RELIGION IN PUBLIC: PASSAGES FROM HEGEL'S *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

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Abstract

This article argues that religion is a public matter. The discussion proceeds in two stages. First I give a normative account of religion, the state, and their dialectical relationship. After proposing a new account of "religious truth," I suggest that religion has both critical and utopian roles toward the state. Then the essay examines the political and economic roles of religion in civil society, where religion both incubates civil-societal organizations and disturbs civil-societal patterns. I conclude that religious truth, properly understood, is not incompatible with democratic communication. Contra Richard Rorty, religion is not a "conversation-stopper."

Introduction

"In political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community," Richard Rorty once claimed, religion is "a conversation-stopper." That is why "religion needs to be privatized."[1] In advancing this claim, Rorty reinforces a popular misconception of religion as personal and private. I would argue by contrast that religion is a public matter. Its public character becomes manifest in the relationships that contemporary religion has to the state and to civil society. The discussion proceeds in two stages. First, taking up some claims in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, I give a normative account of religion, the state, and their relationship.[2] Then I examine the role of religion in civil society, focusing

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Religion as Conversation-stopper," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 171.

[2] My account of this relationship is indebted to two papers by Andrew Buchwalter: "The Relationship of Religion and Politics under Conditions of Modernity and Globality,"

primarily on political and economic questions. By the end it should have become clear why I characterize religion as a public matter.

1. Religion and the State

Section 270 in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* advances four claims concerning the state's relation to religion.[3] First, religion provides a justificatory ground for the state by pointing to God "as the unlimited foundation and cause on which everything depends," including "the state, laws, and duties" (*PR* 292). Second, any attempt to make religion "the essentially valid and determining factor" in relation to the state destabilizes the state and "leads to religious *fanaticism*" (*PR* 293). Third, as institutionalized worship that "consists in *actions* and in *doctrine*," religion needs and deserves state "assistance and protection" (*PR* 295). Fourth, religion and the state are properly distinct and independent, such that the state must guard the right of citizens to have their own "insight and conviction" when religious communities assert "unlimited and unconditional *authority*" in society (*PR* 301). I want to suggest that each of Hegel's claims is roughly right, but for the wrong reasons. The wrongness of his reasons stems from how he characterizes both religion and the state.

1.1 Religion

In the passage quoted, Hegel portrays religion as both inward and outward, both personal and public. On the one hand, the content of religion is "absolute truth." Religion has this content in the subjective mode of faith, feeling, and representational cognition (*vorstellende Erkenntnis*) "whose concern is with God as the unlimited foundation and cause on which everything depends" (*PR* 292). On the other hand, as institutionalized worship, religion has a public side. A religious community carries out actions of worship on the basis of appropriate "*possessions and property*" and via "*individuals* dedicated to the *service* of the community" (*PR* 295). The religious community's actions and property place it under the jurisdiction of the state and its laws. Religious teaching or doctrine (*Lehre*), by contrast, is primarily a matter of conscience and, as such, lies outside the state's purview. Insofar as religious teaching pertains to "ethical principles" and "the laws

[3] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); pagination cited internally as *PR*.

of the state," however, the state must uphold its own "self-conscious, objective rationality" against religiously motivated refusals of the state's authority or attacks upon it (*PR* 295-302).

Despite emphasizing the double-sidedness of religion, Hegel characterizes religion as a *subjective* rationality, in contrast to the *objective* rationality of the state. In separating the state from religion, for example, the addition to §270 emphasizes the inwardness [*die Innerlichkeit*] of religion: "emotion, feeling [*Empfindung*], and representational thought are the ground on which [the content of religion] rests. On this ground, everything has the form of subjectivity…" (*PR* 303). It is this characterization of religion that I wish to modify. Although it is so that modern religions involve faith, feeling, and representational thought, this is not all that they involve, nor are faith, feeling, and representational thought primarily subjective. Nor are the actions and teachings of a religious community best regarded as the "expression" of an inner realm of faith, feeling, and representational thought. I would argue instead that religion is primarily a distinctive array of practices and organizations, that the practices of religion are always already institutionalized, and that they are thoroughly intersubjective. That is why it is a mistake to regard religion as personal and private.

Here it helps to distinguish two concepts of religion that we often confuse. The first concept is that of religion as *spirituality*. Religion as spirituality is the all-encompassing orientation or direction of people's lives and of their culture and society. It has to do with what we find most important, what matters most. Certainly the orientation or direction of our lives will show up in institutionalized religious practices. But it does not require such practices in order to show up, and it can and does show up in many other organizations and practices—political, economic, artistic, academic, and the like. The so-called secularization of Western society may well have shaken the ability of religious organizations to shape people's spirituality. That does not mean, however, that spirituality has weakened or disappeared. Instead, either other institutions have stepped into the breach (the nation state, for example, in connection with nationalism, or the market economy, in connection with consumerism as a way of life) or individuals have sought non-institutional and anti-institutional pathways for their spiritual quests (nature mysticism, for example, or an ethic of personal authenticity).

The second concept of religion is that of *institutionalized worship and faith*. We employ this concept when we speak of religious traditions and world religions. Religion in this second sense involves a distinctive array of practices and organizations that have their own legitimacy and worth in relationship to other institutions—not only the state but also institutions of kinship, economy, education, and the like. Whereas religion as spiritual orientation *shows up* in many different institutions and practices, including organized religion, religion as institutionalized worship *intersects* other institutions and practices but maintains its own legitimacy and worth. From here on I use the term "religion" to refer to this

second concept, to religion as institutionalized worship and faith, and reserve the term "spirituality" for the first concept, for religion as all-encompassing orientation or direction.[4]

Like Hegel, I believe the content of religion lies in religious truth. Unlike Hegel, I do not regard religious truth as absolute. Nor, however, do I consider religious truth to be mainly subjective, even though, like Hegel, I also do not regard it as primarily propositional. I understand religious truth to be a process of worshipful disclosure in dynamic correlation with human fidelity to the societal principle of faith as hopeful trust. In the practices of religion, people disclose the meaning of their lives and of the institutions, communities, cultures, and societies they inhabit. The meaning to be disclosed pertains to what ultimately sustains them in the face of both good and evil, whether personal and interpersonal or cultural and societal or historical and transhistorical. In disclosing such meaning, people place their hope and trust—their faith—in a source of ultimate sustenance. That source can have various names, and it can show up in diverse ways. Many people name the source of their ultimate sustenance "God."

Religious communities often find and have found "God" speaking to them in the stories of their faith, both oral and written. Religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for which certain "sacred writings" provide an authoritative touchstone, can be called scriptural religions. In a scriptural religion, the activities and symbols of worship typically orient themselves to the stories of faith told in that religion's "sacred writings" or "scriptures." For adherents of such religions, to interpret scriptures, whether informally or formally, is to retell inscripturated stories of faith in a contemporary context.

Every religion, whether scriptural or not, also develops and passes on certain rituals. Rituals are ways in which a religious community finds "God" showing up. Rituals are how a religious community appropriates the hopeful and trustful disclosure of ultimate meaning that occurs in the activities and experiences of its members. Within a religious context, to participate in the rituals of worship is to reenact faith-ful disclosure, to remember and celebrate the source of ultimate sustenance, to participate in "God's" appearance.

To this point I have avoided the term "revelation." If "God" speaks in the stories of faith and in their retelling, however, and shows up in the rituals of worship and their reenactment, then such stories and rituals are media of "God's"

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[4] This distinction derives in part from the work of D. H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), who differentiate between "religion" (what I call "spirituality") and "faith" (what I call "religion"). For a summary and evaluation of Dooyeweerd's conception, see James H. Olthuis, "Dooyeweerd on Religion and Faith," in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd: Reflections on Critical Philosophy in the Christian Tradition*, ed. C. T. McIntire (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 21-40.

being revealed.[5] They are not the only ways in which "God" is revealed: people can find "God" showing up or speaking in any of their practices, regardless of whether these occur within a "faithing" frame. Unlike other media of "divine" revelation, however, the stories of faith and rituals of worship are singularly oriented toward worshipful disclosure in hopeful trust, and they acquire their full meaning within a religious community. They acquire full meaning there because people must *expect* "God" to speak or show up in such stories and rituals and must retell and reenact them in order to *find* "God" speaking or showing up in them. That in turn requires the encouragement and support of others who also take this approach—something that usually occurs within a community of faithful and worshipful participants. A religious community finds the meaning of its stories and rituals to be significant when these address the community's need for worshipful disclosure of the source of ultimate sustenance in which the community places its faith. Teachings are attempts to summarize the meaning that a religious community has found significant over the generations and continues to find significant. Doctrines are attempts to render explicit the significant meaning of a community's stories of faith and rituals of worship. The propositional truth of teachings and doctrines is indexed to such significant meaning. That is why, like Hegel, I do not consider religious truth to be primarily propositional, even though I also do not regard it as mainly subjective.

1.2 State

We have seen that Hegel develops a dialectical account of the state's relation to religion. On the one hand, religion points to God as the state's ultimate justificatory foundation and merits state assistance and protection. On the other hand, the state must ward off any attempt to put religion in control of the state and must protect citizens from religious imperialism. In developing this account, Hegel appeals to his own conception of the state as the most comprehensive source of societal integration under the conditions of modernity. As he puts it at the end of

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[5] I do not have space to take up Hegel's account of "revealed religion" (*die offenbare Religion*) in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Suffice it to say that I do not think "spirit" must rise from the level of representational thinking to pure thought in order to come fully into its own. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§672-808, pp. 410-93. Habermas observes that Hegel's "sublation of the world of religious representation in the philosophical concept enabled the saving of its essential contents only by casting off the substance of its piety. Certainly, the atheistic core, enveloped in esoteric insight, was reserved for the philosophers." Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 227.

Philosophy of Right, the present "has cast off its barbarism and unjust [*unrechtliche*] arbitrariness, and truth has cast off its otherworldliness and contingent force, so that the true reconciliation, which reveals the *state* as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective" (*PR* 380).

Without discussing Hegel's conception of the state in detail, which would require a separate treatment, let me simply assert once again that I think Hegel is more or less right, but for the wrong reasons. The reason why the state—or, more precisely, the constitutional democratic state—needs to sustain a dialectical relation with religion is not because the state is the most comprehensive source of societal integration but because of the specific type of societal integration the modern democratic state provides, namely, political and legal integration. This becomes clear if we consider the primary normative task of the state. The state's primary normative task is, through legislation, administration, and judicial decisions, to achieve and maintain public justice for all the individuals, communities, and institutions within its jurisdiction. When the state lives up to its normative task, it is the most important institutional framework within which matters of public justice can be addressed.

Matters of public justice occur in three domains. One is the plurality of distinctive institutions—religious, ethical, economic, educational, and the like— that need societal space to pursue their own legitimate tasks and that have a claim to state protection from illegitimate incursions by other institutions. I shall call this the domain of institutional pluralism. The second domain of public justice is that of cultural pluralism. Many different cultural communities have claims to public recognition from other communities. Such claims need to be adjudicated within the context of statewide legislation. The third domain of public justice pertains to the diverse needs and concerns of all the individuals who live within a state's jurisdiction. The state must protect persons from gross injustices at the hands of others, and they can expect a rightful share in the benefits afforded by government policies and programs.

It is not easy to reconcile this normative conception of the constitutional democratic state with the fact that national governments today take the shape of an administrative system—a system of governance in which the primary political power resides not in the legislature or judiciary but in a complex and self-regulating bureaucracy largely impervious to influence from citizens.[6] The administrative system makes it more difficult to see how the state can be an institutional framework for public justice and not simply a hegemonic center of political power. Yet the power of the administrative state is not unlimited, nor is the task of achieving and maintaining public justice unconstrained. Rather, the state's power is always subject to the requirement of public justification. State

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[6] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 505.

power needs to prove justifiable before the court of public opinion if it is to be sustained. Moreover, matters of public justice come into the state's purview only insofar as enforceable laws and policies, themselves subject to the requirement of public justification, can address such matters. Like Habermas, I believe that democratic communication is the source of public justification.[7] Even as an administrative system, then, the state's task is to pursue enforceable public justice on the basis of publicly justifiable force. That is how the state provides political and legal integration in a pluralist society. Contra Hegel, however, *political* integration is not a *comprehensive* integration of society.

1.3 Dialectic of State and Religion

Now we are in a position to reconsider the dialectical relation between state and religion. Religion and the state each provide what the other lacks and, in making such provision, each inflects the scope of the other's mandate. As institutionalized faith and worship, religion calls the state to account. Indeed, it calls all other institutions to account. At its best, religion holds open possibilities for human flourishing and either relativizes or calls into question the specific ways in which people, in their cultural practices and social institutions, try to follow discrete societal principles such as solidarity and justice. It does so by calling adherents to hopeful trust in a source of ultimate sustenance that cannot be limited to any current practices and institutions whether in isolation or in combination. The allegedly "transcendent" character of religions does not lie in their pointing toward a completely other world, toward a so-called "spiritual" realm, but rather in their holding open possibilities for a greater degree of interconnected flourishing in the contemporary world. So too, the supposedly "absolute" character of religions does not lie in their offering a source of dogmatic certainty, but rather in their placing in question contemporary attempts or failures to pursue solidarity and justice.

   Hence religion can perform both a critical and a utopian role with respect to the state. On the one hand, religious communities can challenge the operations of state power and can ask whether the state is in fact achieving public justice for the diverse institutions, communities, and individuals within the state's jurisdiction. One sees this potential, for example, in the history of Judaism, when prophets like

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[7] Habermas proposes that "we view law as the medium through which communicative power is translated into administrative power. For the transformation of communicative power into administrative [power] has the character of an *empowerment* within the framework of statutory authorization. We can then interpret the idea of the constitutional state in general as the requirement that the administrative system, which is steered through the power code, be tied to the lawmaking communicative power and kept free of illegitimate interventions of social power (i.e., of the factual strength of privileged interests to assert themselves)." Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 150.

Isaiah, speaking on behalf of their people and religion, criticized their rulers for failing to defend the widows and orphans. Decoupled from the state through modern differentiation, contemporary religions can achieve a new degree of freedom: not the subjective freedom of Hegelian inwardness, but a critical freedom to envision what justice requires, to resist state-sponsored injustice, and to lend a voice to the marginalized and oppressed in society. Religions can do this in the very practices of faith and worship that make up their distinctive texture.

On the other hand, religious communities can also hold open the prospect of a society in which the state, along with other institutions, truly sustains the interconnected flourishing of all human beings and the earth they inhabit. Images of such a society occur in every world religion: the messianic condition in Jewish prophetic literature, for example, and the new earth in the apocalypse of St. John—images that recall the promises of reconciliation (Genesis) and liberation (Exodus) in the earliest books of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. By itself, the state is powerless to pursue such a social vision. When the state tries to pursue it on its own, the state exceeds its normative task, with disastrous results. Yet the state needs religious reminders that there is more to societal wellbeing than the state can provide, and that what the state does provide is never enough. In other words, religion can offer an eschatological horizon that relativizes the state's accomplishments and mandate.

The state, in turn, needs to call religion to account, protecting it from illegitimate incursions from other institutions, to be sure, but also counteracting religion's own worst tendencies with respect to public justice. Hegel is surely right to say that the state should not allow religious communities to dominate the political and legal framework of public justice and should protect citizens from religious coercion. In adjudicating conflicting demands from religious and nonreligious institutions, and in weighing the claims of diverse cultural communities, some of which have religious roots, the state must adhere to a nonreligious and publicly accessible conception of public justice. Otherwise injustice toward nonreligious institutions and communities will inhere in the integrating framework of public justice. This is not to deny that the state must secure political and legal space for religious organizations and practices, a space that allows faith and worship to have their own legitimacy and worth and not to succumb to the dictates of the state, the marketplace, or any other institution. In securing this space, however, the state also needs to resist the tendencies of religious communities to collapse social critique into ideological assertion and to turn eschatological vision into political imposition. No contemporary religious community has the right, in a public setting, to proclaim its own critique of other institutions and practices to be the only right way. Nor does any contemporary religious community have the duty to achieve its social vision by political force. A state that resists such tendencies can help remind religious communities that reinterpretation and reenactment lie at the heart of their own religious practices.

In the dialectical relation between state and religion, then, religion provides a critique of state power with a view to what justice requires, and it relativizes the state's accomplishments and mandate. The state, in turn, secures the political and legal space in which religious critique and relativization occur, while protecting itself and other institutions from religious incursions that would also undermine the legitimacy of religious practices. It is in protecting itself and other nonreligious institutions, paradoxically, that the state lends assistance to religion. Seen through the lens of this dialectical relation, religion necessarily has a public character.

2. Religion and Civil Society

The public character of religion goes beyond its relation to the state, however. For religion also sustains a dialectical relation with civil society. To uncover this relation, let me first describe my conception of civil society. Then I shall explore the role of religion at two points of intersection among civil society, economy, and the state.

2.1 Civil Society

I regard civil society as one of three macrostructures in contemporary Western societies.[8] The other two macrostructures are the for-profit (or proprietary) economy and the administrative state. Whereas the economy and the state are highly integrated systems that operate according to their own logics, civil society is a more diffuse array of organizations and social movements. It is the space of social interaction and interpersonal communication where cultural and economic alternatives can thrive and where informal political publics can take root.

The intersections between civil society and the proprietary economy, on the one hand, and between civil society and the administrative state, on the other, have special significance for the role of religion in civil society. I call the first of these intersections "the civic sector." "Civic sector" refers to the economic zone of cooperative, nonprofit, and mutual benefit organizations within national and international economies. The civic sector is the primary way in which civil society achieves economic differentiation and economic integration toward the proprietary economy and the administrative state. The civic sector is the region in society that is most conducive to what some have labeled a "social economy"—an economy in

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[8] This most important sources for this all-too-brief account of civil society are Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992) and Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms*, especially Chapter 8, "Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere," 329-87.

which considerations of solidarity take precedence over efficiency, productivity, and maximal consumption.

I call the second intersection—that between civil society and the state—"the public sphere." The public sphere is a continually shifting network of practices and media of communication by which social groups and individuals seek wider recognition, social movements and classes struggle for liberation, and cultural products and events achieve general circulation. The public sphere supports wide-ranging discussions about justice and the common good, and it sustains widespread participation in the shaping of societal structures.

Philosophically, religion as institutionalized faith and worship has had an uncertain status with respect to civil society. Neither Hegel nor Habermas, for example, gives sustained attention to religion when they lay out their conceptions of civil society. Yet both of them clearly think religion has a role to play in the formation and continuation of civil society. How should that role be understood?

I propose that we regard religion as both an incubator of civil-societal organizations and a disturber of civil-societal patterns. Religious communities, in their disclosure of ultimate meaning, can help give birth to artistic, educational, and other organizations and movements that contribute to cultural, economic, and political change. One sees this, for example, in the history of North American schools and universities, in struggles to expand the electoral franchise, and in the Civil Rights Movement. Religious communities, in their refusal to find ultimate meaning in any existing practices and institutions, can also disturb the current array of organizations in civil society or challenge the direction in which civil society is heading. This disruptive role becomes most readily apparent when religious communities take a fundamentalist turn, as is evident from contemporary efforts in the United States to restrict the teaching of evolutionary biology in public schools and to resist environmentalism. Historically, however, religious communities have also opened spaces in civil society for scientific inquiry and have helped redirect civil society toward environmental concerns.

Unlike other critics of fundamentalism, I do not think that all religious disturbance of civil society is problematic. Moreover, insofar as fundamentalism's disruptive tendency is problematic, I would trace the source of the problem back to normative deficiencies in fundamentalists' understanding and practice of religion. Rather than pursue worshipful disclosure in hopeful trust, fundamentalism tends to substitute its own scriptures and rituals for the source of ultimate sustenance. While purporting to worship "God," fundamentalism fetishizes its own religious practices: its interpretation of sacred writings becomes sacrosanct, and its enactment of religious rituals becomes an ultimate authority. Consequently, anyone who worships differently or not at all becomes an object of suspicion and an occasion for despair. Such subversion of hopeful trust often translates into efforts either to reject or to dominate civil society.

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The critique of fundamentalism has particular relevance for the civic sector and the public sphere, where religion's dual role as incubator and disturber acquires its greatest societal significance. Let me next discuss religion and the civic sector and then consider religion and the public sphere.

2.2 Religion and the Civic Sector

Hegel correctly observes that religious communities have an economic dimension. They have "possessions and property," he says, and this fact places them within "the province of the state" (*PR* 295-6). But Hegel does not ask about the peculiar character of religious ownership, nor does he reflect on how religious ownership relates to larger economic patterns. Hegel does not note that the economic organization of religious communities exemplifies an economy that cannot be reduced either to a proprietary market economy or to a governmental political economy. In a religious economy, resources are supposed to be held in trust for the community as a whole and cannot legitimately be deployed to the advantage of only select members of the community. Moreover, every member of the community is expected, where able, to contribute resources, whether time, money, or specific possessions, to the ongoing life of the religious community.

A pattern of communalizing resources is necessary for the type of institution that religion is. Because institutionalized faith and worship require mutual encouragement and support among members of a religious community, the appropriate economy cannot operate either on the principle of private profit or on the principle of impartial allocation. The guiding economic principle must be one of mutual service on behalf of the community and all of its members—what some religionists call "stewardship."

This guiding principle for a religious economy places religious communities in both proximity and tension with the economy of civil society. Elsewhere I have identified three normative expectations as predominant in the civic sector: sociality, open communication, and resource sharing.[9] "Sociality" is the expectation that civic sector organizations should provide socially significant goods of collective benefit. "Open communication" refers to the expectation that participants in such organizations will have a say in the decisions, policies, and strategies that affect them. "Resource sharing" identifies an imperative to gather and tend sociocultural goods on behalf of others and without assurance of private gain. Together these three expectations point toward a mode of economic organization in which solidarity has priority—i.e., toward a social economy.

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[9] For a detailed account, see the chapter titled "Civic Sector" in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Art in Public: Politics, Economics, and a Democratic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

The priority of solidarity as a societal principle in the economy of civic sector organizations helps explain both the proximity and the tension in which religious communities stand toward the civic sector. Economically, both religious communities and civic sector organizations give normative priority to a "common good" rather than to either "private" or "public" goods. Yet this similarity harbors an important difference. Whereas the common good emphasized by religious communities is first of all the good of their own communities of faith and worship, the common good emphasized by civic sector organizations is more diffuse, a good that in principle would be tended and provided for all who need it, regardless of their community memberships.[10] From the perspective of civil society, religious organizations can appear unduly parochial. From the perspective of religion, civic sector organizations can appear unduly open-ended.

Nevertheless, interactions between religious and civic sector organizations can open up religion. If the addressee of religious faith and worship is indeed a source of ultimate sustenance, then religious communities cannot properly be concerned about only their own wellbeing. What ultimately sustains members of a religious community in the face of both good and evil would not be ultimate if it sustained only them. Furthermore, the people who make up a religious community are not simply members of a religious community. They are citizens, family members, workers, consumers, and so forth. Under contemporary conditions of institutional and cultural pluralism, they share tasks and challenges with others who do not belong to their religious community. If the point of their religious practices is to disclose the meaning of their lives, that will include the meaning of nonreligious relationships. Religious practices are unavoidably about more than religion. To be parochial with respect to the religious community's resources would violate the ultimacy of its source of sustenance and would subvert the import of the community's religious practices.

Accordingly, participation in the civic sector can help remind religious adherents of religion's inherent inclusiveness and generosity. Civic sector organizations can also challenge religious adherents to relativize their own religious community, to regard religious truth as not their exclusive possession and the community's resources as not exclusively theirs, to recognize that the good is more common than a devout religionist might expect, and that the goods a religious community holds in common are also for the common good.

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[10] This difference gives rise to some of the concerns that surround government funding for "faith-based initiatives." Such funding involves a tricky balancing between the community-oriented concerns of religious organizations and the civil-society orientation of civic sector organizations.

2.3 Religion and the Public Sphere

Just as Hegel acknowledges but attenuates the economic dimension of religious communities, so he recognizes but resists their political dimension. Although he constructs a dialectical relation between religion and state, he has little to say about the role of religion in the practices and media of communication where political interests and advocacy take shape. Yet it is precisely here, in the political public sphere or, better, in the political dimension of the public sphere, that many contemporary concerns about religion and the state arise.

Lying at the intersection between civil society and the state, the public sphere is both a societal structure and a normative principle. As a structure, it encompasses formal publics (e.g., parliaments) and informal publics (e.g., advocacy groups) and allows two-way traffic to flow between the state and civil society. As a normative principle, the public sphere embodies the promise, built into the operating assumptions of various organizations, that communication and decision-making about matters of general concern such as health care and the environment will be genuinely democratic. This principle of democratic communication implies that groups should demonstrate universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity when they call attention to matters of general concern and should be prepared to justify their procedures in that regard.[11]

On the face of it, this principle of democratic communication seems incompatible with the process of religious truth. Do not religious practices unavoidably lift matters of general concern out of the public arena and into a place where democratic communication is either impossible or inappropriate? Conversely, if religious communities try to bring the worshipfully disclosed meaning of their lives to bear on matters of general concern, will they not automatically violate the principle of democratic communication?

The apparent incompatibility between democratic communication and religious truth has two conceptual sources. One is an overly constricted notion of truth. Many religionists, like their contemporary critics, restrict the character of truth to propositional truth. They thereby tend to reduce the content of institutionalized faith and worship to whatever can be stated in propositional form—to teachings, creeds, and doctrines, for example. Although such formulations do have a legitimate role to play in religious communities, it is a mistake, in my view, to reduce faithful and worshipful disclosure of ultimate meaning to statements about it.

The other source of apparent incompatibility is inattention to the democratic presuppositions of religious life. Inattention arises from how religionists and their critics understand and practice the justification of religious beliefs. We tend to

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[11] See "Models of Public Space" in Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 89-120.

view such justification as primarily or exclusively a discursive procedure, as a matter of arguing for the validity of linguistic claims. Combined with the restriction of truth to propositional statements, this tendency undermines the disclosive character of religious truth and removes the justification of religious beliefs from the practical contexts where such a discursive procedure has significant meaning.

It would be better, it seems to me, to regard the justification of religious beliefs as just one element within a more comprehensive process that I call the "authentication of truth." By "authentication" I mean the ways in which people bear witness to truth.[12] Authentication of religious truth is the process whereby religious communities attest in practice to a dynamic correlation between the worshipful disclosure of what ultimately sustains them and their hopeful trust in this source of ultimate sustenance. Religious communities can attest to such religious truth in retelling the stories of their faith and in reenacting the rituals of their worship. They can also bear witness economically in their organization and deployment of communal resources. And they can testify to religious truth in how they discursively justify their religious beliefs. If such justification becomes isolated from other modes of authentication, however, or if discursive justification becomes the full extent of a religious community's authentication, that will impede a community's ability to live out the content of its religion.

Moreover, the authentication of truth, whether religious or otherwise, is invitational and public. It openly invites others to recognize what truth requires, and it welcomes a response from those invited, a response of uncoerced acceptance or rejection or inattention. Hence the principle of democratic communication is intrinsic to genuine authentication. More specifically, the principle of democratic communication is intrinsic to the authentication of religious truth. Democratic communication is thereby also intrinsic to the discursive justification of religious beliefs that makes up one element within religious authentication. The apparent incompatibility between religious truth and democratic communication is just that: it is merely apparent, even though failures in democratic communication are all too common in the actual conduct of religious communities.

No doubt many will object to how I have characterized religious truth and religious authentication. On one side will be those who object to my relativizing propositional truth to just one dimension of religious truth and to my treating discursive justification as just one element in the authentication of religious truth. Surely, they will say, these characterizations either render religion irrational or exempt religionists from the standards of public accountability. Do not my characterizations of truth and authentication permit or even encourage the sort of dogmatism that makes religion what Richard Rorty calls a "conversation-stopper"?

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[12] For a more substantial account of authentication, see Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101-6.

On the other side will be those who consider the truth of their religion to be the only truth. They hold that this truth is indeed propositional, that it can be discursively justified within their own religious community, and that it does not need to be discursively justified outside that community. For these "true believers," my characterization of religious truth will be much too open ended, and my characterization of religious authentication will be excessively democratic.

Now I think one can answer these two sets of objections. Answering them, however, would require an account of how propositional truth relates to more comprehensive truth and how justification relates to more comprehensive authentication, and giving such an account here would take us too far afield.[13] Of greatest interest in the present context is how both sides give priority to propositional truth and discursive justification. They simply disagree about the compatibility of religion with propositional truth and about the discursive justifiability of religious beliefs. Furthermore, this disagreement truncates their debate about the role of religion in the public sphere. For both sides, the debate comes down to whether and how religious beliefs and their discursive justification can enter public debates about government programs, policies, and legislation.

I have suggested, by contrast, that religion is first and foremost a matter of retelling stories of faith and reenacting rituals of worship. If these stories and rituals have a bearing on matters of general concern—as they surely do and must— then contemporary religious communities need to communicate the meaning of their stories and rituals in ways that show respect for others and remain open to being accepted, rejected, or ignored. There will be no knockdown arguments for religious beliefs in the public sphere, for the point of such arguments will not be to knock down the opposition. But there will also be no refusal to give arguments, because arguments are intrinsic to respectful and open communication in the public sphere.

Yet the most important "arguments" to be given by religion in public will not be merely discursive justifications. They will be demonstrations in practice that a religious source of ultimate sustenance truly deserves hopeful trust. The prophet Micah summarized as follows what the religion of his community comes to: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6.8, NRSV). If contemporary religions were to follow this injunction in their dealings with others, they would not be conversation-stoppers. They would be worthy conversation partners in the public sphere.

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[13] In addition to the account of authentication in *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, see the account of propositional truth in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77-100, and the discussion of both truth and authentication in Lambert Zuidervaart, "Unfinished Business: Toward a Reformational Conception of Truth," *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009): 1-20. I plan to work out the details in a book manuscript on the general idea of truth.

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