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A POSTSECULAR RATIONALE?

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR AS EPISTEMIC PEERS

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A Postsecular Rationale?
Religious and Secular as Epistemic Peers

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Abstract. In *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State*, Robert Audi addresses disagreements among equally rational persons on political matters of coercion by analysing the features of discussions between epistemic peers, and supporting a normative principle of toleration. It is possible to question the extent to which Audi's views are consistent with the possibility of religious citizens being properly defined as epistemic peers with their non-religious counterparts, insofar as he also argues for some significant constraints on religious reasons in public debates, and he advocates secular reasons being considered as equivalent to natural reasons.
I shall also consider Jürgen Habermas's criticism of Audi's stance. One of Habermas' main points focused on Audi's strong division between religious and non-religious arguments that requires religious citizens to artificially split their reasons, while non-religiously affiliated citizens are not met with any similar requirement. Also, analysing the concept of epistemic parity, we can as well grasp some of the main features of the Habermasian idea of postsecularism. The difference between secular and postsecular views can be framed as hinging on what it means to be epistemic peers, thus bearing consequences on the understanding of the relationship between church and state—particularly regarding the nature of state neutrality and the different status of churches and organised secular groups.

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I

Introduction. Religious and Secular Reasons

What does equality require, when it comes to participation in public discourse and political deliberation? The multifaceted efforts put in place to answer this question have often lead to question the boundaries of public reasons, roughly defined as reasons that are universally accessible to every citizen and, as such, apt to provide the basis for political deliberation.[1] One of the most heated subjects has been the inequality of the burdens that are imposed upon religious or non-religious persons when they try to access a public arena whose boundaries are defined in secular or religious terms. In this regard, I think that more attention should go to the epistemological characterization that secular and religious reasons, and the relationship between them, receive. If we care about equality, the framework for rational discussion should be set up in the most unbiased way. If the rationality criteria embedded within the normative framework of public deliberation are ultimately unfair in one sense or another, that could put citizens with different kinds of belief into a condition of epistemic imparity even before the conversation actually had a chance to take place.

Among others positions in the contemporary debate, Robert Audi's e Jürgen Habermas' views are relevant to understand what is at stake here. Audi claims that equality

[1] The concept of "public reason" is mostly connected with the work of John Rawls, but it has been subject to several interpretations and discussions. For the original formulation, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (1997): 765–807.

of participation in public discourse and political deliberation should allow religious reasons to play a role of their own, but he also argues that religious citizens should articulate sufficient secular reasons to justify their public views. Habermas, on the other hand, argues that positions like the one defended by Audi are intrinsically unfair in distributing the burdens between secular and religious citizens, and thus suggests that we should pursue some kind of cooperative discursive involvement from both parts. He also maintains that the secular citizens should be expected to engage in a self-critical assessment of the boundaries of public rationality as much as their religious counterparts are.

In this paper I am going to take on Audi's view showing that he is mostly right in rejecting the accusations of exclusivism that have been raised against his quite comprehensive view, but I also claim that his account of epistemic parity between secular and religious citizens is somewhat at odds with his own normative principle of secular rationale. I will then compare and contrast Audi's view with the one maintained by Habermas, showing that they differ on their conception of epistemic parity and on their characterization of the equality of burdens required to participate in public discourse. In conclusion, I claim that both views show some significant internal tensions that leave room for further developments, even if in general I think that the Habermasian postsecular perspective articulates a more promising framework to face the inequality of burdens that the access to public discourse may require from secular and religious citizens. This is a quite relevant conclusion because these views do not only point to different ethics of citizenship but might also

impact, as I will illustrate, on the regulation of the institutional relationships between church and state.

II

Robert Audi on Epistemic Parity and Toleration

With *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State*, Robert Audi took a step forward in his personal, wide-ranging contribution to the topic of the place of religious commitment in contemporary democracies.[2] His position has grown around the development of a core ethics of citizenship, and has been progressively refined and enriched in a series of works that have drawn attention and stoked debate in the field.[3] I cannot cover his entire view here, so I will focus mainly on how his latest book addresses the issue of disagreements between equally rational persons on political matters of coercion, and analyses the features of discussions between epistemic peers to advocate for a normative principle of toleration.

[2] Robert Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Unless otherwise specified, parenthetical references refer to this text.

[3] Among others, see Robert Audi, "The Place of Religious Argument in a Free and Democratic Society," *San Diego Law Review* 30 (1993): 677–702; "Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics," In *Religion in the Public Square*, by Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); "Religion, Morality, and Law in Liberal Democratic Societies: Divine Command Ethics and the Separation of Religion and Politics," *The Modern Schoolman* 78, nos. 2–3 (2001): 199–217; *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The starting point for Audi's analysis is his principle of secular rationale:

> *The principle of secular rationale*: Citizens in a democracy have a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless they have, and are willing to offer, [an] adequate secular reason for this advocacy or support (e.g. for a vote). (pp. 65-66).

This principle provides the cornerstone of Audi's normative views on the matter and has often been taken as the core of his overall theory.[4] It is grounded in the notion that in a democratic setting, coercion always has to be justified through rational arguments, which have to be accessible to all citizens, regardless of their religious or secular views. Audi does not imply nor believe that adequate reasons must be shared by everyone, but only that they need to be understandable to all rational adults, which means that they should be "appraisable by them through using natural reason in the light of facts to which they have access on the basis of exercising their natural rational capacities" (p. 70). This characterisation of secular reasons as appraisable by "natural reason" and acquirable through the exercise of "natural capacities" is quite relevant and was incorporated into Audi's view on the basis of his latest elaborations on the correct understanding of the principle of secular rationale. He goes as far as stating that "it is important to see that the principle of secular rationale could

[4] It should be noted that the formulation of the principle stays essentially unchanged thorough all of his works. Among others, see "The Separation of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 3 (1989): 259–296; "Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion," 25; *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, 86.

with virtually equal appropriateness be called the principle of natural reason" (p. 76). What he tries to point to here is a characterisation of secular reasons as free as possible from the burden of an interpretation of the "secular" as partisan, one-sided kinds of reasons, which have to be opposed to religious ones in a scheme of cultural and historical contraposition. Thus, understanding secular reasons as natural ones is an approach meant to offer a more inclusive common field that can serve as a ground for shared, basic normative claims or, at least, to provide secular reasons with a less vague and controversial meaning in the eyes of the religious interlocutor (See p. 78). In terms of the epistemic status of reasons, Audi is quite sharp in arguing that natural reasons are all secular in the epistemic sense (See pp. 86-87). This, in turn, implies that religious reasons are not just un-secular, but also distinctively "un-natural" in epistemic terms. Audi recognises that religious reasons are not the only ones with manifest problems regarding their universal accessibility. In this regard, he nonetheless states that "although religious reasons are not the only kind that should not be the basis for coercion, they are nonetheless special," and this is because of "their major role in the sense of identity of many people" and "the high authority they have in the eyes of many of them" (p. 71).

Within this framework, then, the principle of secular rationale offers a normative ethical requirement that citizens should consider when it comes to their active participation in the processes of public debate and political representation. Ideally, if they are consistent with such a principle, the citizens should be greatly facilitated in their deliberative tasks, and as a result find a high level of cooperation on most normative issues. However, there is another way to approach the issue of pluralistic public

discourse between religious and non-religious people. We can, in fact, assume as a premise the actual occurrence of deep, persisting disagreements and question the normative limits of democratic toleration in such situations. It is for facing this kind of challenge that Audi elaborates the principles of rational disagreement and toleration. These can be considered, in a sense, as mirroring the purpose of the principle of secular rationale on the other side of the matter: they frame a normative approach to deal with persisting disagreements, whereas the latter is meant to convey the normative conditions of plausible democratic agreements.[5] The principle of rational disagreement is formulated as follows:

> *Principle of rational disagreement*: The justification of coercion in a given instance is (other things equal) inversely proportional to the strength of the evidence for epistemic parity among disputants who disagree on whether coercion in that instance is warranted (p. 118).

Rational disagreement between epistemic peers is openly construed by Audi as inclusive of relationships between people who differ in religion, between religious and non-religious people, or even between people with the same religious affiliation (See p. 117). Understanding the implications of epistemic parity thus becomes crucial to appropriately grasp the scope and applications of the principle.

As Audi puts it, "roughly, epistemic peers are (rational) persons who are, in the matter in question, equally rational, possessed of the same relevant evidence, and equally

[5] To this purpose, the principle of secular rationale is joined, in Audi's account, by the principles of secular motivation and religious rationale, which I will not cover here. See Ibid., 143–145 and 89–90, respectively.

conscientious in assessing that evidence" (p. 117).[6] The principle of rational disagreement consequently stands on grounds of reciprocity, which should equally concern all interlocutors in the same measure, insofar as they are in conditions of parity.[7] The weakness of the justifications that citizens may offer in such situations is, however, problematic, and it may be taken as a premise for different kinds of conduct. Audi himself acknowledges this issue, by claiming that situations of persisting disagreement with interlocutors that appear to be epistemic peers could lead to scepticism or quite simply to both sides taking their own unchanged view as the right one. He argues, though, that this kind of situation should rather be faced with humility, by being open to the possibility that we could be at least less justified than our peers in holding our position. In public deliberation humility pushes towards a very restrained attitude when the rationale for coercive laws and public policy doesn't look very strong if compared to the opposing one.

This kind of stance, consistent with Audi's general epistemological views that are characterized by a sharp anti-sceptical position based on a distinct moderate foundationalism,[8] leads to the normative take, which

[6] Elsewhere in his work the definition of epistemic parity essentially matches. See e.g. Robert Audi, *Epistemology: a Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 373: "Roughly, to be an epistemic peer in a given matter is to be (a) exposed to the same relevant evidence as oneself, (b) equally conscious in considering it, and (c) equally rational in the matter."
[7] See Audi, *Democratic Authority*, 118, where he writes: "The principle of rational disagreement is certainly in the spirit of 'Do unto others'."
[8] See Audi, *Epistemology*, 333–377.

defines the principle of toleration in relation to situations of persisting disagreement:

> *The principle of toleration*: If it [is] not reasonable for proponents of coercion in a given matter to consider themselves epistemically superior in that matter to supporters of the corresponding liberty, then in that matter the former have a prima facie obligation to tolerate rather than coerce (pp. 119-120).

The principle normatively articulates the "humility" option with a precise liberal tone: in situations of epistemic parity, individual freedom of conduct is always preferable over coercion (See pp. 117-118).

III

A Restless Parity

Audi's views assigned a significant role to religious reasons in public deliberation, but, at the same time, he establishes some clear limitations to religious reasons and an overall priority of secular reasons over religious ones, especially in matters of coercion. It is not obvious, though, that the kind of priority of the secular that Audi defends is fully compatible with the possibility for religious and secular citizens to be effectively epistemic peers. This issue may appear to be a primarily epistemological one, but it also carries significant political consequences, since if two citizens cannot be actually considered epistemic peers when they discuss on a matters of public interest, they will also be less than equal when it comes to their participation in public deliberation. Let us explore in more details the implications of Audi's account on this matter.

Being part of the same general normative account, Audi's principle of toleration is meant to be fully compatible with his principle of secular rationale. The latter, though, places a significant restriction on sociopolitical appeals to religious reasons, and this restriction seems particularly relevant if, as we have seen, secular reasons are intended as equivalent to natural reasons—an expression of our natural cognitive capabilities. This raises some concerns about the viability of epistemic parity as a key notion that is applicable to the relationship between religious and non-religious citizens within the boundaries of Audi's conceptual framework. One concern comes from the intrinsic difficulty of applying the very notion of epistemic parity in such a complex, deliberative scenario. Another comes from the aforementioned friction between the principle of secular rationale and the ideal of reciprocity, which grounds the principles of rational disagreement and toleration.

To better articulate the first concern, I will examine some more detailed considerations of epistemic parity elaborated elsewhere by Audi himself.[9] The basic idea here is that two interlocutors are in a situation of epistemic parity with respect to a specific claim if they are (1) equally rational and (2) equally informed on facts relevant to that claim. Most notably, Audi argues that these considerations can be extended beyond specific claims to be applied to general subject matters, as it may be in the case of the realm of practical ethics. The criteria of epistemic parity can thus be plausibly applicable to the subject of an ethics of

[9] Robert Audi, "Rational Disagreement as a Challenge to Practical Ethics," in *Epistemology: New Essays*, ed. Quentin Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 236.

citizenship, which is my concern here. Moreover, Audi also elaborates that when both (1) and (2) are satisfied, there is a situation of full epistemic parity, and when only one is satisfied, or either is only partially satisfied, there is a situation of partial epistemic parity, where the latter notion admits degrees.

This account, while consistent with the characterisation we have seen so far, offers a more nuanced and plural take on epistemic parity. First, it authorizes an extension of the concept, from being applied to specific matters to being applied to wide-ranging subjects—in this case, ethics. Second, it allows for an application in different degrees: from partial peers to full peers. At the same time, both conditions for epistemic parity appear as problematic. Rationality conditions are in general difficult to define and apply,[10] as they are related to the different forms of appropriateness that characterize the cognitive and practical responses of each individual to their experiences. On the other hand, information conditions, while apparently easy to determine with reference to certain factual knowledge, are instead extremely controversial when it comes to identifying which ones are actually the relevant facts at stake. Moreover, it should be noted that normative considerations of tolerance require every citizen to be able to recognise the parity of their interlocutors, and thus to appropriately apply the above condition to people they are in persistent disagreement with. Whether, and to what extent, this is always possible is at least dubious. Audi himself acknowledges that our access to others' total evidence is indirect, difficult and incomplete, to the point

[10] As Audi himself puts it, "rationality conditions are both multifarious and subtle". Ibid.

that it may often be difficult or, in practice, impossible, to have adequate evidence for thinking that someone else is in fact an epistemic peer.[11] While he suggests that these difficulties do not bar the possibility of being justified in one's assessment of one's status and level of epistemic parity with others, the problematic nature of the evaluations persists and underlines the relevance of self-scrutiny as a condition for reasonably maintaining a belief when we think that there is a significant probability that a disputant is effectively an epistemic peer.[12] The problem here lies not in the vagueness of the concept, but in its practicability. Audi is developing an ethics of citizenship, and as such, some level of vagueness in the concepts can be accepted. The principles, though, are still meant to provide a plausible guide for citizens' behaviours, and thus should be applicable by citizens with some degree of uncontroversial precision. Audi himself acknowledges that the non-trivial applicability of the principle may in fact be a problem, even if he puts aside the concern by stating that the level of sophistication it requires should be possessed in general by "a competent high school graduate in many educationally 'advanced' countries" (p. 119). His point is fair but debatable, particularly if contrasted with the point he makes about the multifarious and subtle nature of the rationality conditions.

The trouble with the assessment of epistemic parity is intertwined with the concern about the relationship between the principle of secular rationale and the principles of rational disagreement and toleration. It should be noted that the first principle is meant to hold a certain primacy

[11] Ibid., 237.
[12] Ibid., 238.

and be independent of the others. As Audi points out, "the principle of rational disagreement is a useful adjunct to the principle of secular rationale—the principle of natural reason—but is not essential to the appropriate employment of the latter" (p. 119). In this sense, the epistemic restrictions it imposes hold in a way that is not dependent on considerations about the epistemic parity of the interlocutors. Or, more likely, as I suggest here, the principle already places a significant statement of epistemic imparity between religious and non-religious citizens. Following the principle of secular rationale, in public debates, religious citizens are always required to decisively rely on a non-religious subset of their reasons—even though their religious reasons can supplement their secular ones—and those non-religious reasons are identified with the natural scope of reason as a faculty they share with other human beings. On the other hand, non-religious citizens are not subject to any similar requirement, thus making their whole set of reasons acceptable within public arguments. This, along with the awareness that religious reasons are often deeply relevant to the identity and outlook of religious citizens, may reasonably lead people to wonder if they can ever be assessed, within this frame, as full epistemic peers with their secular counterparts. Leaving aside the requirements of self-scrutiny, which could be questioned from a secular point of view, the segmentation of their reasons may not be compatible with a statement of equally available relevant evidence—the information condition—between secular and religious counterparts, insofar as all the evidence within the secular horizon is deemed universally accessible and naturally available in a way that is denied to any evidence that comes from religious sources. The very rationality of the two sides—the

rationality condition—may also consequently be unequal, particularly if we consider how the religious citizen is described as structurally relying on epistemic sources that exceed the scope of their natural cognitive powers.

On these grounds, it is possible to question to what extent Audi's view is consistent with the possibility of religious citizens being properly defined as epistemic peers with their non-religious counterparts, insofar as the principle of secular rationale holds. This problem is especially apparent because the principle of secular rationale is paired with the assumption that secular reasons, as we have seen, can be meant as quasi-synonymous with natural reasons, while religious reasons are not. The principles of rational disagreement and tolerance would thus put the religious at a structural disadvantage, even before any consideration is given to the specific matter at hand.[13]

This kind of tension does not undermine the principle of rational disagreement in itself, or even the principle of secular rationale. It poses a challenge, though, to the overall

[13] An interesting case is that of atheist citizens. They hold some reasons that could be considered "religious' since they are grounded in a stance on religious matters, like the existence of God, and that may be deeply rooted in their sense of identity, as it is in the case of religious people. In this perspective, the atheist could be affected by the two principles in question as much as the religious person could. Audi, interestingly enough, underlines how his characterization of secular reasons is "theologically neutral and in no way atheistic" (p. 77). On the other hand, though, his characterization of religion and of the religious, articulated in nine criteria, is distinctively pointing to forms of organized religion, with specific communities, rituals, sacred objects, prayers and so on (P. 72). In this sense, the atheist can hardly fit into the overall account of the religious as opposed to the secular offered by Audi.

consistency of Audi's outlook. The most plausible counter argument here is that, in his view, the assessment of epistemic parity is restricted to situations of disagreement on specific topics in specific circumstances. Two citizens, secular and religious, could be recognised as equally rational *in general*, while still not peers *on a specific matter*, or vice versa. This line of reasoning, though, does not seem to be entirely convincing. Are these two levels so independent? Does not this overly weaken the relationship between global and local rationality? If two people are not epistemic peers overall, is not their ability to be epistemic peers on specific matters also intrinsically weakened? If they have an "overall" different ability to appraise evidence, is not this inevitably reflected in their ability to appraise evidence in a specific case? In the account of rationality *in* and *of* a practice that Audi himself offers in *The Architecture of Reason*, it seems that, beyond the special standards of the rationality characteristic of practices, the local practices themselves presuppose "the general standards of practical rationality."[14] This suggests that if the general standards are flawed or diminished, it will inevitably be reflected at the local level. Such an account of rationality seems thus to support a view that sees general and particular epistemic parity as mutually connected.

Audi's account of the relationship between religious and non-religious citizens has been as influential as it has been subject to debate by other scholars. Some of the most recurrent critiques have been general issues of inequality in

[14] Robert Audi, *The Architecture of Reason. The Structure and Substance of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 190.

the burdens imposed upon religious and secular citizens.[15] Audi's development and refinement of his views has, over time, provided detailed answers to most of his critics, sketching a more and more articulated and inclusive perimeter for secular and religious citizens to engage in political discussion. Such a framework, though it sincerely aims to somehow include religious reasons besides secular ones, may still not allow for the level of epistemic parity that Audi himself suggests is possible between all citizens.

IV

Jürgen Habermas and the Equal Burden

I shall now consider a different and equally influential take on the relationship between religious and non-religious perspectives, with the intent of suggesting an alternative account of epistemic parity and thus performing a comparative assessment with Audi's view. I am thinking of the wide-ranging reflection that Jürgen Habermas has articulated on the category of the postsecular. Habermas is an especially interesting interlocutor here because of his criticism of Audi's stance. This criticism provides an interesting starting point for our analysis of the Habermasian position on epistemic parity.

[15] Among others, see Paul J. Weithman, "The Separation of Church and State: Some Questions for Professor Audi," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, no. 1 (1991): 66–76; Philip L. Quinn, "Political Liberalisms and their Exclusions of the Religious," *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 69, no. 2 (1995): 35–56; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in decision and discussion of political issues," in *Religion in the Public Square* by Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Habermas' concerns are framed within a general assessment of the attitude of liberal, contractualist outlooks towards the place of religion in the public square. Most notably, he writes:

> The self-understanding of the constitutional state has developed within the framework of a contractualist tradition that relies on 'natural' reason, in other words solely on public arguments to which supposedly *all* persons have *equal access*. The assumption of a common human reason forms the basis of justification for a secular state that no longer depends on religious legitimation. And this in turn makes the separation of state and church possible at the institutional level in the first place. The historical backdrop against which the liberal conception emerged were the religious wars and confessional disputes in early Modern times. The constitutional state responded first by the secularization and then by the democratization of political power. This genealogy also forms the background to John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*.[16]

This short analysis is especially interesting because it identifies two essential elements in the genealogy of modern liberalism, and particularly of Rawlsian political liberalism: the notion of "natural" reasons as basic grounds for public discussion, and the standard of universal accessibility to all citizens. It comes as no surprise, then, that in Habermas' account, Audi's view does not only represent a typical expression of that tradition, but more specifically, a direct elaboration upon Rawlsian premises. As he puts it, "Robert Audi clothes the duty of civility postulated by Rawls in a special 'principle of secular justifications.'"[17] Seen as an evolved and refined version of

[16] Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006), 4.
[17] Ibid., 7.

the Rawlsian stance, the principle of secular rationale is subject to an assessment that has also been applied, in some cases, to the notion of the duty of civility. One of Habermas' main remarks is, in fact, about the strong, artificial division between religious and non-religious reasons that the principle of secular rationale demands from religious citizens, while non-religiously affiliated citizens are not met with any similar requirement. While Habermas was making this point, the issue had not yet be treated by Audi with open reference to the status of citizens as epistemic peers. However, it seems clear that Habermas points to the same idea of epistemic reciprocity between religious and non-religious citizens that I am specifically trying to address here by looking at Audi's latest work.[18]

Habermas' main counterpoint to the principle of secular rationale is, essentially, that "many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons."[19] He tries to focus on the burden that such normative statements impose; not only on the public behaviour of citizens, but on their self-understanding as religious persons. This points to the fact that some religious individuals do not have the ability to properly make such a distinction and formulate public arguments on secular grounds that are foreign to them; thus, they are practically excluded from participating in public deliberation. But the critique implies even more than that. As Habermas puts it, that kind of approach ignores "the integral role that religion

[18] Habermas' observations are essentially just directed to the account given by Audi in 1997 in "Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics', thus only address the early core of his views and, above all, the principle of secular rationale.

[19] Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 8.

plays in the life of a person of faith, in other words to religion's 'seat' in everyday life." Any sincerely religious person "pursues her daily rounds by drawing on belief" and in this sense their "true belief is not only a doctrine, believed content, but a source of energy that the person who has a faith taps performatively and thus nurtures his or her entire life."[20]

On these premises, Habermas cannot accept a perspective that expects religious citizens to abstain from referring to religious reasons as their main public reasons. Instead, he suggests to translate religious insights into a more widely accessible language. This is an exercise that has historically been at the basis of some significant landmarks of our civilization—like the derivation of fundamental human rights from the notion of the dignity of every human being as a child of the Creator—and which should be undertaken as a cooperative learning processes that involves religious and secular citizens alike.

Such a normative perspective, though, may be viable only given certain epistemic premises. That is what Habermas tries to convey through the notion of postsecularity, which embeds certain kinds of epistemic attitude, both of religious citizens towards secular ones and of secular citizens towards religious ones, thus overcoming the imposition of asymmetrical burdens on one group or the other. The definition of those attitudes is a historical process that, at least in Western countries, religious citizens have for the most part already endured, pushed by the necessity to cope with a secular environment whose cognitive and moral features are often at odds with their religious convictions. Through many steps, secularisation

[20] Ibid.

had a deep impact on the theological self-understanding of the most influential religions present in modern societies, often producing a certain level of attunement with some of the basic moral and political values of liberal democracy. Habermas suggests that a somewhat similar process should positively impact the views inspired by the tradition of the Enlightenment. In this sense, "the insight by secular citizens that they live in a post-secular society that is *epistemically adjusted* to the continued existence of religious communities first requires a change in mentality that is no less cognitively exacting than the adaptation of religious awareness to the challenges of an ever more secularized environment."[21] This specific kind of reciprocity could offer a more equal and fruitful background for public discourse, where the secular citizens must understand their conflict with religious views as a reasonably expected disagreement at least as much as the religious citizens are required to do. This implies that, from a secular perspective, nobody should be considered irrational because of their religious convictions *as such*, thus allowing at least implicitly for a first condition of epistemic parity. Not only rationality, but also relevant information, seems to be equally available in Habermas' view, insofar as he thinks that religious doctrines should be recognised, at least potentially, as bearing cognitive resources about the meaning of personal and social life, which may be unavailable from a secular perspective. In this sense, it seems we can say that the criteria of epistemic parity so far illustrated in Audi's account could be applied within a postsecular context without, in principle, favouring one side over the other.

[21] Ibid., 15.

Moreover, it should be noted that Habermas also pairs his consideration of reasonable disagreement with a specific remark on the meaning of toleration. The process of transforming the epistemic attitudes between secular and religious citizens apparently aims for a status of symmetrical engagement that the notion of toleration seems unable to capture entirely. What is at stake goes indeed beyond a respectful attitude towards the existential significance that religion has for religious people. More radically, Habermas argues that secular citizens should engage in "a self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of Modernity."[22] This secularist self-understanding of Modernity is strongly related to a certain conception of secularization, construed as a linear and irreversible process that inevitably leads to the disappearance of religions. Within the perimeter of such understanding, Habermas argues, it is impossible for a secular citizen to take seriously any contribution that comes from the religious field or even to admit that it may carry some valuable content that can be translated in a different language.

Now, while Habermas does not specifically frame the issue in terms of epistemic parity, it is quite clear that what he is aiming for is a substantially equivalent condition of epistemic attitudes that includes mutual recognition of rationality and access to relevant information. Such a condition is to be achieved through a process of self-understanding that re-positions secular and religious stances as more closely historically and socially intertwined than previous conflictive understandings would have allowed. In this sense, "the required work of philosophical

[22] Ibid., 14–15.

reconstruction goes to show that the ethics of democratic citizenship assumes secular citizens exhibit a mentality that is no less demanding than the corresponding mentality of their religious counterparts,"[23] since they are required to undertake a similar effort of self-critical understanding. Epistemic parity consequently seems to be achieved through a process that imposes an equal burden on all interlocutors, regardless of their affiliation and commitments.

V

Audi's Response to Habermas

Habermas' criticism did not remain unanswered. Audi addressed it quite extensively in *Democratic Authority*, mainly by pointing to the fairness and inclusiveness of his principle of secular rationale, which actually does largely allow for the contribution of religious reasons, as long as they are accompanied by appropriate secular ones. He also contrasts the inclusiveness of his principle with the requirement of translation into generally accessible terms, which Habermas imposes on the public arguments of religious citizens to the advantage of their secular counterparts.

To the argument that religious citizens draw on religious resources to define their own lives and thus would have to bear a deep internal division to rely on secular arguments, Audi opposes a different consideration of reciprocity. In this regard, he states that "in the very understanding of one's own religious view and how it differs from others,

[23] Ibid., 18.

one has much of what is needed to distinguish religious reasons from other kinds and to see some of the reasons why we are obligated to have adequate secular reasons as a basis for coercive laws or public policies" (p. 88). The idea here is that the internal insight one's religious horizon can have, along with some basic moral considerations grounded in natural reason, is enough to grasp why no one should be coerced on the basis of someone else's religious reasons. This conclusion would apply both to people of other affiliations and to people without any religious affiliation, thus justifying the principle of secular rationale as a safeguard against that risk.

On the other hand, Audi briefly considers the positive stance articulated by his interlocutor, and regarding the Habermasian requirement of translation of the religious cognitive contributions into a more widely accessible language, he argues that it is actually more demanding than his principle of secular rationale. Engaging in a translation doesn't in fact just expects a religious citizen to understand both secular and religious discourse, as the principle of secular rationale does, but also to find some significant correspondence between the two (pp. 88-89).

This quite critical reply offered by Audi helps to point out one of the differences between these two views. Habermas is interested in underlining how religious worldviews may bring to public discourse some cognitive contributions that the secular resources in the tradition of the Enlightenment cannot offer. This stresses the originality of religious insights, but also needs those insights to be in some way "commensurable" with non-religious views and consequently translatable into other languages and forms. Audi takes a more epistemically modest stance

and wants to allow for a deep level of incommensurability between secular and religious reasons. In his view, the two fields may be so deeply divided that their forms and contents are not transferrable, and still within the limits of the principle of secular rationale a religious citizen could be able to bring arguments taken from both. In particular, he seems to underline how religious arguments could preserve all their untranslated religious characters, say in theological language and with quotes from the Holy Scriptures, as long as they are not the only arguments brought to the table. The price may be, as Habermas points out, the burden of a deep internal schism that not everyone may be able or willing to bear. The cooperative translation would be more respectful of integrity, in this regard, since it necessarily entails a sense of actual significance of the religious cognitive content not just for the religious citizen, but also for her secular counterpart. As Audi remarks, though, Habermas nonetheless expects the formal space of political and juridical institutions to be characterized by the primacy of secular reasoning, even if that may be the translation of some religious claims. This seems like a strong requirement, possibly even stronger than what Audi expects in the same area. I will come back to this when assessing their positions on the features of the institutional relationship between church and state.

VI

Discussing the views

It is now possible to make a first comparative assessment of the two views we have been discussing so

far. Audi is correct both in underlying the moderate and comprehensive nature of his own proposal, particularly when compared to other Rawlsian takes on public use of religious arguments, and in pointing to the non-trivial normative requirements of Habermas' views. However, there is still some unresolved conflict regarding the possibility of religious citizens being recognised as epistemic peers with non-religious citizens under the constraints of the principle of secular rationale. Given the above premises, there is room to suggest that the roots of the disagreement between Audi and Habermas actually lie in their respective framing of what the status of epistemic parity between religious and non-religious interlocutors in public discourse entails.

In Audi's approach, epistemic parity is a notion that comes into play within the principles of rational disagreement and toleration, where it supports the priority of toleration over coercion in cases of rational disagreement between epistemic peers on a specific matter. However, the epistemic parity of religious and non-religious citizens, as I have noted, seems to be problematic under the principle of secular rationale, where the set of universally acceptable and naturally accessible reasons is in fact taken to be a subset of reasons for some interlocutors and not for others, due to their religious convictions.

On the other hand, in Habermas' view, epistemic parity seems more a condition that has to be constantly brought about through a cooperative process of engagement between religious and non-religious citizens; a process that is meant to transform the shape of the epistemic horizon of both, entailing a reassessment of what has to be taken as rational or irrational, accessible or translatable, in both the

religious and secular domains. Some mutual recognition of a certain level of rationality is a premise; some measure of it has to be assumed at the beginning of the process. But this is just the first stage of a joint effort that allows for translation and then, as a consequence of translation, opens a shared field of evidence—even though the term "evidence" may be here too narrow, as Habermas points largely to symbolic and motivational resources as well. Moreover, it is by actively engaging in that cooperative effort that the citizens' conceptions of what is rational and irrational are transformed. Habermas has no literal account of the concept of epistemic parity presented by Audi, but he accounts here for both elements of it: the mutual recognition of rationality and of access to relevant evidence. They are in fact both included in the "complementary learning process" implied by his postsecular stance, a process that involves "the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities."[24]

VI

The Postsecular Stance

As we have seen so far, Audi and Habermas express two significant and alternative takes on what epistemic parity and an equal distribution of burdens do entail when it comes to public discourse between religious and secular

[24] Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State," in *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, by Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, edited by Florian Schuller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 47.

citizens. To better understand how deep this divide actually is, and to what extent the postsecular framework offers an alternative paradigm to confront this issue, we need to articulate in more details the Habermasian views on this topic.

A main focus of Habermas' work is the inquiry into the cultural understandings that draw the line between some basic correlative notions, like rational and irrational or religious and secular. In particular, he is of the view that the liberal tradition has developed a significant bias when it comes to the definition of the boundaries of the deliberative public sphere, too often designed from distinctively abstract and secular premises and then ineffectively imposed upon the lively and diverse field of public discourse.

From this line of thought stems the idea of the postsecular setting as a social and historical context that allows for a self-critical re-assessment of the epistemic boundaries of religious and secular views, and for a cooperative attempt at mutual communication of their resources, which can serve as a necessary support to the struggling political spheres of the Western democracies.[25]

[25] While Habermas clearly states that the cognitive and motivational resources of religions are indeed precious for contemporary liberal democracies too often plagued by individualism and indifference, he also constantly underlines that their inclusion is not to be intended as the result of a utilitarian argument. See Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations," 46–47: "The expression "postsecular" does more than give public recognition to religious fellowships in view of the functional contribution they make to the reproduction of motivations and attitudes that are societally desirable. The public awareness of a post-secular society also reflects a normative insight that has consequences for the political dealings on unbelieving citizens with believing citizens.

Within such a context, the distinction between secular and religious views certainly stays, but "the methodological separation between the two universes of discourse is compatible with the openness of philosophy to possible cognitive contents of religion."[26] This "appropriation" is not meant to entail any specific claim of the secular worldview's superiority, but it is rather a statement of awareness of the kind of intertwined epistemic condition that links secular and religious citizens in postsecular societies. In this regard, Habermas adds that "this posture distinguishes the postmetaphysical self-understanding of the Kantian tradition from the neopaganism that appeals—whether rightly or wrongly—to Nietzsche."[27]

This remark offers insight into a significant premise of the postsecular stance, which is the influence of the postmetaphysical perspective on both religious and secular views. In Habermas' words, the term "postmetaphysical" is used "not only in a methodological sense that concerns procedures and conceptual means, but also in a substantial sense, to describe agnostic positions that make a sharp distinction between belief and knowledge without assuming the validity of a particular religion (as does modern apologetics) or without denying the possible cognitive

In the postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the "modernization of the public consciousness" involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other's contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate."

[26] Jürgen Habermas, "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion," In *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 245.

[27] Habermas, "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge," 246.

content of these traditions (as does scientism)."[28] Within this perspective, both secular and religious "militant" views have to drop a measure of their epistemic claims, if for nothing else than to admit a certain degree of cognitive value in the inputs that come from different outlooks. In this late stage of Modernity, religious beliefs are still believable and actually believed by many. The category of postsecularity is useful precisely to address the consequences of this somewhat unexpected phenomenon.

A secular stance conscious of the postmetaphysical framework is expected to avoid the temptation of defining what is true and false in religion merely within the limits of philosophical, secular reason. At the same time, though, the conditions of religious belief have also changed and every believer has to conceive oneself as a believer among different kinds of believers, integrating this pluralism into one's own epistemic horizon. This weakens the barrier between the secular and religious fields, and sets the stage for the subsequent transformation of the self-understanding that each view holds. In a sense, it is due to the confidence in the influence of the postmetaphysical cultural climate that Habermas' stance assumes that a certain level of "commensurability" between secular and religious perspectives exists. This assumption is not unimportant, though, and sets a constraint over the validity of the postsecular stance.

In the end, as we have seen, Habermas claims that the effort of translation into a generally accessible language that is required from religious citizens does not impose an asymmetrical burden, insofar as secular citizens are expected to do their part by accepting contributions to

[28] Ibid., 245.

public debate, even if expressed in religious language, and by joining the translation effort of their religious counterparts. But is this postsecular burden really equal? Habermas seems aware that the statement is not obvious, even if he claims that a substantial level of parity is nonetheless respected. Even if the expectations which apply to the secular citizens do not "fully counterbalance the non-neutrality in the effects of the principle of tolerance," the "residual imbalance" is not a foundation strong enough to reject the justification of the principle itself. In particular, "in the light of the glaring injustice that is overcome by abolishing religious discrimination, it would be disproportionate of believers to reject the demand for tolerance because its burdens are not shared equally."[29]

Here, the principle of tolerance is meant as a liberal respect for all citizens, regardless of their worldviews and lifestyles, and is presented as more difficult for religious citizens to bear, due to the strong normativity of their moral outlooks. More significantly, though, it should be noted that within the postsecular framework, what seems to undermine epistemic parity is not the asymmetry of the burdens as much as it is the asymmetry in the nature of the expected effort. It cannot be denied that Habermas expects every citizen to contribute to the achievement of communicative equality, and to avoid the imposition of any worldview, be it secular or religious. The required translation is a one-way process, however, from a religious language to one that is more widely accessible. In this sense, the postsecular stance prescribes a cooperative process of self-understanding and reciprocal learning, but

[29] Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures," 310.

not a strictly symmetrical one.[30] If the burden is asymmetrical, how can we really talk of an equal burden? The point is relevant as an internal tension in Habermas' view, since his main critique of Audi, and of Rawlsian views in general, is precisely about the inequality of burdens and seems, consequently, to presuppose the normativity of an egalitarian stance on the matter. Certainly, both secular and religious citizens are expected to undertake some kind of effort to achieve the conditions for public discourse, but it is still largely open to debate how the Habermasian stance actually grants a more equal distribution of burdens and not just a different, somewhat cooperative, but still asymmetrical-and thus potentially unfair-one.[31]

[30] It is likely in this sense that Habermas sometimes defines the learning process as "complementary', which allows for the different nature of the effort on the two sides. See Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," 15–16: "An epistemic mindset is presupposed here that would originate from a self-critical assessment of the limits of secular reason. However, this cognitive precondition indicates that the version of an ethics of citizenship I have proposed may only be expected from all citizens equally if both, religious as well as secular citizens, already have undergone complementary learning processes."

[31] I do not want to imply that this asymmetry will always go in favour of one of the two sides. It can go either way. One could make a case about the fact that secular citizens are actually at a disadvantage because they are being asked to remain open to the potential truth of a rival worldview in a way that religious citizens are not, since they are only expected to translate their own views in a different language. In some situations it may be the case, but Habermas also clearly underlines how in the postsecular societies the religious communities have been already widely pressured by the process of secularization to question themselves and to open up to the epistemic potential of the secular worldview. They certainly remain under that expectation, even if the spotlight is now rather on the application of that kind of requirement in the secular field.

VIII

Secular or Postsecular Institutions?

Framing differently the issue of the unequal burdens required to participate in public discourse has implications that go beyond the epistemology of the public sphere or the ethics of citizenship. The equality of citizens as secular or religious persons is at stake and this puts into question how secular and religious institutions should deal with each other in the light of the multi-layered identity of their members, who are citizens of a state and, at the same time, affiliated to churches or secular groups. I argue that, in this sense, secular and postsecular accounts point to two different ways of thinking about the separation of church and state.

Around the concept of epistemic parity, we can grasp at least one of the main ideas of postsecularism, which, after Habermas' account, is receiving wide attention in both philosophical and sociological circles.[32] Postsecular accounts try to minimize the assumption of a normative priority of the secular over the religious, and advocate a process of mutual understanding, with a reciprocally acknowledged epistemic parity as the possible outcome of the process. Within this context, actual epistemic parity is more of a working hypothesis, always in the making, and particular arrangements are in some way subject to the outcome of the processes of mutual understanding. In this

[32] Among others, see Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Philip S. Gorski et al., *The Postsecular in Question* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Peter Nynäs, Mika Lassander and Terhi Utriainen, eds., *Post-secular Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

sense, the postsecular stance is concerned with the historical and pragmatic character of the concepts of rationality and evidence, basic elements in the definition of epistemic parity. In this context, epistemic parity can be seen as a status whose conditions have to be cooperatively realized and whose criteria are always socially defined and redefined rather than merely assessed.

Audi's understanding, on the other hand, is more akin to traditional political liberalism—though with a significant level of refinement and articulation. Public discourse is characterized by a conspicuous normative priority of the secular, even if formulated in very inclusive terms, from which follows an overall principle of toleration, particularly in defence of liberty against coercion to individual conduct. Within this context, parity between the secular and the religious seems problematic, but public discourse within these limits can still be significantly inclusive and tolerant of religious reasons.

Now, the contrast between secular and postsecular accounts can be framed as a contrast between alternative paradigms of epistemic parity, with some noteworthy consequences at the institutional level. While in general both kinds of views support, in some form, the principle of separation between church and state, their normative considerations about public discourse have in fact influenced the way social institutions, most notably churches and states, are expected to conceive themselves, their relationship with citizens and their own social agency in the public sphere. Interesting examples of this difference are the nature of the neutrality of the state's authority and the peculiar status of churches, when compared to organised cultural groups of non-religious character.

In Audi's view, "neutrality is best understood in the context of a governmental commitment to liberty, in part because government should not be neutral toward either threats to liberty or violations of liberties guaranteed by law" (p. 45). On the other hand, he claims that limits to the protection of liberty can be justified on the basis of moral considerations. This is a relevant trait in Audi's views, and it is rooted in his conviction that some moral duties and rights can be appropriately grounded through the natural use of our cognitive powers and can find a wide rational agreement independent of cultural and religious diversity.[33] Here, the substantial overlapping of secular and natural reasons is again of significance, since the limitation of the state's neutrality towards religion is grounded in this prioritising of some essential moral norms (mainly in the form of fundamental human rights) over others, which rely on different grounds of normativity, especially of a religious nature. A normative moral outlook of secular character thus oversees the limits and applications of the neutrality of the state towards religions.

In Habermas' view, the topic of neutrality is linked to the protection of liberties as well, but in a different fashion and with different concerns. In his own words:

> The neutrality of the state authority on questions of world views guarantees the same ethical freedom to every citizen. This is incompatible with the political universalization of a secularist world view. When secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make

[33] Most notably, Audi's moral theory is stated in *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and in *The Good in the Right: a Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

> contributions in a religious language to public debates. Indeed, a liberal political culture can expect that the secularized citizens play their part in the endeavors to translate relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole.[34]

The neutrality of the state is here construed through the distinct postsecular conceptions of equal burden and cooperative translation. The notion of an epistemic parity, which originates from self-critical processes of understanding, shapes the meaning of an institutional feature, neutrality, which is crucial in defining the relationship between liberal democracies and organised religions. Even though the normative consequences of this influence do not receive a proper articulation here, a framework for their discussion is set. On this account, though, it should be noted that Habermas' position is at least mixed. On the one hand, he characterizes the institutional space with a strong priority of the secular language, to a very similar effect than most Rawlsian views and, possibly, as Audi argues, even more strictly than the principle of secular rationale would require. Still, the postsecular stance is different insofar as it frames the priority of the secular into a self-critical and cooperative re-assessment of the secular itself and does not allow for a "naturalisation" of it, as Audi seems inclined to do by maintaining the equivalence between secular and natural reasons. It is in this sense that the conditions of a fair institutional epistemic framework are, again, more the result of a self-aware historical process of negotiation and transformation, rather the formalisation of the limits of "natural reason" conceived in a secular fashion. It is certainly questionable to what extent Habermas' stance on the priority of the secular in the institutional space is

[34] Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations," 51–52.

entirely consistent with the implications of his own postsecular outlook, or if it is still a substantive heritage of the tradition of the Enlightenment that he claims we should in some way transcend.

The solid, morally grounded view of neutrality advocated by Audi at least consistently reflects his take on epistemic parity and toleration, inasmuch as it relies on liberty as the default position and questions on what grounds it can be legitimately limited. In this case, strong moral reasons that can be reasonably shared regardless of religious convictions are found to be an appropriate basis for limiting religious liberty: the practical use of secular reason is once again the primary ground.

A similar line of consideration can be taken when it comes to the definition of the political role of churches. Audi views the traditional liberal notion of the separation of church and state as entirely consistent with the principles he formulated regarding the conduct of religious persons. In this regard, he argues that the principles he suggests for the individual citizens are also entirely applicable to the conduct of religious institutions as well as to that of clergy acting as such and not simply as citizens (See p. 95). However, the fundamentally religious nature of churches and their clergy requires a specific application of those principles to the effect that their direct involvement in political debates, when it comes to matters of coercion of individual conduct, should always be avoided, as they are structurally non-secular, and churches and clergy should be

limited to the public expression of their distinct moral views.[35]

On this topic, Habermas once again pursues the strategy of the "equal burden" and remarks that "the advance in reflexivity exacted from religious consciousness in pluralistic societies in turn provides a model for the mindset of secular groups in multicultural societies."[36] The organised secular groups are not excepted in the postsecular frame and are expected to share the transformative burden with churches and other religious organisations. Actually, it is not even clear that they hold an epistemic advantage over their counterparts. The exercise of tolerance, in fact, demands that all kinds of communities, secular and religious alike, should actively build cognitive bridges between their internal ethos and the morality of human rights that characterizes the contemporary democratic societies. In this sense, Habermas argues, secular groups "whose historical development is out of sync with the surrounding culture may find this even more difficult than religious communities that can draw on the highly developed conceptual resources of one of the major world religions."[37]

On the other hand, the burden on religious groups is not irrelevant: "The formation of religious communities harmonizes with the secular process of socialization only when […] corresponding statements of norms and values

[35] See Ibid., 95–98. This normative stance is here expressed by two specific principles: the principle of ecclesiastical political neutrality and the principle of clerical political neutrality.
[36] Jürgen Habermas, "Religious Tolerance as Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," In *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 270.
[37] Ibid.

are not only differentiated *from one another*, but when one statement follows consistently *from the other*."[38] Once again, the public role of religious elements that Audi pursues through a strategy of distinction, limitation and fair balance is pursued by Habermas as the result of a process whose features are transformation, learning and equal burden.

IX

Conclusions

All things considered, it appears that in Audi's secular perspective, the field of epistemic parity is one of natural reasons and distinctively secular justifications, and upon this ground he builds a system of normative relationships at the institutional level, most notably around the liberal principle of the separation of church and state. It should be noted that the principle of secular rationale is not meant as a factor of exclusion *per se*. Audi designs a fairly inclusive normative setting around the principle and advocates an ideal of "theoethical equilibrium," in the light of which each individual should pursue a unitary outlook through a reflective fine-tuning of convictions coming from religious and secular sources alike (See pp. 20-23). However, the religious and secular stay essentially separated, and the grounds for their regulation are not neutral. Within this limits, in any case, his normative views about the relationship between church and state are very consistent and provide a solid connection between the principles of a quite inclusive ethics of citizenship and the justification of

[38] Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures," 308.

the political separation between religious and secular power.

In Habermas' postsecular perspective the space of epistemic parity is that of communicative reason and self-critical understandings of the limits of the secular and religious in postmetaphysical terms. This "postsecular rationale" provides some justification for a different take on secular and religious institutions, whose processes of historical self-understanding are similar and mutually intertwined.[39] The features of a postsecular relationship between churches and states are in part already a product of the effects of secularisation, and in part a possibility whose actual outcome is still to be determined. It is debatable, though, to what extent the quite traditional Habermasian stance on the priority of secular reasons at the institutional level is effectively a consistent development of his own call for a self-critical reassessment of the Modern understanding of the religious and for a new kind of cooperative effort, with equal burdens, between secular and religious citizens.

Whatever shape the future relationship between religious and secular groups, communities and organisations, and states and churches takes, it seems,

[39] Habermas takes the consequences of this shifting understanding beyond the boundaries of the life of single states and churches, to the international setting. See Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures," 310: "This observation paves the way for a dialectical understanding of cultural secularization. If we conceive of the modernization of public consciousness in Europe as a learning process that affects and changes religious and secular mentalities alike by forcing the tradition of Enlightenment, as well as religious doctrines, to reflect on their respective limits, then the international tensions between major cultures and world religions also appear in a different light."

anyway, to depend significantly on what kind of parity the citizens will be willing to reciprocally acknowledge. Where persons meet as peers, they can also meet as cooperative fellow citizens: that is certainly a crucial place where social arrangements meet epistemic ones.

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