the translation requirement. First of all, we have the argument, presented by Charles Taylor⁽⁶⁾. He states that it requires people to somehow tear themselves into two parts — religious and secular or purely scientific, which is not possible because religion is something that forms the very foundations of someone’s life. He also notes, that translation requirement is a product of Enlightenment glorification and depends on a particular way of seeing the Weberian disenchantment (in its most superficial interpretation) as a mostly good development. And while Habermas criticizes the standard Enlightenment–induced secularism, he remains within that same framework based on the primacy of reason.

I think the problems with the translation requirement are reflected in an interesting example that Habermas presents in his essay “An awareness of what is missing”:

On April 9, 1991, a memorial service for Max Frisch was held in St Peter’s Church in Zurich. It began with Karin Pilliod, Frisch’s partner, reading out a brief declaration written by the deceased. It stated, among other things: “We let our nearest speak, and without an ‘amen.’ I am grateful to the ministers of St. Peter’s in Zurich... for their permission to place the coffin in the church during our memorial service. The ashes will be strewn somewhere.” Two friends spoke. No priest, no blessing. The mourners were made up of intellectuals, most of whom had little time for church and religion. [...] Clearly, Max Frisch, an agnostic who rejected any profession of Faith, had sensed the awkwardness of non–religious burial practices and, by his choice of place, publicly declared that the enlightened modern age has failed to find a suitable replacement for a religious way of coping with the final rite of passage which brings life to a close. (Habermas 2010: 15)

(6). Charles Taylor presents this argument in various essays. See (Taylor 2011).

Habermas interprets this event as melancholy over something that has been lost forever. According to him, “the philosophically enlightened self–understanding of modernity stands in a peculiar dialectical relationship to the theological self–understanding of the major world religions, which intrude into this modernity as the most awkward element from its past” (Habermas 2010: 16). This particular awkwardness only exists for those who accept the mainstream secularization thesis and, as I mentioned before, most of the proponents of secularism use it as a foundation for their reasoning. Opposing secularism as an ideology always involves rethinking the secularization thesis and acknowledging the complexity of the secularization process that is why it is hard to talk about one, without touching on the other. Yet, it is important to note, that religion being a relic from the past is a recurring thought both in standard secularism and Habermasian postsecularism.

Habermas continues seeing religion as something that is in decline and transforming (narrowing its scope) because of the inevitable secularization process, yet he also wants to savor its benefits by translating religious truths into a rational vocabulary. The problem is that it turns religion into form without content. While the Christian culture is rich and managed to shape the entire Western culture as we know it, there is more to Christianity than cultural treasures and ethics. And that is where the translation requirement starts to seem like an impossible task. How can one possibly translate resurrection? Virgin birth? Miracles? If one strips religion of its specifically religious content, all that is left are blind movements through the motions. And the foundations on which religion stands are subtler than that. For Habermas that would be a fair price to pay for living in a working democracy, but are all citizens willing to pay such price?

I urge you to keep the question of the foundations of religion in mind as we move on to the next question: the question of the foundations of the state, political decisions, and the law itself. I think that the chief author I want to discuss in this article, Paul Kahn, and his novel interpretation of Schmitt’s political theology, which develops into an original account of political process and politics itself, can take secularism debates one step further.

2. Political theology revisited

Kahn’s critique of the primacy of rationalism in politics is a part of his attempt to interpret and also modernize Schmitt’s political theology

project. Therefore, it is critical that we have Schmitt's canonical thesis at hand.

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. (Schmitt 1985: 36)

A most likely unintentional yet useful example of what Schmitt is talking about, is presented by an influential sociologist of religion, David Martin. He notes that “ideas like liberty, equality and fraternity are secular translations of biblical texts, such as our oneness (irrespective of all adventitious characteristic) in Christ, the unity of humanity ‘under God’, and the way in which every human being is a king and a priest ‘unto God’” (Martin 2017: 75). It is crucial to note that the translation that Martin is talking about is not the same translation that Habermas is suggesting. In Martin's case, and, of course, in Schmitt's thought, the process should be understood rather as a particular transformation of the concept where the original meaning always remains within the newly developed concept and affects the way it is being used. Another way to say it is that for Martin (as well as Schmitt and Kahn) theology is still present even in allegedly most secular concepts. Habermas argues exactly the opposite — according to him, translation is possible because there is a rational kernel already present in theology in so far as it is the work of humans who share the same rationality with their secular counterparts.

The theological remnants and their implications are one of the crucial facets of Kahn's theory that he builds using Schmitt's method — sociology of concepts. To set it shortly, sociology of concepts, as sociology of legal concepts, is an alternative to regular legal sociology. Note that Kahn considers sociology of concepts to be ontologically neutral. According to Kahn, “sociology of concepts remains central to the political theological enterprise even as modern political imagination has broken decisively with the metaphysics of our era. [...] [because — V.B.] the conditions of postmodern inquiry have become so diverse as to overwhelm Schmitt's substantive claims” (Kahn 2011: 91). Ergo, while Kahn may not subscribe to Schmitt's metaphysical claims, according to which there is a certain connection between the theological model of a

particular era and its political order⁽⁷⁾, he keeps the method and puts it to work.

Sociology of legal concepts is aimed against legal sociology that, being an empirical science, firstly tries to reveal the relationship between legal concepts and other social forms. For example, legal concepts may be determined by certain interests of particular groups, material resource distribution, etc. The key claim of legal sociology is that the social roles of individuals (as Christians, bureaucrats, etc.) determine our ideas. It is a one-way causal relationship and it is determined based on the rational scientific thinking causal model ‘x determines y.’ For example, if I am a farmer, I will vote for a party that promises to subsidize farmers, etc.

Neither Schmitt, nor Kahn are convinced by this model. Schmitt calls the theoretical unity that is created by this one-way causality, a caricature and Kahn, more gently — reductionism. Such sociological speculations make it very easy to exclude certain social groups from the general public discourse. All we need to do is select a particular social group and claim that it operates and thinks the way it does because of a certain interest, and then try to neutralize that group in order to achieve universal justice. For instance, we can pick Christians and their agenda to ban euthanasia, then forbid them to base their statements on euthanasia on the Bible and claim they can only continue lobbying for that agenda if they find a universally acceptable way of reasoning which undermines the very reason why they started.

The reduction lies in the fact that this way of thinking allows us to find one single cause for every outcome. Charles Taylor addressed this issue while describing the thinking of the proponents of secularization thesis, stating that “they take some feature of modernization, like, urbanization, or industrialization, or the development of class society, or the rise of science–technology, and see them as working steadily to undermine and sideline religious faith; whereas <...> the actual movement is not at all linear in many cases” (Taylor 2007: 432). Taylor, like Martin and others who oppose both mainstream secularization thesis and secularism as well, identifies this kind of one-sided causality as an issue while, as I mentioned before, many proponents of secularism take it for granted.

Sociology of concepts works differently. It “rejects the principle of causality as the form of explanation” (Kahn 2011: 92). The goal of this is to admit the freedom of an act and the freedom of thought, meaning that a person cannot be reduced to one particular role. Such thinking is exactly what makes the

(7). See Schmitt (1986).

proponents of secularism ask the citizens to strip away their religious views and pick another role — the one of a rational citizen — to act by. This is not only not satisfying but also counter-intuitive because, as Taylor notes, “we don’t just decide once and for all when we enter sociology class to leave our “values” at the door. They don’t just enter as conscious premises which we can discount. They continue to shape our thought at a much deeper level, and it is only a continuing open exchange with those of different standpoints which will help us to correct some of the distortions they engender” (Taylor 2007: 428). The same is true for our actions and beliefs in the public sphere as a whole.

Yet, if we refuse this particular reductionism and its causal explanations, what are we left with? What is left, is something that Kahn calls a world of meanings. It may sound like a mental construct or a linguistic game but what Kahn means is the actual world within which we act creatively and spontaneously every day. Even though Kahn does not consider himself a communitarian *per se*, the world of meaning is a very communitarian concept. I am born within a certain community, it shapes me and I shape it in return. “It is a world I can understand because it is already mine.” (Kahn 2011: 109) The concept of a world of meanings should encourage us to start understanding concepts as being born out of a way of life.

What this means is that we do not utter concepts and create the world around us according to them, we already find their meanings in the world around us. Kahn highlights that “practice is never just an application of a norm: it’s a way of communicating. Practices only become possible within a community that ‘knows’ what they mean. The relationship of practice and idea is better understood on the model of discourse — each side is communicating meanings. A legal decision is a practice in just this sense, it is not just a mechanical application of an abstract rule but a judgment — that is, a statement — of what the law is.” (Kahn 2011: 99) Just like we make up a language because we need to communicate, we also create a legal system because we need to co-exist in a certain community. We take part in this process, it is not something that is given, it is a continual process and it is creative. What is now a norm, was once a possibility, a decision among other decisions. When we subscribe to this worldview, we exchange a one-way causal relationship to a reciprocal relationship. In that way we can begin seeing that political practices are never really the outcome of a single course of reasoning, or, as Kahn puts it: “it is not the end of discourse, it’s a form of discourse” (Kahn 2011: 99).

This is where Kahn parts ways with liberal secular theorists completely. Secular theorists need a political decision to be the last step of a flawless communication process. For example, take Habermas' case, where in secular rational discussion individuals don't have to come up with a creative decision but rather discover that one decision was already right to begin with. It was there before we even started talking. I would suggest that in this case the main difference between Habermas and Kahn is between perfect communication and productive communication and those are very different things.

Yet, if we are to accept the dichotomy between perfect and productive communication, we are unavoidably confronted by another question: if there is no universal rationality, how can productive communication occur in this world of meanings at all? Kahn's answer is analogical thinking. Generally, it is a method of understanding certain concepts through the analogy with other concepts. Analogical thinking is the antidote to Rawls' and Habermas' idea that in order to understand each other, citizens have to use one particular secular vocabulary. That is because they follow this understanding of an abstract individual behind the Rawlsian veil of ignorance – an individual without any roots, without any story. Meanwhile Kahn's individual is always already rooted in a particular narrative. This idea closely resembles the thought of Heidegger or Gadamer.

Analogical thinking lets us show that even the concepts based on directly unavailable experiences can be understood and find their place in the public discourse. Definitely, religious experiences can hardly be proven and from an empiricist's standpoint, they are often absolutely paradoxical (religious communities embrace paradoxes since they're inscribed in the very nature of faith). However, they can be explained to irreligious people based on the experiences they have themselves. For example, if one wants to explain their faith in God, they can appeal to somebody's understanding about the existence of something bigger than themselves. That kind of understanding is available to anyone who is a part of a family or other type of community. To put it simply, and Kahn does not avoid highlighting this, the concept of something bigger than ourselves is perfectly understandable to anyone who loves somebody. It is an intuitive approach because we also constantly explain our secular experiences through analogy as well. Not everyone can recognize what it means to be married, have multiple kids or live with a terminal illness but we do empathize with such experiences and design our political actions accordingly.

3. The arena of rhetoric and sacrifice

I think it is worthy of attention that while in the secularism discourse there are plenty of debates on the nature of religion (its inner rationality and whether it can be considered rational at all, its authoritativeness, etc.), the topic of the nature of politics is often overlooked or taken for granted. While many political theorists discuss the nature of 'the political', Kahn brings us closer to politics as such. Because frankly, politics is often exactly what gets in the way of a well-built political theory since politics is never consistent and always ever-changing. In no way is this a new idea when Aristotle himself thought that political science was an impossible subject because of the lack of a stable object.

To cross the bridge between political theory and actual politics, Kahn takes up the too often overlooked topic of rhetoric. Even though he uses rhetoric speech as an antidote to rational reasoning, it does not mean that he considers rhetoric to be somehow innately irrational. What matters here is that rhetoric brings a lot more factors to the table. The speaker always has at least a theoretical chance to say something new and creative or to put things that are already known in a different order. Even the speech act itself becomes relevant. Furthermore, rhetorical speech has no need to exclude belief, emotion or personal experience. Rhetoric allows us to expand the social imaginary that we act within. If we admit that this mode of communication is what we are working with in the political domain, it allows us to be politically productive. We no longer need to strive for rational reasoning that is devoid of anything deeply personal, therefore we can concentrate on the action which in politics, often unlike in philosophy, is the goal.

Even when we turn to the fundamental meaning of the state, we also find a rhetorical element. Rhetorical speech helps us understand our citizenship. It allows us to see the state as a moving organism, not a static construct governed by blind law. After all, while in the age of monarchy, the state was embodied in the body of a monarch, now it is embodied in the body of the public sovereign and that is each and every citizen. In order to do their part, the citizen has to be aware of what citizenship implies: being a part of a bigger whole, a part of a community bound together by law that can describe itself as "We the People". Could rational thinking ever be enough to maintain a public sovereign and create such solidarity?

These questions bring us back to Habermas and the way he addresses the question of solidarity in *An Awareness of what is missing*. He expresses his

belief that religious people and religious communities had something very important to offer here. He admits that if one considers citizens' relationship to the State to be a purely rational one, solidarity becomes an issue. "This [...] strict rational morality explains why enlightened reason unavoidably loses its grip on the images preserved by religion, of the moral whole — The Kingdom of God on earth, as collectively binding ideals. At the same time practical reasons fails to fulfill its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awake, in the minds of secular objects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven." (Habermas 2010: 19) So, we can see here that Habermas is fully aware that translation strips something away from religious content, something that is necessary to bind people together.

I agree with Kahn who claims that in politics reason is subordinated to the metaphysics of will. It produces "the political rhetoric of sacrifice: the call to individual citizen to realize his or her deepest meaning in the giving over of the embodied self wholly to the maintenance of the sacred meaning of the state" (Kahn 2004: 163). Kahn talks about sacrifice a lot and for a very important reason. State's demand of sacrifice in the event of war is a true issue for liberal ideology (that is the birthmother of secularism), since there isn't anything liberal about killing or being killed. Kahn states that "the modern state has been this curious combination of well-being and sacrifice" (Kahn 2013: 205). The two concepts are often considered to be dichotomous, yet they co-exist in every state. While the law is designed to protect and nourish the citizens' lives it is also designed to require them to put those lives at risk in order to protect the integrity of the State.

Sacrifice and love that spring out of each other, are the foundations of Christian faith. That sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been bringing people together for millenniums. Suffering for others is a deeply Christian virtue. That is why when it comes to solidarity and community religious people may have a deeper and more organic understanding of it than the secular ones. While reason and law may produce obedience and order, solidarity and the will to put someone's interests before our own, produces a people. Patriotism is not rational, especially in the current political climate, where we are often patriotic not because of our country's victories but rather in spite of its losses. „Political rhetoric does not call the individual to sacrifice for the rule of a universal ideal of justice, or for satisfaction of the interest of any particular citizen or group of citizens. It is a call to be as a part of the trans-temporal unity of the state that is the popular sovereign." (Kahn 2004: 164)

So as we can see, when it comes to politics and the survival of the state, rational reasoning does not have the final word. There are many different factors to consider and their importance, even though often overlooked or taken for granted, must be brought back into the secularism discourse. Not only to bring the academy closer to “the real world” but also to broaden our understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between Church and State.

4. *Dura lex sed lex*

If we choose to subscribe to Kahn’s views and consider ourselves as agents, creatively acting in a common world of meanings and being able to explain all of our experiences to each other, we can see a whole new idea of solidarity where nobody needs to translate their beliefs in order to be understood. And as we put the primacy rhetoric and sacrifice into the picture, we can also see the inner irrationality of the state, which makes the requirement for the primacy of reason obsolete. These ideas open a gateway to new modes of understanding that may be useful in recalibrating the future relationship between Church and State and also ask the question, how cracked the wall between the two truly is?

I would like to conclude this article with a comment on something very recent and sensitive, yet relevant to the ideas that I considered above. Recently we all had a unique opportunity to witness the long–forgotten sides of politics during the COVID–19 pandemic. Some actions of the governments seemed rational, others, less so. But we were able to see a lot of rhetoric, a lot of analogical discourse (brought on by unprecedented situations) and the way the state of exception turned almost everything in the public sphere into a profoundly political matter. It was the closest the young generations (who have never seen war) ever got to grasping the true power of the state. In the face of this immense tragedy, we also got to see a dreadful face of sacrifice when governments had to choose who should be saved and whose lives should be left to chance because of the lack of resources. This pandemic will definitely affect our understanding of politics even in the academic discourse (which can already be seen in articles by Agamben, Žižek and others) yet the way it will develop is yet unknown.

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