BOOK REVIEWS

Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Cornel West.
The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere. Eduardo Mendieta,
Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.) Afterword by Craig Calhoun. SSRC
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This book was written following a public event held in New York in 2009 at
which four preeminent philosophers presented their perspectives on the legiti-
mate role of religion in the democratic public sphere. In the printed volume
their contributions are followed by mutual discussions.

In contrast to the title of the book which refers to the *power* of religion in
the public sphere, its content mostly discusses the *legitimate inclusion* of reli-
gion in public affairs, not particularly forms of religious authority or historical
changes in the scope of religious *power* in the public sphere.

Its authors argue for increasing inclusion of particular forms of religion
into the public sphere. Scholars and readers having a practical or theoretical
interest in reasons for the legitimate *exclusion* of forms of religion from the
public sphere will find detailed discussion of this subject mostly in the contri-
bution by Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas devotes a substantial part of his argument to outlining historical
patterns of the religious and democratic legitimization of political affairs. In
pre-democratic politics, religion was indispensable for securing compliance
to the law by providing sacred origins for the laws (17) and for legitimizing
political power by reference to transcendent religious authority. In democra-
cies, the previous pattern of the metasocial religious legitimization of political
power has been replaced by the democratic deliberation of self-empowered
citizens (21). 'The political' has been emancipated from its reliance on reli-
gious legitimization and collectively binding decisions should be "freed from
all religious influences" (24). In order for religious citizens to be included
in the processes of deliberative politics on an *equal* basis with non-religious
citizens (24), they have to meet two conditions: they should not come from
fundamentalist religious communities and they should translate "the potential
truth contents of religious utterances … into a generally accessible language
before they can find their way onto the agendas of parliaments, courts, or
administrative bodies…" (25).

According to Habermas, the resulting state of affairs does not discrimi-
nate against religious citizens (26–27). Irrespective of the (religious or non-
religious) substance, the citizens' 'mindsets' are not relevant for legitimizing

the power of democratic discourses. The latter is based on *public* contributions to the formation of opinions and consensus building (33), while the 'mindsets' are private.

Charles Taylor's arguments are not much in disagreement, but they do present several significant elaborations of arguments already proposed by Habermas. Taylor does not question the secular nature of the democratic state, yet he argues strongly for the reconceptualization of the term 'secularism'. For Taylor, a secularist state strives for three goals – liberty, equality and fraternity – which are often in contradiction with each other. During the pursuit of these goals, all religious and non-religious perspectives and systems of belief should be equally included as there is no need to distinguish the religious from non-religious, secular or atheist within these processes (34–37). Therefore, secularism manifests itself as a correct response to increasing religious and ideological diversity.

Taylor extends the Habermasian requirement translating religious reasons into secular language to secular outlooks and convictions as well: "The state can be neither Christian nor Muslim nor Jewish, but, by the same token, it should also be neither Marxist, nor Kantian, nor utilitarian" (50). Correspondingly, collectively binding decisions cannot be said to be legitimate by referring to Jesus Christ, but may not use references to Karl Marx or Immanuel Kant either.

Taylor observes that democratic states are based on the principles of "human rights, equality, the rule of law, democracy which function as a political ethics shared by all citizens" (37, 45). Secular states are not concerned with the variety of reasons why such political ethics are supported by followers of different ideologies (37). Consequently, Taylor's requirement of shared political ethics resembles the Habermasian condition of translating religious reasons into commonly shared language because both aim to include religious and non-religious 'mindsets', treat those outlooks equally and provide norms and principles that are required from all.

Judith Butler's essay contributes to the general discussion in significant ways. Charles Taylor had already made the point that secularism inevitably has manifestations that vary across cultures. Butler elaborates on this topic by arguing that practical battle lines do not need to be drawn between the religious and the secular or between public and private. Depending on what kind of religion we are talking about, its relationship with the public sphere and the political arena can be understood differently (70–71). Therefore, one has to observe how the boundaries between public and private affairs are defined (constructed), what type of religion is helping to define these boundaries, what types of religion are limited to the private sphere and what kinds of religious discourses exist comfortably and legitimately in the public sphere.

Butler particularly focuses on the instances when public criticism of Israeli state violence that has emerged from within Jewish frameworks of

social justice is taken to be anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish. For Butler, to criticize "openly and publicly" such violence is "an obligatory ethical demand from within Jewish frameworks, both religious and nonreligious" (73, 83). Conformably, Butler advocates for the inclusion of religiously-motivated criticism of another public discourse which itself is connected with religious, national, cultural and political identity. It is highly likely that, in most national cultures, critical views on commonly shared national aspirations, identity, and a sense of security are always in danger of being marginalized and excluded irrespective of their religious or non-religious motivations and reasons.

For example, it would seem not to make much difference if, in the example provided by Butler, opposition to state violence were to originate from Kantian or utilitarian frameworks instead of Jewish ones. Particularly in such issues where the cultural, national and political "we" is perceived in the singular, the following observation from Butler seems to be valid: "The public sphere is constituted time and again through certain kinds of exclusions: images that cannot be seen, words that cannot be heard" (75).

Consequently, the inclusion of religious and ideological perspectives and views is inevitably limited and the boundaries of inclusion not easily contested. While Judith Butler discussed the contestability of these boundaries by focusing on the relationship between religion and nationalism, Cornel West concentrates on the right- and left-wing political connections of religion.

In a retrospective look at recent political history of the United States, West observes that the views combining religion with the ideological left – he himself argues for a prophetic, emancipative, radical, Christian *and* Marxist view that is capable of confronting "hegemonic powers always operating" (99) – tend to attain the position of legitimate participant only for a short period of time.

Whilst Butler contrasts her – what can be termed as – 'secular humanism with Jewish roots' with the established national-religious discourse, West contrasts the prophetic religion with the 'dominant forms of religion'. His prophetic religion tries to put brakes "on the capitalist civilization gone mad" (103), is "an individual and collective performative praxis of maladjustment to greed, fear, and bigotry", and aims to generate righteous indignation against injustice (99).

Both Butler and West observed a particular type of publicly legitimate religion which was already effectively functioning. Both argued for the inclusion of another type of religion that is more universal, emphatic, compassionate and humanist. And both seem to advocate for a type of worldview that tends to be in a weaker position irrespective of the religious or ideological composition of reasons, motivations and arguments.

For those unfamiliar with approaches to religion in the public sphere that the authors of this book have been elaborating for decades, the book offers an excellent introduction to their conceptualizations, approaches and core

arguments. For those who are acquainted with their works, the book traces the ways how preeminent philosophers discuss each other's arguments critically and thereby set new frames for general scholarly discussion of this topic.

The academic debate over religion in the public sphere is most widespread within the United States where religious dissent and self-expression have been legitimate for centuries, Protestant denominationalism has influenced the cultural pattern of religious organization and religious pluralism has attained forms to an extent not reached anywhere in Europe.

Judith Butler and Cornel West have paid *critical* attention to particular situations where religio-political discourse has been monopolized by religious and political elites. In traditionally Orthodox, monoconfessional Lutheran or Catholic nations of Europe, the manifestations of religion in the public sphere, especially of identifiable religious reasons, are related to the forms of organized religion that still hold a monopoly over the use of religion as a public and political resource to a significant extent. Therefore Judith Butler's essay offers particularly useful insights for those who analyze European cultural contexts which are religiously monoconfessional, have low religious diversity and a strong symbolic connection between traditional religion and a shared national identity.

The legitimacy of the religiously-motivated radical politics of the left, as advocated by Cornel West, resonates more in Africa and Latin America than in Europe. Due to socio-political reasons and historical legacies, religiously motivated left-wing politics is discursively least relevant in European post-communist countries.

Last but not least, the kind of organized religion that is perceived to have a legitimate public function and the kind of fusion of the religious and secular discourses that are considered legitimate in the public sphere depend significantly upon the degree of differentiation of the organized religion from the state, the political and the cultural; the historical legacy of church-state relations; and the diversity inside the sphere of the 'religious'.

Because of the increasing diversity of religious, ideological and political views and the multiplication of the practical connections between them, instead of asking about the power of religion in the public sphere in the singular, we should be asking: "*What kind* of religion functions *how effectively* in attaining *what kind of goals* and *for whom*?"

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