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## Introduction

The State is based on religion. . . . It is only when religion is made the foundation that the practice of righteousness attains stability, and that the fulfillment of duty is secured. It is in religion that what is deepest in man, the conscience, first feels that it lies under an absolute obligation, and has the certain knowledge of this obligation; therefore the State must rest on religion. . . . In this aspect, religion stands in the closest connection with the political principle.

—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel<sup>1</sup>

Since time immemorial, thinkers have acknowledged, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, an intimate relationship between religion and politics. The relationship has not been characterized to everyone's satisfaction, but few have denied that it exists. Preliterate societies have rarely, if ever, attempted to consistently distinguish the sacred from the politically profane—and the fact is that the sacred and the political overlap in intricate fashion in the least, as well as in the most, advanced communities. In tribal societies, as in pharaonic Egypt and Imperial Rome, rulers were cloaked in the trappings of divinity. In modern times, the industrializing Japanese chose to imagine their emperors as linearly descended from the sun god.

<sup>1</sup>G. F. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), pp. 50, 51; *Philosophy of Mind*, part 3 of *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2003), para. 552, p. 283; and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), vol. 1, p. 102. Editors of Hegel's works in English have not consistently capitalized technical terms like "State," "Reason," and "Will" in their texts. The difficulty is, of course, not being able to identify their technical use. All nouns are capitalized in German, and in his narratives, Hegel never specifically signaled their technical use. Below, for the sake of consistency, technical terms will be capitalized throughout (even in English-language texts where they are not). The term "state" presents special problems. It is clear that Hegel spoke of a "proper" state that clearly required capitalization. The difficulty is trying to determine when he was speaking technically of the "Idea of the State" and when he was referring to the empirical states with which we are all familiar. To complicate the issue further, Hegel held that *all* states had something of the State in them, however transient and distorted—so that in speaking of states, one found embedded in them features of the State.

Among contemporary social scientists, there is easy talk of “civil religions,” and “sacralized politics,” by virtue of which politics in industrial democracies is imbued with some of the features of faith. Belief in the sacred is invoked to render business transactions more reliable, institutions more just, witnesses more truthful, and children more obedient. Belief in the divine prompts citizens to conform their conduct to public law, moral sanction, and collective conscience. Faith prompts individuals to sacrifice in the service of the community. Public ceremonies often take on the properties of worship, and things—flags, songs, and offices—become invested with special significance, requiring unusual deference and respect.

Although sometimes intricate and often inscrutable, the relationship between faith and politics in industrialized democracies is generally functional in character. In such environs, the profane allocation of responsibilities, for example, is often legitimated by invocations to one or another divinity through the swearing of oaths. Politicians speak, with easy familiarity, of “God,” the “Almighty,” and “Providence”—and their declamations are thereby held to be more binding.

Among citizens in industrial democracies, God is expected to provide stability and respect for law and common practice in peace, and protection and victory in conflict. All of which is advanced with sufficient imprecision to allow any and all citizens the freedom to choose their own divinity, as well as their own church affiliation. In general, “valid” laws are understood to somehow conform to some set of ill defined, but divine, enjoinders. All these forms of sacralization are readily recognized, granted, and, in general, considered benign, if not beneficent.

Conversely, throughout history there have been practices associated with sacralization that have been, and are, deplored: the ritual sacrifice of human beings to demanding deities; the insistence on absolute conformity to dogma; the attendant punishment of heresy; as well as the explicit or implicit call for the immolation of all that, and all those, considered offensive to powers transcendent.

It has been considered the unique accomplishment of the industrialized democracies to have rendered sacralization, at least in large part, inoffensive to modern sensibilities. Young men and women still imagine themselves directed by the Almighty to defend their countries with homicidal violence. Moral evil is still, more often than not, defined in terms of a decalog found in a revered text. Amid all that, individuals are allowed choices, and offenses to public morality and security are judged by regulations conceived fair rather than sacred. However it works, sacralization in industrial democracies is generally expected

to contribute to the stability, promise, and predictability of organized society, redounding to the benefit of everyone.

Unhappily, over time, and most emphatically over the past two centuries, the sacralization of politics in modern settings has taken on ominous features. Since at least the end of the nineteenth century, political sociologists and theorists, in developing or industrialized countries, have chosen to identify a category of political movements and institutionalized systems of governance as “political religions.”<sup>2</sup> Political religions are understood to be phenomena essentially peculiar, though not exclusive, to the twentieth century. Though secular in character, such “religions” are understood to share some properties of generic religion—properties conceived negative in import—fanaticism, intolerance, and irrationality.

Some contemporary political systems, industrialized or not, are avowedly religious—informed by legal systems that are dictated by revelation (a form of *jus divinum*)—in which, behaviors and systems of observances are prescribed in order to provide for collective and individual redemption and salvation. They are systems in which priests and prophets have an affirmed place. Such systems are overtly religious and license their political power through their candid and overt religiosity. Their populations are animated by faith, and infused by a sense of duty. Citizens perform individual and group rituals in order to evoke, maintain, and renew a sense of collective identity. The priests and prophets of such a system are the embodiments of an ineffable *charisma*, the proper recipients of adulation and unqualified obedience. “Islamic republics” are contemporary members of such a class.

All political systems, to some degree, feature at least some of those properties. As has been suggested, some of the symbols and rituals in industrialized democracies are treated with seemingly religious deference; presidents and political leaders in such systems certainly enjoy a measure of respect denied others. Nonetheless, analysts insist on the qualitative and quantitative differences between explicitly “politicized religions,” as such, and the “civil religions”

<sup>2</sup> The nomenclature varies, but the content of the discussion is clearly recognizable. Some of the most illuminating discussion can be found in Gaetano Mosca, *Elementi di scienza politica* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1953), 2 vols., available in English as *The Ruling Class* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1939), particularly chap. 7; see Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1952), particularly bk. 1, chap. 4; and Vilfredo Pareto, *A Treatise on General Sociology: The Mind and Society* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1935), 2 vols., particularly vol. 1, chap. 4. Pareto’s discussions concerning the relationship of religion to politics are engaging and instructive. Among the many modern and contemporary authors, the works of Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harper, 2006), recommend themselves.

of industrial pluralisms. There are clear differences between an unqualifiedly religious system that has assumed sovereign political power, and an industrial democracy animated by a “civil religion.” There are manifest differences in allowable public conduct between religious systems that have assumed jealous political power and the systems that permit the religious pluralisms with which we are familiar.

What those differences imply for public policy and public conduct need not detain us here. For present purposes, it is important to acknowledge that there are also arresting qualitative and quantitative differences between avowedly religious systems, the civil religions of industrialized democracies, and the political religions of “totalitarianisms.”

“Totalitarianism”<sup>3</sup> is a term that refers to a relatively distinct set of political arrangements that, while professedly secular, have an unmistakably religious cast. They are systems led by the inspired—those who are considered possessed of unassailable truths, as well as being invariably wise in calculation and correct in judgment. The leaders of such systems are spoken of as “charismatics”<sup>4</sup>—and generally assume leadership responsibilities for life. They are addressed, deferentially, as “The Leader,” and their behaviors understood to fully embody the will of the community.

Of the movements they lead, each is infused by a faith that brooks no reservation or opposition; any suggestion of an alternative politics is abjured. In principle, such movements aspire to single party control. The aspiration is vindicated by a conviction that the charismatic leader and his party boast qualities that ensure flawless judgment and unmatched virtue. Obedience and sacrifice in the service of such leadership will assure the movement, and its party, merited success.

Because the instruments of special purpose, the movement, the party, and the state it constructs, conceive any opposition, however bland, to be indecent at best, and immoral at worst. Given the political environment of the totalitarian state, any opposition is held to be the product of either ignorance or malevolence—requiring alternatively reeducation or punishment.

<sup>3</sup> The literature devoted to “totalitarianism” is vast. Some of the more interesting examples, that are relatively easy to obtain, include Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); and Ernest A. Menze, ed., *Totalitarianism Reconsidered* (London: Kennikat Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Lindholm, *Charisma* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990) is helpful in dealing with a difficult concept.

Animated by an irrepressible conviction regarding the rectitude of their cause, totalitarians feel compelled to marshal all others to their mission. Totalitarians tend to seek total control of all aspects of life lived and business conducted. Those ends are pursued through monopoly control of production and distribution, education and communication, as well as welfare and well-being. What results is a real or factitious sense of community—a seamless unity of all members of a body of believers—each prepared to obey and sacrifice in faithful service.

Clearly each such system differs in its particulars. Each leader will have unique properties; each movement its own belief system. Controls will vary in extent and intensity, and punishment in frequency and lethality. Nonetheless, the sense is that the twentieth century was host to a peculiar set of political systems that shared the general species traits of religious fundamentalism. They are not accounted religious. Many, if not most, claim to be antireligious and secular in principle. Many, if not most, disclaim interest in transcendent matters—in questions of immortality and final judgments. Nonetheless, the features of religion are unmistakable. Totalitarian systems are animated by “political religions”<sup>5</sup>—a concept with which the present discussion will occupy itself.

“Political religions” will be spoken of with the conviction that, in the course of discussion, the scope and reference of such a concept increasingly will become evident. The account will occupy itself with their intellectual origins, something of their history, as well as allusion to what is implied by their postures. In substance, the account will be, largely, an intellectual history of totalitarianism—as a peculiar political system that has taken on some of the distinguishing characteristics of what historically has been identified as religion—and which, because of the technological appurtenances of our time, has acquired the abilities to control, and shape to its purposes, entire, complex societies.

### Ideologies

There are no generally accepted definitions for many of the most important terms, and their associated concepts, employed in studied social science discourse. Most terms are very loosely defined—but sufficiently understood

<sup>5</sup> Theologians have not succeeded in supplying a generally accepted definition of what a “religion” might be taken to be. In that, they are little different from intellectual historians or political theorists when they attempt convincing definitions of generally contested terms like “totalitarianism,” “political,” “democracy,” or any number of other notions. For a discussion of some of the problems, see A. James Gregor, *Metascience and Politics: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Language of Political Science* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003), chaps. 3, 4, and 8.

to allow a reasonably effortless exchange of ideas among the initiated. Thus, there are no generally accepted definitions for the terms “religion,” “political,” “democracy,” or “totalitarianism.” Nonetheless, we are perfectly comfortable speaking of “religion” as “that system of beliefs, together with those attendant rules and observances, dealing with things considered sacred.” We speak of the “political” as any arrangement dealing with “the authoritative allocation of resources.”

Certainly, such definitions leave a great deal to be desired. They are not sufficiently precise to rule out things seemingly, but not quite, the same. Such disabilities attend any effort at lexical definition of contested concepts. For present purposes, the intuitive sense of what “religion” or “politics” might mean is perfectly suitable. Much the same will be true of terms like “totalitarian” and “ideology.” Their discursive treatment should make their meaning sufficiently transparent to support discussion.

Notwithstanding, some special attention here will be accorded “ideology”—to serve heuristic purpose in the discussion that follows. “Ideology,” as a concept, will be forced to bear the weight of a number of distinctions important for any discussion concerning the relationship of religion to politics—when neither religion nor politics can be explicitly defined.

In social science exchanges, the term “ideology” is generally understood to refer to special formulations that, in their totality, are neither exclusively scientific nor religious. At the same time, it is held that ideologies may host elements of both. Unlike scientific products, and more like those of religion, ideologies entertain and advance moral judgments, recommendations, enjoinders, and imperatives. Unlike exclusively religious ideologies, secular ideologies make seemingly substantive scientific claims critical to their enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

As used here, the concept “ideology” covers all those theoretical formulations that pretend to explain the essence and workings of the world and the humans in it. Ideologies are variable in content and intent, but all imagine themselves delivering illuminating, and convincing, “perspectives on the world (*Weltanschauungen*).” Thus, we are accustomed to speaking of “religious,” “Marxist,” “racist,” and “democratic” worldviews—and assume that each provides some comprehension of the world and its purposes different from any alternative. For any ideology to perform such tasks, it must contain at least three constituent claim components: empirical, logical, and normative. It must, in effect, share at least some of the major attributes of *science*.

Science is understood to deal with *empirical* claims—descriptive and predic-

<sup>6</sup> See A. James Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), chap. 1.

tive propositions about material “reality.” In principle, we expect such claims to be subject to confirmation or disconfirmation by sensory evidence—simple and/or compound observations. In standard science, complex empirical propositions are threaded together by logical connectives and transformation rules in order to predict and explain events and features in the observable world. Of the logical connectives employed by science, it can be said the *logic* employed proceeds through valid forms to sound conclusion by virtue of explicit definition and rules of transformation. In part, scientific truth becomes a function of language itself. Mathematical truth claims fall into this category. One knows what constitutes a proof in mathematics, and validity in logic. Science has learned to map logicomathematics over the perceived world in order to render predictions possible.

It is intuitively clear that ideologies are both something less, and something more, than empirical and logical truth claims. While composed, in part, of empirical and logical claims, nothing in past history suggests that the falsification of any or all such claims would necessarily result in the renunciation of an ideology.

It is its *normative* character that clearly distinguishes ideology from science and establishes its affinities with religion. Normative pronouncements tender qualitative judgments—making attributions, for example, of goodness and beauty to things, behaviors, and experiences. Such pronouncements make claims for which no generally accepted truth conditions are available. In general, one simply does not know what evidence would provide the requisite warrant for the claim that a work is “beautiful,” or a behavior “righteous.” Unlike empirical and logical claims, such declamations are typified by emotive, imperative, and perlocutionary affect.<sup>7</sup> What they lack is empirical or logical license. It can be said that while ideologies, like science, make efforts to describe and explain the world, their principal function is to inspire transformative behavior—to prompt action. Their principal purpose is not to understand the world, it is to change it.

Ideologies, in effect, are very complicated artifacts. Curiously enough, those committed to one or another ideology spend surprisingly little time attempting to confirm or disconfirm its empirical claims. It would seem, for example, that by the twenty-first century Marx’s followers would have established the empirical truth of the nineteenth-century claim that the “proletariat” has suffered “increasing emiseration” over time. And yet, no unequivocal confirmation has been forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup>“Perlocutionary” language involves speech that produces affect, and is expected to influence behavior and activity. See Gregor, *Metascience and Politics*, chap. 9.

In attempting to establish the truth of such a claim, for example, one is not certain who might count as a “proletarian.” Nor is one equipped with a precise definition of what “emiseration” might imply, or how it might be measured. Given the vagueness and ambiguity, it is, in principle, impossible to confirm or disconfirm the truth of the Marxist insistence that the proletariat suffers increasing emiseration over time. None of that, in any way, seems to discourage Marxism’s proponents.

The survivability of such formulations does not seem to depend on the logical or descriptive truth of its claims, but on normative affect. Ideologies are persuasive in ways other than logic and science are convincing.

Most founders of ideologies spend remarkably little time in trying to establish the truth of the empirical and logical components of their belief systems. National Socialist claims concerning the superiority and/or inferiority of one or another “race” defy confirmation. To pretend to establish the truth of such claims minimally requires a generally accepted definition of “race”—and some suggestion as to how “superiority” or “inferiority” might be recognized and measured. The failure to satisfy any of those requirements did little to diminish commitment by the followers of Adolf Hitler.

In fact, it has been the case that the proponents of one or another ideology will make every effort to avoid and/or obstruct attempts to determine the truth or falsity of any of its component claims. Some, for example, will specifically reject the standard procedures of confirmation or disconfirmation. There will be talk of a rejection of “bourgeois” or “Jewish” logic and science. Only the findings of “proletarian” or “Aryan” investigators could possibly be accommodated. Truth and untruth become hostage to methodological eccentricities.

In effect, it would appear that the formulation of empirical or logical truths is not the principal occupation of the ideologist. More than anything else, it seems that ideologies are formulations specifically designed to give expression to evaluative judgments—to prescribe and proscribe, to celebrate heroes and to deliver us from “monsters.” Ideologies frame goal cultures for multitudes. They advance supportive and sustaining codes of conduct. At their best, “secular” ideologies are functional surrogates for traditional religion. Some ideologies appear as secular surrogates for religion because their advocates insist that the bulk of their constituent claims are empirical and/or logical. The majority of theological claims, on the other hand, are acknowledged to be “transcendental,” intrinsically beyond the range of either empirical or logical evidence. Religious beliefs appeal to faith. Secular ideologists claim to be involved in an entirely different venture. They pretend to formulate and advance claims they hold “scientific.”



Some have argued that the secular ideologies of our time, at least in part, are the result of the overall decline in faith, abandonment of belief in a world transcendent. With the commencement of the modern era there was a gradual, then increasingly accelerated, loss of faith in a supermundane reality. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the advance of empirical science all contributed to the process. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were many who dismissed religious beliefs as superstition. At the same time, there were others who insisted that human beings could not be mobilized to collective purpose without appeals religious in character. What they proceeded to do was to put together belief systems that might serve in just such a capacity.

By the time of the French revolution, there were those who fabricated the requisite belief systems—which today are identified as “political religions.” A political religion is a system of beliefs that rejects the notion that political power emanates from a divine source. Instead, a nation or its citizens are “sacralized” and made the repository of sovereign political power. Among later ideologists, there were those who were to recognize other sacralized bases of power: the state, a class, a race, or history itself.<sup>8</sup>

The most familiar of these modern ideologies insist on the absolute quality of the truths they dispense. Throughout the twentieth century, Marxists, Fascists, National Socialists, Maoists, and the followers of Pol Pot have all behaved very much as though possessed of revealed truth. They have behaved, in fact, as though they were communicants of a faith. They rarely, if ever, conceded difficulties in establishing the truth of their most fundamental claims; they poorly tolerated open inquiry; they dealt with any reservations concerning the truth of their claims as moral infractions; and they regularly treated those who attempted to reduce the vagueness and ambiguity of their pronouncements as heretics and apostates.<sup>9</sup> In effect, some of the major ideologists of the modern era have taken on the behavioral properties of the faithful—and the systems they construct, the institutional features of religious intolerance.

That there are no warranted sciences of metaphysics, universal ethics, or applied morality, is critical to present concerns. Throughout history, one of the most important functions of religion has been to explain the ultimate origin and goal of created beings—and thereby to specifically provide codes of

<sup>8</sup>See the entire discussion in Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), particularly chaps. 1–6.

<sup>9</sup>The entire history of Marxism, as an ideology, is replete with instances of such treatment. There was not one major Marxist in the twentieth century who has not been charged with either heresy or apostasy. See the discussion in A. James Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Modern Radicalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), chaps. 3–7.

conduct, the grounds for moral judgment, the identification of infractions, the depiction of public purposes, as well as the prescription of individual and collective ends. When a subset of political ideologies expressly assumes such metaphysical and normative responsibilities, it can be spoken of as a “political religion.”

It is important to recognize that some ideologies, however they characterize themselves, are essentially religious in character. They have assumed responsibilities that historically have been those of organized faith. Such ideologies, as a subset, pretend to the responsibilities of faith while, at the same time, concealing their expressly normative professions beneath the cover of economic, historical, biological, or philosophical “science.” In traditional religion, enjoinders, injunctions, prescriptions, and proscriptions are warranted by appeal to sacred texts, revelations, epiphanies, and divinations. They are generally conceived binding because of the deep sentiments they inspire. However they choose to present themselves, political religions share many of the same features.

In many ways, traditional and political religions share properties. However disguised as exclusively empirical or logical, for example, political, like traditional, religions recommend, advocate, prescribe, and command behaviors. The agents in such systems almost always inspire awe, and the leaders, reverence. The systems strategically employ sign, symbol, and ritual—and the “truth” of doctrine rests on individual and collective faith. In both traditional as well as political religions, it is faith, not empirical or logical truth, which inspires loyalty, self-abnegation, commitment, and obedience.<sup>10</sup>

### **Political Philosophy and Political Religion**

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the intellectual environment of Europe had been transformed. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment

<sup>10</sup> Most ethical systems, ideological or not, seem to ultimately appeal to self-interest—an interest for which no argument is necessary or required. Interest in one’s self is unproblematic. In industrial democracies, the most palpable appeal is made to individual interests. Individuals are considered rational calculators prepared to negotiate in the pursuit of their concerns. They seek the best possible negotiable ends. Whatever normative elements animate such a process, they are self-affirming and unproblematic. One does not have to be convinced to seek a maximization of personal well-being. Appealing to personal interest, the allocation of benefits and the guidance of collective purpose is the result of negotiation between reasonable maximizers. The most fundamental claims that serve in the allocation of benefits or in the guidance of public purpose are made in terms of individual and collective interests that, in principle, can be measured and counted. When the most fundamental claims employed for such purposes cannot be so measured or counted, we are dealing with inscrutables that begin to take on the appearance of metaphysical claims that require grounds other than measuring or counting. These are the ideologies that attempt to warrant the political religions with which we are here concerned.

had altered cultural, religious, and political circumstances. In prior centuries, Christian Europe had held philosophy in thrall as its handmaiden—but by the seventeenth, philosophers pretended to intellectual independence. Thereafter, politics could no longer rest on indisputable religious truths but sought enabling principles.

In his time, David Hume (1711–1776) argued that once religion no longer provided the legitimating rationale for politics, political parties required some alternative. No political party could “support itself without a philosophical or speculative system of principles annexed to its political or practical one.” He went on to suggest that the fabrication of such systems would result in their being “a little unshapely . . . more especially when actuated by party zeal.”<sup>11</sup> In effect, Hume intimated that the modern world had created conditions that gave rise to the need for ideological justification for political systems. Such alternatives would replace religion as the arbiter of collective purpose and as a guide to conduct. He had anticipated the advent of rationalizing ideologies and the birth of political religions.

More than that, Hume foresaw that such enabling speculative systems might well serve other than beneficent purposes. In his *History of England*, for instance, he spoke of circumstances in which “every man had framed the model of a republic; and however new it was, or fantastical, he was eager in recommending it to his fellow citizens, or even imposing it by force upon them”<sup>12</sup>—at disabling cost.

Hume was convinced that human beings were capable of fabricating “fantastical” systems, predicated on what were thought to be impeccable truths. He was equally convinced that in so doing they could hardly avoid gross error and moral infraction. He was prepared to argue that such secular surrogates of religious faith could only be flawed in substance and often deleterious in effect. He argued that there was no evidence that might confirm the infallibility of the truth claims of any system that human beings were prepared to invoke in order to influence conduct. His systematic skepticism was the ground of his tolerance, and of his common-sense humanity.

Hume’s reasoned opinion was that *all* claims must be supported by best evidence—and that evidence changes with subject matter, time, and circumstance.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, he held all claims to the possession of truth to be, in

<sup>11</sup> David Hume, *Essays Moral, Literary, and Political* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), pp. 465–466.

<sup>12</sup> David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983), vol. 5, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> In dealing with basic epistemological issues, the English seemed prepared to be “common-sensical.” Thinkers such as Francis Bacon and John Locke had early argued that the human mind somehow captured the properties of external materiality in sensory “representations”—to store

principle, contingent and corrigible. Tomorrow's evidence might well discredit today's truth. That he was tolerant followed from just such convictions. No truth could be so insulated from counterevidence as to be infallible. We forever must be prepared to abandon claims we believe true, and acknowledge the possible truth of claims we think false.

Hume was prepared to allow that in some domains of discourse it was difficult to establish truth or falsity with any conviction. Clearly, he felt that to be the case regarding matters of faith. At the same time, he was prepared to acknowledge that human beings gave evidence of needing faith in order to function properly. Thus, he was prepared to tolerate the general tenets of pre-reflective theism in the choice of individuals, but not their imposition on others. Hume held that because all belief systems are transient, none could be imposed, or impose itself, on others. Individuals should be free to follow the call of whatever faith—as long as it inflicts no harm on others.

His opinions fostered and sustained Hume's humanity. Given his skepticism, for example, he counseled against allowing a single dominant power to control a political system. No single agency could claim the right to impose its views on citizens. He recognized such a claim to undisputed control a self-evident threat to the free exchange of ideas, the freedom of choice, and the liberty of conscience. Hume proposed political arrangements composed of a number of independent, responsible authorities, each armed with the "right of lawful dissent"—in what is today identified as a pluralistic system of "checks and balances"—all animated by a civil religion.<sup>14</sup>

An argument can be made that such a view follows, at least in part, from an initial *individualistic* orientation peculiar to British empiricists. That is to say,

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them in consciousness as "ideas." Humans would then employ reflective imaging and generalizations in order to formulate natural laws and predict material behaviors. All of that depended on best evidence, and was forever contingent. Attempts to understand a transcendent domain were left to the private reflections of individuals. British empiricism in general, and Hume, in particular, advocated a tolerant form of religious opinion that tends to be identified as deism—in which a "creator" was conceived initiating a law-governed system of things in which *persons* were destined to operate. It was a metaphysical system well adapted to the procedural democracy that is now identified with the politics of industrialized systems. See the interesting discussion in Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), particularly chaps. 1–3, 6.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion in David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 564. For Hume, his *Treatise*, and his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, served as the foundation of his political philosophy. His *Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; edited by Kund Haakonssen) provides supplementary material that served Hume's purposes in attempting to make political discourse less divisive and sectarian. In the *Political Essays*, Hume speaks of the tolerance of diverse opinion, and of dispersing power throughout the political system.

British empiricists argued that at the very commencement of the search for truth, *individuals* observed external things—things that were solid and shaped, and which behaved in regular fashion. The epistemology of British empiricism was eminently “commonsensical.”

On the Continent, things were fundamentally different—and political philosophy followed a different trajectory.<sup>15</sup> Again, epistemology lay at the center of concern; but there, a different pattern of argument was forthcoming, in part, out of specific philosophical developments<sup>16</sup>—and, in part, the result of the intense religious dialogue that engaged the attention of all.

In asking how human beings might come to know the essentials of an “external world,” a world of “natural phenomena” that existed independent of human consciousness—and how one was to construe the relationship between the physical and the mental—Continental epistemologists followed a course different from that pursued by their colleagues across the Channel. The difference was partially the result of a special preoccupation among Continentals with how all of that was related to an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Creator.<sup>17</sup>

By the nineteenth century, that was the context in which all of Europe was prepared to systematically (i.e., philosophically) address theological and confessional controversies. The entire century was to be buffeted by questions that were inherently epistemological—yet not exclusively empirical or logical. One set of those questions turned on what a secular understanding of the reality of the world might be. Another attempted to deal with the supposed knowledge of an “other-worldly” domain that was supersensual and transcendent. Science was to grow out of the one, and modern theology out of the other. The distinction between the two was not always clear.

In general, philosophers on the Continent dealt with these matters in their own fashion. If epistemological pursuits were governed by common sense in the British Isles, that could hardly be said of ruminations on the Continent.

<sup>15</sup> Some have argued for a kind of Anglo-Saxon “exceptionalism”—with the English intrinsically “individualistic” and “libertarian.” Rather than English empiricism giving rise to individual rights, individual rights gave rise to epistemological empiricism. See Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property, and Social Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> These included the opposition of the “rationalists” (Rene Descartes [1596–1650] and his followers) to British empiricism (Thomas Hobbes [1588–1679], John Locke [1632–1704], and David Hume [1711–1776]). In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (New York: The Humanities Press, Inc., 1955), vol. 3, pp. 220–222, Hegel identified the works of Descartes and Locke as among the original sources of the metaphysics of his time.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960), vol. 6, provides a summary account. In this context, see Hegel’s discussion with respect to Descartes in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 250–252.